



Myanmar/Burma:

A Country Report Based on Data 1900-2012

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About V-Dem

Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) is a new approach to conceptualization and measurement of democracy. It is a collaboration between some 50+ scholars across the world hosted by the Department of Political Science at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden; and the Kellogg Institute at the University of Notre Dame, USA.

With four Principal Investigators (PIs), three Project Coordinators (PCs), fifteen Project Managers (PMs) with special responsibility for issue areas, more than thirty Regional Managers (RMs), almost 200 Country Coordinators (CCs), a set of Research Assistants (RAs), and approximately 3,000 Country Experts (CEs), the V-Dem project is one of the largest ever social science research-oriented data collection programs.

V-Dem is collecting data on 329 indicators of various aspects democracy tied to the core of electoral democracy as well as six varying properties: liberal, majoritarian, consensual, participatory, deliberative and egalitarian dimensions of democracy.

A pilot study in 2011 tested the preliminary set of indicators and the data collection interfaces and procedures. Twelve countries from six regions of the world were covered, generating 462,000 data points. In the main phase, all countries of the world will be covered from 1900 to the present, generating some 22 million data across the 329 indicators, as well as several indices of varying forms of democracy.

The resulting database will be the largest of its kind, and make possible both highly detailed, nuanced analysis of virtually all aspects of democracy in a country, and quick, summary comparisons between countries based on aggregated indices for at least seven varieties of democracy.

The data will be downloadable from a public V-Dem website as a public good some time in 2015. Users from anywhere will also be able to use sophisticated but intuitive and accessible online analysis tools. Students and media across the world will benefit from the nuanced comparative and historical data. Governments, development agencies, and NGOs will be able to make much better informed decisions, and even go back in time to re-evaluate aid efforts.

V-Dem is funded by (in order of magnitude): The Ministry of Foreign Affairs-Sweden, the European Commission/EuroAID, the Swedish Research Council, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs-Denmark, the Danish Research Council, the Canadian International Development Agency, NORAD/the Norwegian Research Council, Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, and the Quality of Government Institute.

For further details and information, see <http://v-dem.net>.

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Executive Summary

- The aggregated (illustrative) V-Dem democracy index shows an uneven but gradual improvement over the post-soviet period that confirms with familiar observers' account of Burma/Myanmar.
- At the same time, indices of the components of the overall index show great variability of different dimensions of democracy. This highlights the importance of the disaggregated approach to measuring democracy that V-Dem enables.
- The scores and indicators of V-Dem are useful to show the development of democratic system in Myanmar characterized by a pullback from the promised democratic development after the early post-independence period while the last few years registers significant improvements:
 - Electoral contestation is now on the rise but the lacking capacity and autonomy of the electoral management body remains a point of concern, as well as the equality in access to national media for political parties.
 - The legitimacy of electoral processes has varied highly but the country seems now to be on track.
 - The democratic qualities of the party system lags behind the general positive development with limitations in barriers to political parties, autonomy of parties, the extension of party organizations and branches, and in clarity of platforms.
 - The judicial sector is faring the worst. In most aspects little or nothing has changed significantly even in the past few years.
 - Civil society has re-emerged but there are concerns about the control of entry and exit of CSOs by government, and for women's equal access to CSOs.
 - Media is developing much stronger democratic qualities while concerns remain about government harassment of journalists and about the media in general lacking critical voices toward the government.
 - Civil liberties shows a partially positive development. Property rights, freedom from forced labor, freedom of discussion for women, freedom from political killings, and freedom of domestic movement for both women and men have improved but still are far from perfect. Other rights – academic freedom, equality in terms of civil liberties for all social group, freedom of foreign movement and torture, and transparent and predictable laws – remain concerning.
 - The deliberative qualities of the present situation in Burma/Myanmar seems to have improved radically, which is positive sign.
- The V-Dem scores provide an overview of the uneven, and yet recently inspiring path of Burma/Myanmar's political development.

1. Introduction

Burma/Myanmar was a typical Southeast Asian feudal kingdom that lost sovereignty to the British following three wars in 1826, 1852 and in 1885. The V-Dem coding period begins in 1900 in the middle of the colonial period. Up to 1919, the kingdom was an integral part of British India and ruled by its High Commissioner, supported by a Deputy High Commissioner for Burma/Myanmar. In 1920, the British Government modified the administration system to include indigenous Burmese as well. The Burmese opposition rejected the reform and called for home rule. In 1937, Burma became a new British Province with the Burma Act of 1935. According to the act, the Burmese could be members of the executive committee of the Governor, and the elected Legislative Council. This practice lasted until the Japanese conquered Burma/Myanmar in 1942 and established a military regime until the end of World War II in 1945.

The Burmese opposition renewed their calls for independence following the war. Their leader Aung San flew to London to hold the negotiations and in 1947 an election was held to a parliament charged with drafting the first constitution. On 4th January 1948, Myanmar became independent with a Westminster system. The Anti-Fascist and People Freedom League (AFPFL) won the election of 1947. They ruled until 1958 when a split in their ranks created instability and Prime Minister U Nu called for transfer of political power to the army and emergency rule.

The caretaker government of General Ne Win alleviated the political pressure during its two-years rule and held new elections in 1960. Power was transferred back to the old ruling party headed by U Nu. But the ethnic minorities and their representatives were not satisfied with the failure to fulfill the promise to build federal state. General Ne Win perceived the situation as a threat to state unity and conducted a military coup d'état. From 1962 to 1974, the country was governed by Revolutionary Council composed of mix of bureaucrats and generals.

In 1974, General Ne Win drafted a new constitution that established the country as a socialist state. Most of the many large-scale projects initiated during this period worked only on paper and lead to worsening of the socio-economic conditions.

In 1988, the people began actively resisting the dictatorship of General Ne Win. Nationwide demonstrations were organized with the intention to force out the socialist regime. The democratic movement ended with yet another coup d'état. The military junta promised to hold free and fair elections soon. They kept their promise and clean elections were held on 27th May 1990.

The National League for Democracy (NLD) headed by Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of Aung San, won by a landslide gaining over 80 percent of the vote. The military regime refused to transfer power. Instead, they organized national convention and drafted a new constitution. The ruling junta declared that it would demand constitutional provisions for the military to maintain a perpetual dominant position over parliamentary politics,

something which the NLD did not accept. NLD therefore boycotted of the national convention.

The military then orchestrated large-scale detentions of political activists without fair trial or even any court proceedings at all between 1988 and 2010,. They issued long prison sentences and Aung San Suu Kyi was put under house arrest. The ruling regime also cracked down on the media and upheld strict censorship. A peak in the violence was the 2003 De Pel Yin massacre during which there was an attempt on Aung San Suu Kyi's and other leading party figures' lives. The American Government froze the military's financial assets abroad. Subsequently, the military regime announced a seven-step strategy called "Roadmap to Democracy".

In 2008, the military government rushed to force the people to approve the new plan despite the deadly cyclone devastation in the delta. The Roadmap... provided for elections in 2010. The NLD boycotted the elections accusing the military regime for rigging. In accordance to the 2008 constitution, the semi-civilian government held by-elections on 1st May 2012 for the vacant seats in parliament. The amended electoral law allowed Aung San Suu Kyi and her party to run for the elections and NLD won these seats by a landslide.

The objective of this report is to elucidate the nuances of Burma/Myanmar's political developments by a detailed inspection of the V-Dem indicators, as well as portray the situation of the country's political situation as of 2012.

2. A General Picture of Developments in Myanmar/Burma

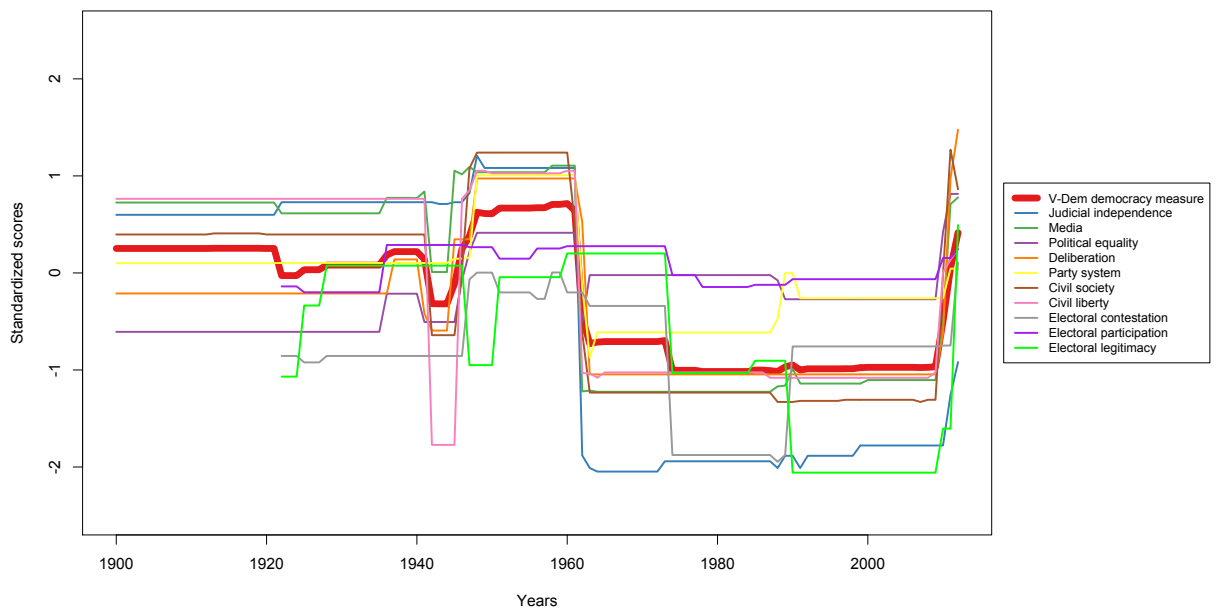
The indices in the figures below have been produced using a simple procedure, whereby we use a number of variables to capture the varying dimensions¹ of democracy, and their variation over time. For each of the elements we present a figure capturing the temporal variation of the dimension as a whole, along with an additional figure presenting its constituent indicators (all presented with using a uniform standardized scale). Please note that the overall index of democracy in Figure 1 is based on an unweighted average of the scores obtained from specific dimensions.

An Overall Measure Disaggregated

Figure 1 presents the overall illustrative V-Dem democracy index along with the ten components used to estimate it. It should be stressed that at the time of the authoring of this report, the V-Dem project had not yet settled on an exact composition and aggregation method for its planned seven indices of varying democracies. The overall index in Figure 1 is therefore illustrative only and not to be confused with the coming indices of democracy that V-Dem will produce. However, Figure 1 displays changes in the overall levels of democracy in Burma/Myanmar and its various components over time.

¹ Throughout this report we use the concepts component/dimension interchangeably to denote the VDEM's ten aspects of democracy.

Figure 1. V-Dem Democracy Score Disaggregated in Burma/Myanmar (1900 - 2012)



The overall V-Dem democracy index (thick red line) is the average of the ten components also displayed in Figure 1, including the level of democratic qualities of civil society (thin brown line); the media (thin dark green line); the party system (thin yellow line); civil liberties (thin pink line); the judicial sector (thin blue line); the nature of deliberation (thin orange line); political equality (thin dark purple line); electoral participation (thin light purple line); electoral contestation (thin grey line); and finally electoral legitimacy (thin green line).

The overall measure shows that the democratic qualities of Burma/Myanmar's political system reached their highest level in the period between the end of World War II and the early 1960s, when the military led by General Ne Win took control of the government. The indicators of democracy have started to improve again in 2011, following the handover of power to the civilian government after the 2010 general election.

3. Varieties of Political Developments in Myanmar/Burma

The presentation in Figure 1 of each components' development separately over time makes it possible to discern the components driving the changes in the overall index in varying periods. This is an important feature of V-Dem's data and analysis that is demonstrated here, and that will be retained when we move to seven indices of different varieties of democracy.

To summarize, the ten components, while in general following a somewhat similar pattern, show important variation. Before 1942, *judiciaries*, *civil liberties*, and *media* were the areas where more democratic freedoms were granted. World War II affected in particular *individual civil liberties* negatively while the subsequent military regime was especially

repressive in the areas of *judicial independence* and *civil society*. Since the mid 1970s, *electoral contestation* has been severely suppressed.

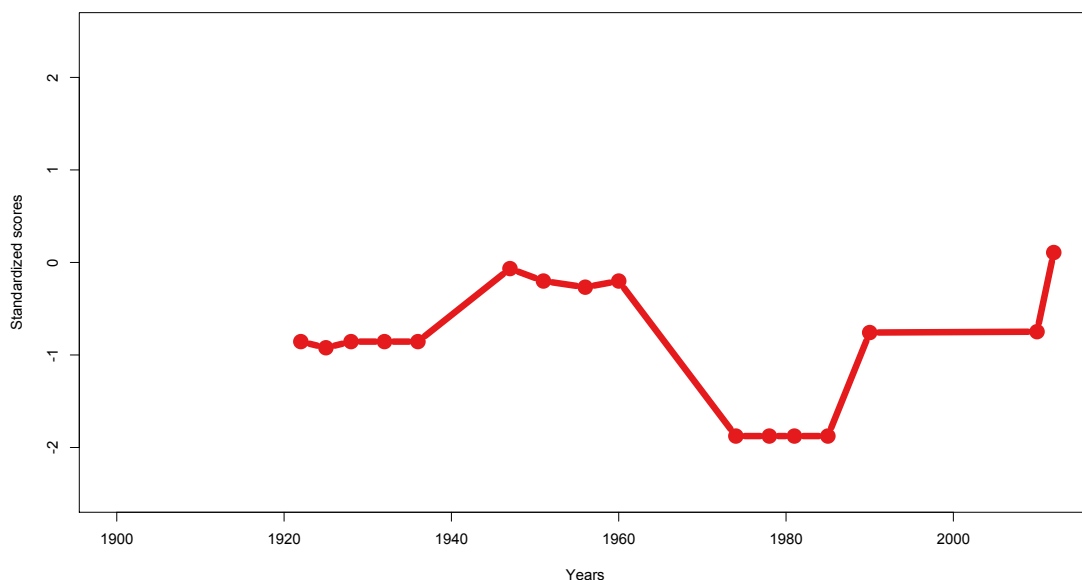
Beginning from 1990s, when elections became somewhat more free and fair, activities that questioned the legitimacy of the elections also became more widespread. After 2010 election and the taking over of power by a civilian government, the improvements on *civil society*, *media*, and *deliberation* are especially noticeable. The positive development is much less significant in the *judicial independence*-dimension in part because the chief of justice is appointed by the president without questioning his or her capacity and the executive and military dominate the judiciary. The indices of *political equality* and *electoral participation* have stayed more or less constant since the independence.

The following sections analyzes the developments in each of these dimensions in more detail, one by one.

Electoral Contestation: A New Dawn?

Figure 2 presents the *electoral contestation* dimension starting in 1922 when the first elections were held in Burma.² The aggregate measure first improved after World War II, declined under the military rule, and improved again since 1990. In addition, for the years when no elections were held, the scores of indicators are taken from the previous election years. For example, no election was held during 1937 and 1946, during 1961 and 1973, and during 1991 and 2009; scores during these three periods reflect the quality of elections held in 1936, 1960 and in 1990, respectively.

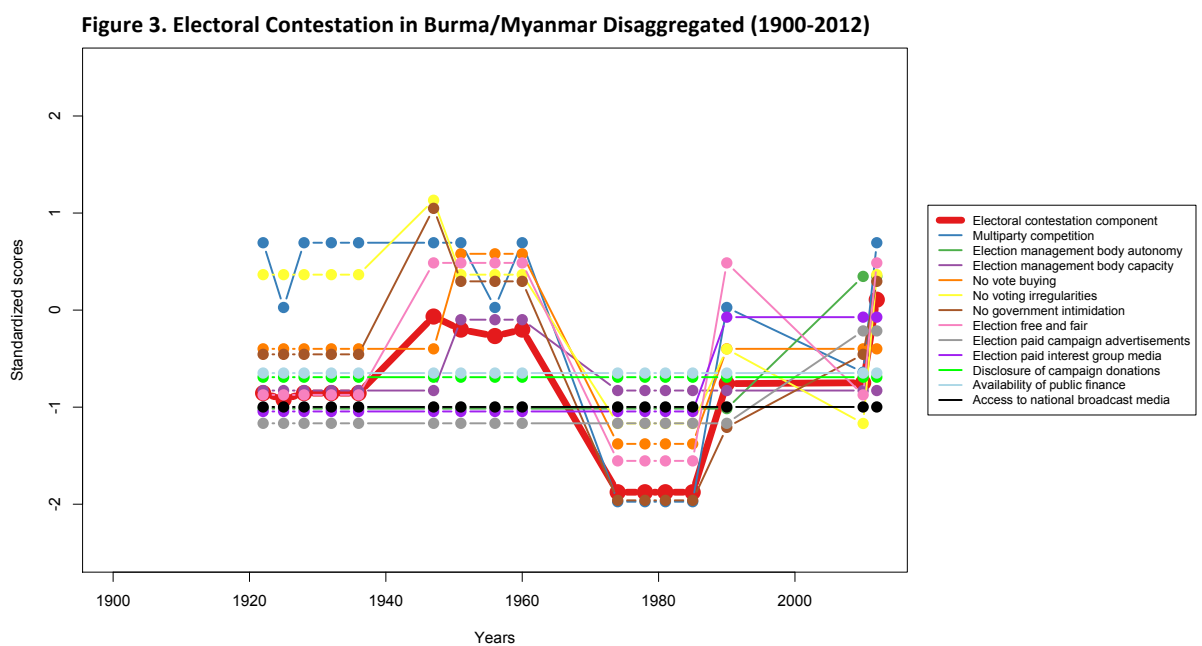
Figure2. Electoral Contestation in Burma/Myanmar (1900 – 2012)



² We break down the electoral component into three sub-components to reflect its multidimensional complexity.

The measure of free and fair electoral contestation is aggregated from twelve indicators. Higher values of the indicators indicate fewer voting irregularities and more equal distribution of campaign resources.

In Figure 3 the main index (thicker red line) can be compared to the measures of individual indicators. The thin blue line reflects coder's assessment on the change in *multiparty competition* in the examined period; the thin green line assesses the *autonomy of the election management body*; the thin dark purple line indicates *the capacity of the election management body*; the thin orange line is the measure of *lack of vote buying*; the yellow line details *lack of voting irregularities*; the thin brown line *lack of government intimidation*; the purple line whether *elections were free and fair*; the grey line whether there were *paid campaign advertisements*; the thin light purple line whether there were *paid interest group media* (if interest groups are allowed to buy campaign advertisement time on national broadcast media); the thin green line whether there was *disclosure requirements for campaign donations*; the thin light blue line whether there was a *general availability of public finance for campaigns*; and finally the thin black line indicating whether all political parties had some *free access to national broadcast media* during election campaigns.



The first thing to note is how closely most of the electoral indicators follow the index for electoral contestation. This dimension of electoral democracy is tightly held together in many ways, and few indicators behave very different from the others.

Starting with the clear deviations from this pattern, the indicators of *disclosure of campaign donations*, *the availability of public finance*, and *the access to national broadcast media* are constant at the lowest level across the entire period. These are three particular aspects of electoral politics that are not necessarily critical. The fact that they have not changed at all in Burma/Myanmar, hence, is not devastating.

But we also note that the general level democratic qualities in the area of electoral contestation is fairly, not to say very, low in Burma/Myanmar for most of this period. On

the -2.5 to 2.5 scale, it barely reaches midway to hit zero at its best. So any changes and positive developments noted below must be seen in this light.

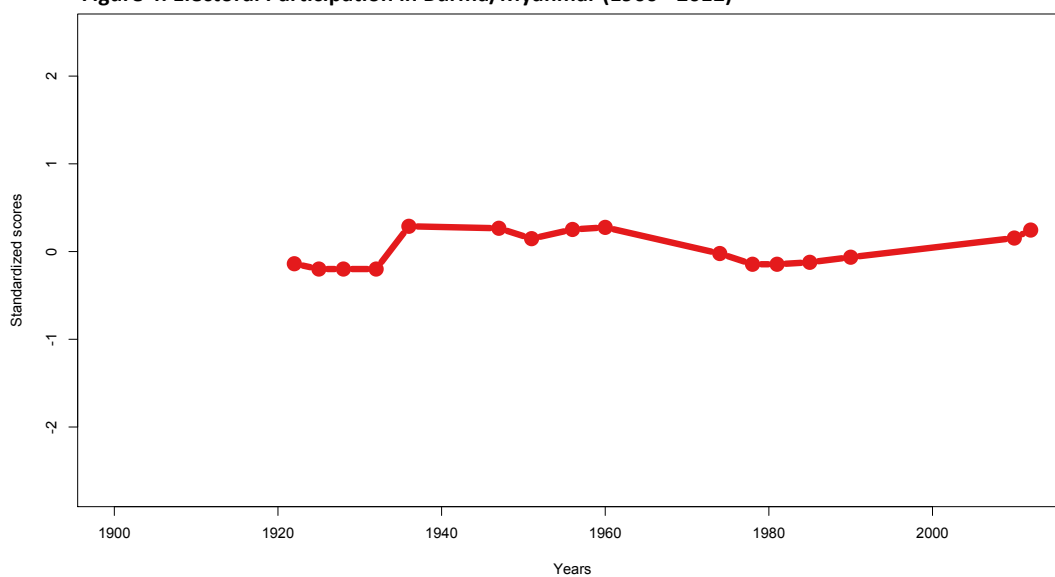
Vote buying, voting irregularities, and government intimidation have been relatively rare in Burma/Myanmar, although the coders indicate some occurrence of vote buying in the 1958 election and again in the last 2012 elections. Elections were naturally more *free and fair* in the late 1940s and the 1950s than were the four elections of one party system during the socialist government. The 1990 general election held by the military was considered free and fair and even more so than the 2010 and the 2012 elections because these were partly manipulated to preserve the seats for the ruling party, USDP.

Overall, the developments in Burma/Myanmar have been positive with regards to electoral contestation over the past few years but we also note that on most aspects of this component much still needs to be done to even reach the levels of democratic qualities present in the 1940s.

Electoral Participation: Moderate and Stable

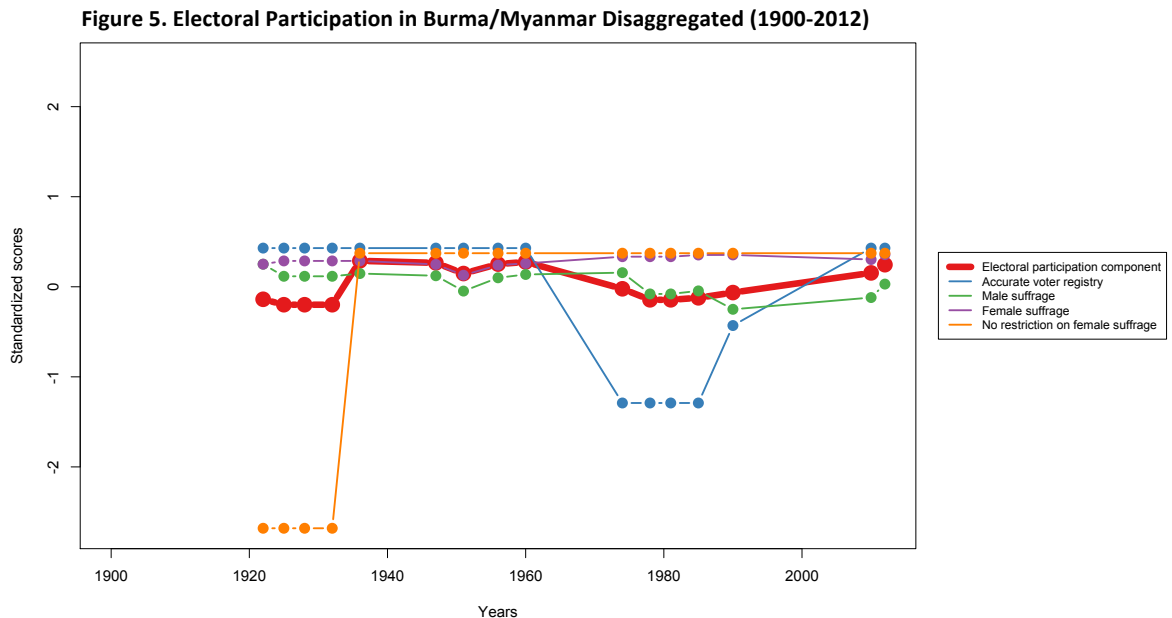
Figures 4 and 5 present changes in the levels of electoral participation over time, along with the indicators used to create the participation index. The aggregate measure is more or less constant across the entire period.

Figure 4. Electoral Participation in Burma/Myanmar (1900 - 2012)



Electoral participation remains steady since the first ever election in 1922 and rises for the first time in 1932 election for electing Burmese politicians for running offices. It remains steady before the Japanese occupation when no elections were held. It surges again in 1947 election for electing legislature for drafting the constitution and running offices of the Governor executive council. It falls during the socialist government and the military government (1962-2010) except during the 1990s when the participation rises in conjunction with the toppling of the socialist government. Participation goes up slightly with the 2010 election.

The development of each component of the overall index is presented in Figure 5. The measure of electoral participation is aggregated from four indicators – accurate voter registry (thin blue line), male suffrage (thin green line), female suffrage (thin purple line) and lack of restriction on female suffrage (thin orange line).



Among the individual indicators, the restriction on *female suffrage* was lifted after 1936. The *accuracy of voter registry* declined under the socialist regime because the elections did not attract voters due to the handpicked list of state central committee of one party government. This indicator started to improve in 1990 when the historic event created hope for people to topple the authoritarianism with the promise of the military to transfer the political power to the winning party.

Electoral Legitimacy: Volatile but Promising

The final component for the electoral dimension of democracy, regards electoral legitimacy. The overall measure is presented in Figure 6 by a thick red line.

Figure 6 captures that the electoral legitimacy of the 1947 and 1990 elections was especially low but the 2010 elections were not fairs much better. What was it that affected legitimacy of these elections so negatively? Here again, the V-Dem methodology with disaggregated indicators for each component makes it possible to drill won further to answer this question.

Figure 6. Electoral Legitimacy in Burma/Myanmar (1900 – 2012)

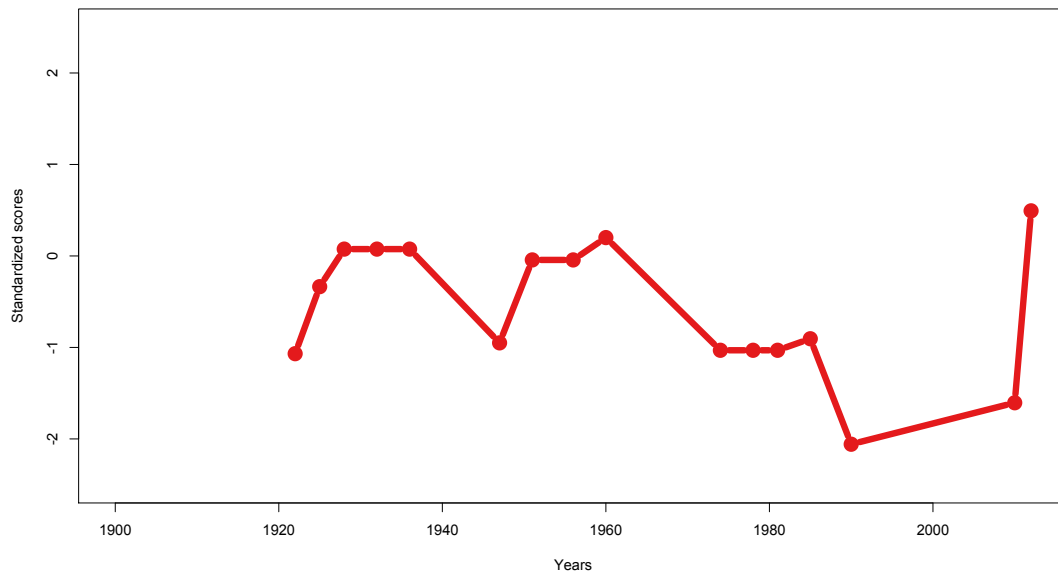
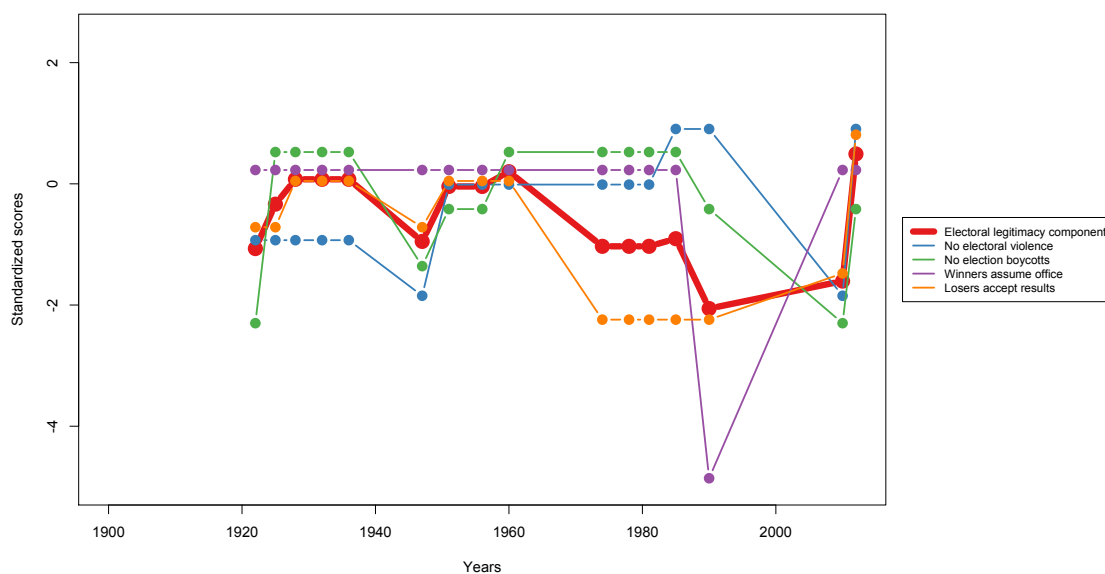


Figure 7 explores further the electoral legitimacy index by presenting each component separately. The measure of electoral legitimacy is aggregated from four indicators – no electoral violence (thin blue line), no election boycotts (thin green line), winners assume office (thin purple line) and losers accept results (thin orange line).

Figure 7. Legitimacy in Burma/Myanmar Disaggregated (1900 - 2012)



After the 1990 election, the electoral winner (the thin purple line) was prevented from *assuming office* by the military government. This severely affected the legitimacy of the elections, naturally.

The figure suggests that the legitimacy of the 1947 elections were negatively affected by *electoral violence* (thin blue line) and by a *boycott* by most major opposition parties (thin green line). The backbone party of the opposition (AFPFL) boycotted the election because of their ideological stance that absolute independence would be impossible without armed

struggle. A fraction of the opposition also boycotted the 1990 elections and this is again picked up by the V-Dem indicator. The almost complete boycott in the 2010 elections is also displayed and draws down the general index of electoral legitimacy drastically.

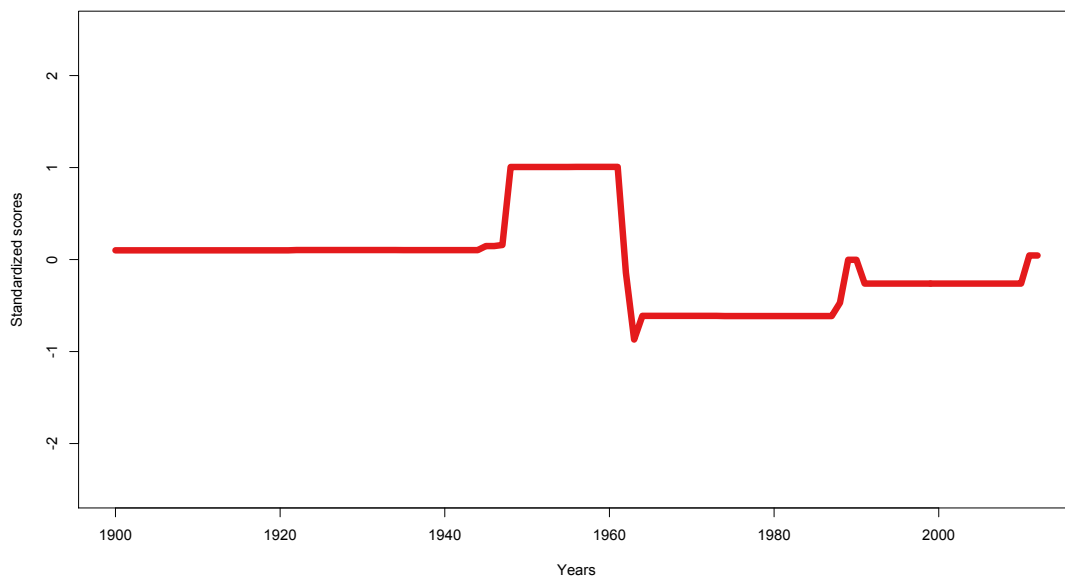
Elections under the period of military rule were in general peaceful. The military forced people to vote but also prevented any election-related violence. The interest of voters in the 2010 elections was rather low since the main opposition party (the NLD) boycotted the elections but there was still some significant levels of electoral violence surrounding the process. The 2012 by-elections restored the legitimacy despite election fraud by the Thein Sein government. However, in these elections, the losing parties did not accept the results (or the oppositions were banned) as discussed above.

Overall, the by-elections in 2012 represented a significant step forward in restoring democracy including the legitimacy of electoral processes.

Party System: Qualities Lagging Behind

Figure 8 shows the changes in the levels of democratic qualities of the *party system* dimension over time in the red thick line.

Figure 8. Party System in Burma/Myanmar (1900 - 2012)



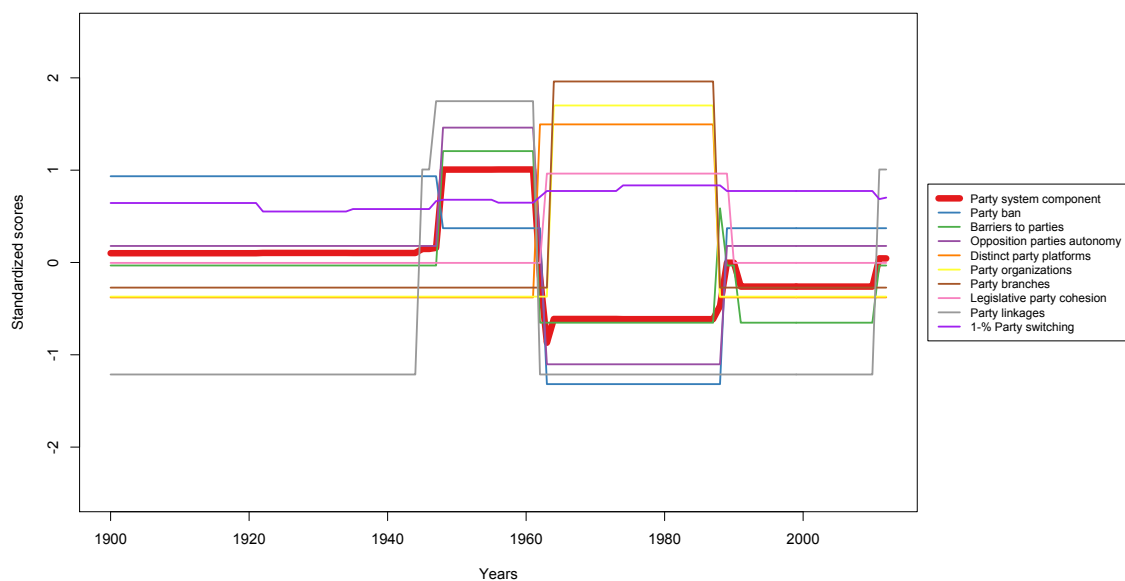
It is different from other components in that the measure of how democratic the party system is, was not negatively affected by the World War II period. To the contrary, this was the period when Aung San formed the major opposition coalition together with other influential political parties and started the underground rebellion against the British. This became the Anti-Fascist and People Freedom League (AFPFL).

The general index of party system "democraticness" thus reaches its highest levels in the late 1940s and the 1950s, when Myanmar adopts the Westminster system and AFPFL and other political parties were given freedom to be formed. The right to form political parties disappeared during the socialist regime from 1974 to 1988 and only started to improve again in the 1990s. But the overall index of democratic qualities in this dimension is still at a

significantly lower level than during the 1940s and 1950s.

Figure 9 drills down further to explore the changing qualities of the party system in Burma/Myanmar. The index discussed above is the unweighted average from nine separate indicators. They include to what extent all or some political parties are banned (thin blue line); whether there are significant restrictions on the right to form a party (thin green line); whether opposition parties can operate independently of the government (thin dark purple line); whether parties have distinct platforms enabling voters to make informed choices at the polls (thin orange line); whether parties have national and local level offices making it possible for citizens to engage with them (thin yellow and orange lines); whether legislators of the same party vote cohesively in the legislature so that voters can predict how their votes will affect policy (thin pink line); to what extent political parties rely on public policies rather than use clientelistic goods to attract votes (thin grey line); and to what degree legislators switch parties between elections thus undermining the sovereignty of voters (thin light purple line). Higher values of the indicators mean fewer restrictions and more autonomy, clearer party platforms and less reliance on clientelism, and higher levels of voting cohesion and less party switching. In Figure 9, the overall index of the democratic qualities of the party system is also preserved and displayed with the thicker red line.

Figure 9. Party System in Burma/Myanmar Disaggregated (1900 - 2012)



Most indicators move in tandem in the ups and downs of “democraticness” over the period and thus track the overall index relatively well. The indicators of whether parties have national and local levels offices, whether legislators vote with other members of their parties, and the distinctiveness of party platforms are exceptions from the general pattern. While we would typically expect these to be indicators of democratic qualities, they are also scored higher in periods of centralized, autocratic rule in a one-party state like Burma/Myanmar in this period. It is natural that such a socialist one-party regime score “well” on party cohesion, party organization and branches, as well as on having a distinct policy platform.

On the other hand, during the same period, all parties except the state-sponsored party (Union Solidarity and Development Party) were banned, thus barriers to form political parties were extremely high and coders also note that linkages to citizens had low democratic qualities. The leading political figures including Aung San Suu Kyi were either in prison or under house arrest. So overall the index for democraticness the party system is (accurately) low in the 1960s through the 1980s.

In the 1950s or early 1990s, when the system was more liberal, it was primarily the levels of party organization and centralization that were relatively low while legislative party cohesion and a partial ban on political parties also draws down the general index.

Most indicators show a positive spike in the early 1990s but then falls back reflecting that the military government refused to transfer the power to the winning (opposition) party, the National League for Democracy in 1993. Only the indicator for party linkages improved significantly with the 2010 elections and the 2012 by-elections.

The indicators of *opposition parties' autonomy* and *party bans* began to improve in the early 1990s but the military government suppressed the autonomy of opposition party and bans on the party during early 1990s to 2010, and parties still tended to rely on clientelistic strategies to attract votes. The levels of *party switching* are in general constant in the period from British rule to the 2010 general election. The most frequent party switching took place in the elections of 1950s when the ruling party, AFPFL persuaded the members of other parties parliamentary represented parties to switch, as well as after 2012 by-election, when some politicians of minority parties switched to NLD. The indicator of *bans on parties* is also distinct from the general pattern: it reached its highest values in the colonial era because the British Government suppressed anti-colonialist political parties, when no parties were officially banned.

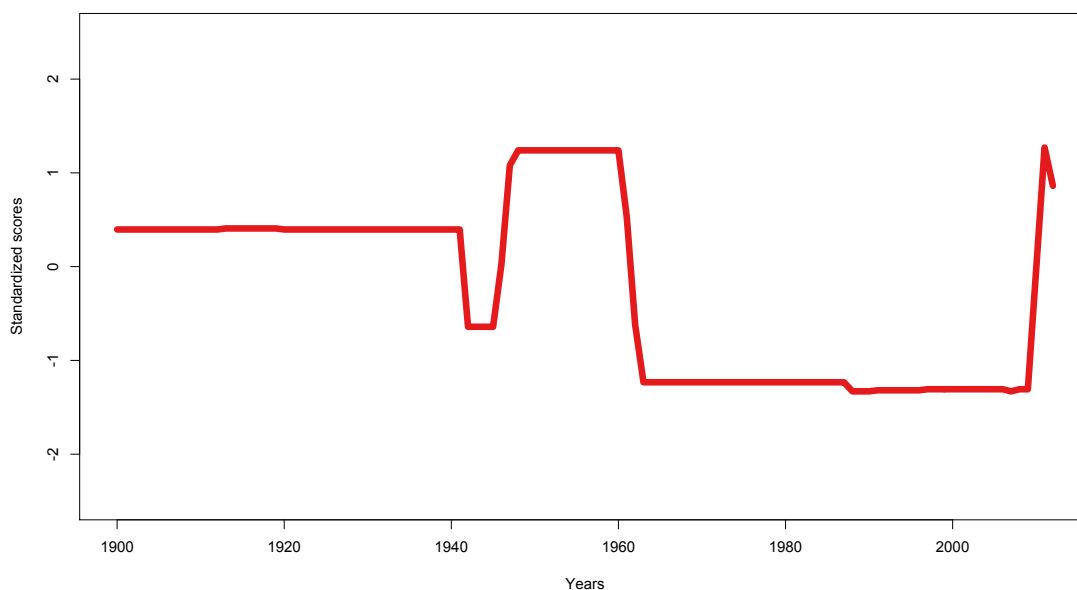
Overall, the democratic qualities of the party system in Burma/Myanmar are still weak and at very modest levels.

Civil Society: Its Fall and Re-Emergence

Figure 10 presents the changes in the levels of Civil Society index over time with the familiar thick red line. This line was the thin brown index indicator in Figure 1.

This figure suggest that the democratic qualities in the area of *civil society*, similar to the overall (illustrative) democracy index in Figure 1, improve during the post-independence period of late 1940s through 1950s, deteriorate during the military-cum-socialist one party state, and then gained ground after 2010.

Figure 10. Civil Society in Burma/Myanmar (1900 – 2012)



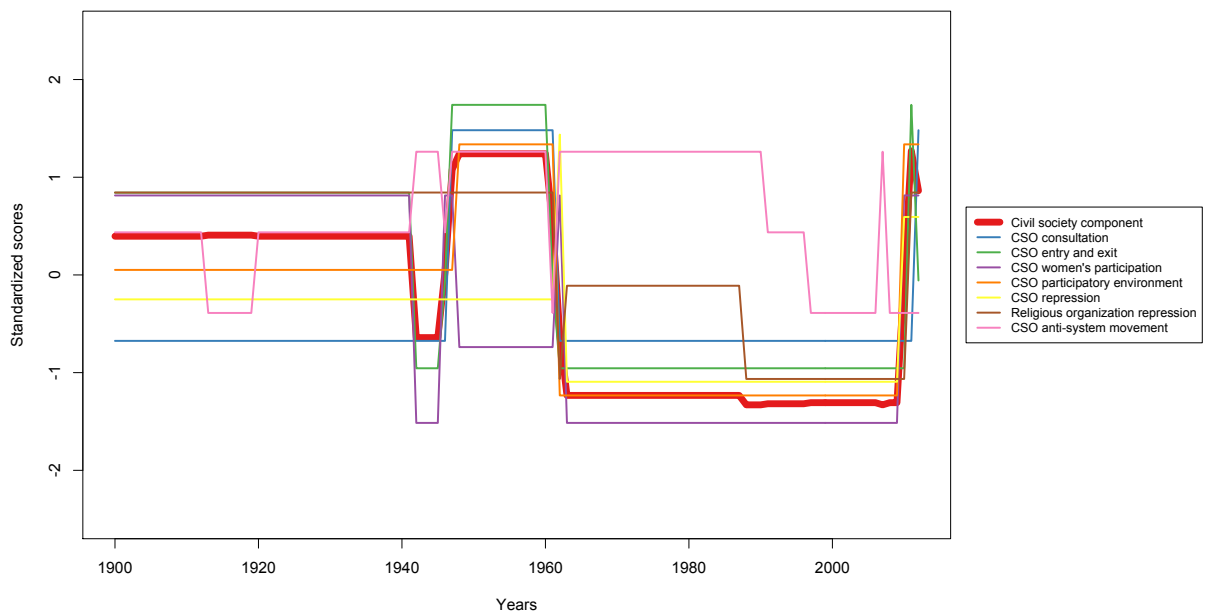
But what are the specific and more detailed developments in Burma/Myanmar that are expressed in this overall measure of civil society? Figure 11 presents a disaggregation of the measure of *civil society* into its composite indicators.

The index of *civil society* is aggregated from seven indicators, including whether civil society groups (CSOs) are consulted by policy makers before making major decisions about policy (thin blue line); whether the government exercises control over the entry and exit of CSOs in public life (thin green line); to what extent women have the same *de facto* possibilities as men to participate in CSOs (thin purple line); whether civil society is characterized by a pluralistic and open environment or dominated by a few large organizations (thin orange line); to what extent CSOs and religious organizations are free from government repression (thin orange and yellow lines); and whether there are anti-system movements present or not (thin pink line)³. In the following figures, all the scores of individual indicators are displayed using standardized values so that they are comparable to each other.

Most individual indicators follow the general pattern of the overall index of civil society. However, the indicators of *women's participation*, *CSO's freedom from government repression*, and *anti-system movement* are three exceptions. The levels of *women's participation in CSOs* were even lower in 1950s than in 1900s to late 1940s when women actively participated in struggles of independence, which is the period when most other civil society indicators reached their highest levels indicating the male domination of this period. During World War II and the military rule, female participation was also particularly low when the Japanese administration of fascist system and the military government suppressed the movement of women. What is interesting is that female participation expanded for a short time in 1946, 1947, and 1962 when more women were educated and took part in rehabilitation activities of the nation after WWII.

³ The aggregated measures of each component from section 2 to section 11 are generated from factor analysis based on the data of 54 currently completed countries.

Figure 11. Civil Society in Burma/Myanmar Disaggregated (1900 – 2012)



CSOs were not free from government repression even in the late 1940s and 1950s when the government thought that some of CSOs activities were linked by the Communist movement. The repression on CSOs was slightly relieved in 1962 but the military government based on one party system, the Burmese Socialist Program Party, and the military government after 1988 cracked down on CSOs and this is reflected vividly in the V-Dem indicator for repression.

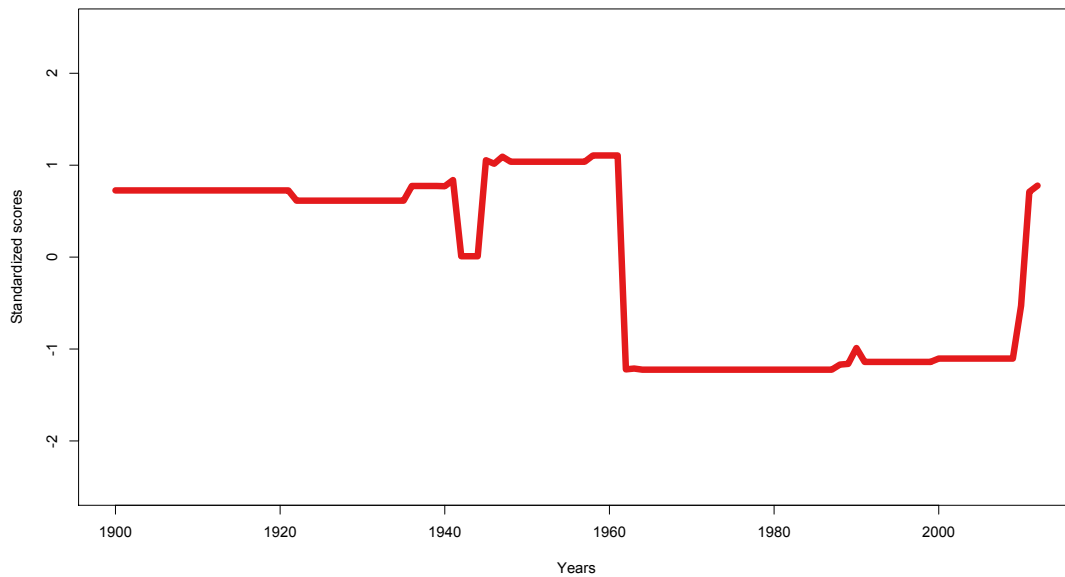
Anti-system movement activities were widespread against the British and the Japanese rulers before and during World War II, as well as under the military rule from the 1960s when most CSOs were anti the system of government in Burma/Myanmar. Compared to other CSOs, religious organized groups were less heavily repressed during the entire period. Nonetheless and except for Buddhism, consecutive governments systematically suppressed freedom for other religions including Christianity, Hinduism and Islamism to a significant degree.

The last few years has involved substantial liberalization of political space also in the civil society dimension. Virtually all V-Dem indicators of civil society show steep increases in the level of democratic qualities for the various aspects of a re-emerging civil society.

Media: Closing and Re-Opening

Figure 12 shows changes in the levels of *media dimension* over time. Higher levels of that indicator means less governmental control on media, a wider range of perspectives covered by media, and more access to media by citizens.

Figure 12. The Media in Burma/Myanmar (1900-2012)

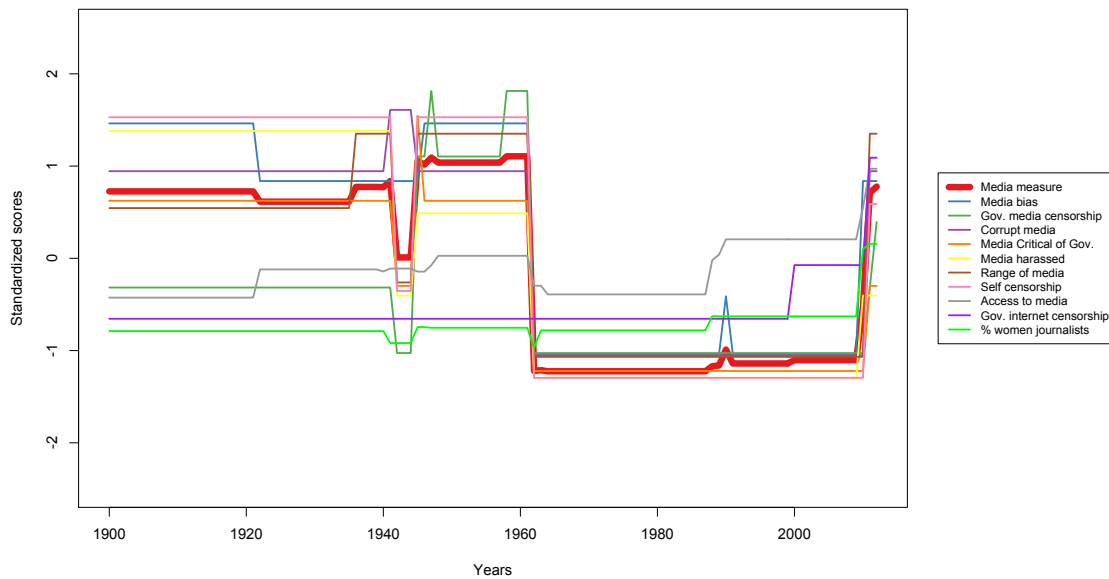


The overall index shows that while media was surely more rudimentary in nature before the 1960s, it was much freer then than during the period of military and one party rule from the early 1960s to recently. The present situation is much better than just a few years ago but nonetheless the democratic qualities of the media situation in Burma/Myanmar today is still worse than before the military took over in 1962.

Figure 13 presents the over-time variation in the specific media indicators. The overall measure of media freedom (thick red line) is aggregated from ten indicators, including if there is media bias in favor of the government (thin blue line); the extent to which government attempts to censor the media and the internet (thin dark green line); whether journalists and editors are corrupt and alter their news coverage in exchange for payments (dark purple line); to what degree the major media routinely criticize the government (thin orange line); the what extent journalists risk being harassed by the government if they voice critical views (thin yellow line); whether media represent a wide range of political perspectives (thin brown line); what level of self-censorship there is among journalists (thin pink line); the percentage of population who have access to media (thin grey line); and the percentage of female journalists (thin light green line).

Some indicators show a different type of variation than the general pattern. *Citizens' access to media and the internet*, and the percentage of *female journalists* began to increase only in the 1990s when the military government gave the licenses for weekly sports journals and later weekly newspapers that allowed an expansion of journalistic work by university graduates of females. Similarly, *media corruption* has been a consistent issue in Burma/Myanmar until the last decade and is now on the improving. *Access to the media* has also deviated from the general trend displayed by the overall media index and again, only the last couple of years has meant a meaningful (positive) difference from the past.

Figure 13. Media Disaggregated in Burma/Myanmar (1900-2012)



Most other aspects of the media follow the general pattern however. But relative to the general level of democratic freedom in the area of the media, journalists were less likely to be harassed by the government and there was less self-censorship among them in the colonial period. We are not surprised to find that V-Dem coders rate that there was more government *censorship* after 1962 military coup of General Ne Win who enacted the notorious 1962 Printers and Publishers Law. Yet, it is comforting to find that the V-Dem indicators adequately reflect what is generally understood to have happened in this period.

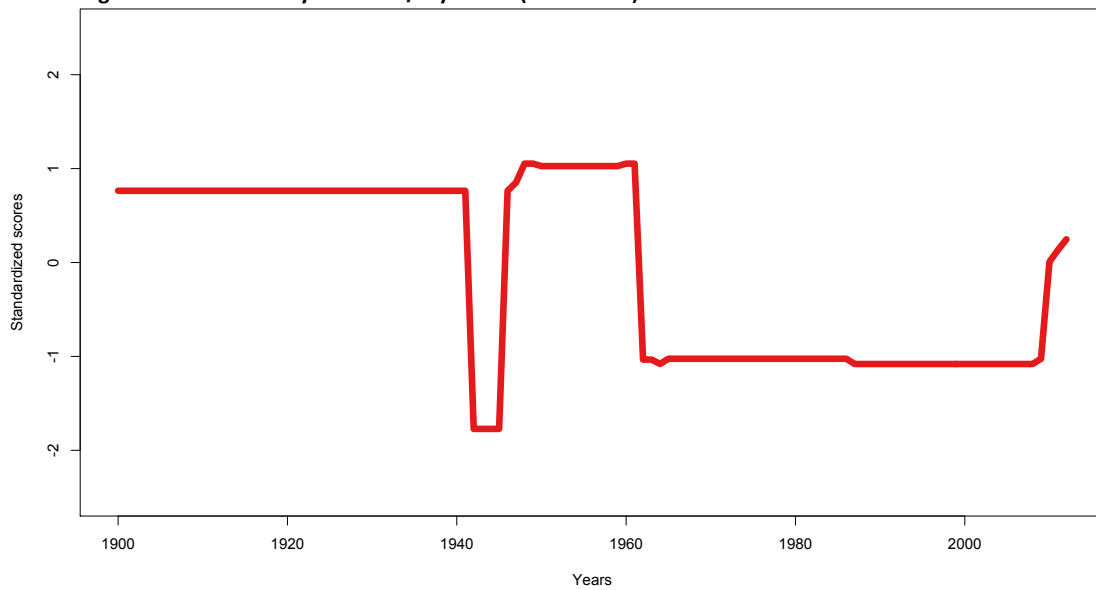
During World War II, most indicators declined only to reach their most democratic levels in the late 1940s and the 1950s. *Government censorship* of the media, for example, was especially rare in 1947 and from 1958 to 1961. General Ne Win then nationalized all the private newspapers enterprises with the purpose of silencing the voice against him and his military government. But all aspects of media were severely repressed under the military regime because all means of media, including three main newspapers, radio and television, were government owned and they were used by Ministry of Information as the tools of propaganda inside and outside of the country.

With a checkered history and after an extended period of a closed media sector, the set of V-Dem media indicators collectively demonstrate a re-opening in the last few years but that goes least far in two critical areas: allowing critical voices among journalists to be heard, and the freedom from harassment by government when journalists express such critiques.

Civil Liberties: Varying and Partially Present

Figures 14 to 17 present changes in the levels of the *civil liberties dimension* over time and its constituting indicators. The thick red line in Figure 14 displays the overall index measuring various aspects of the extent to which both men and women enjoy the full range of civil liberties in Burma/Myanmar.

Figures 14. Civil Liberty in Burma/Myanmar (1900-2012)

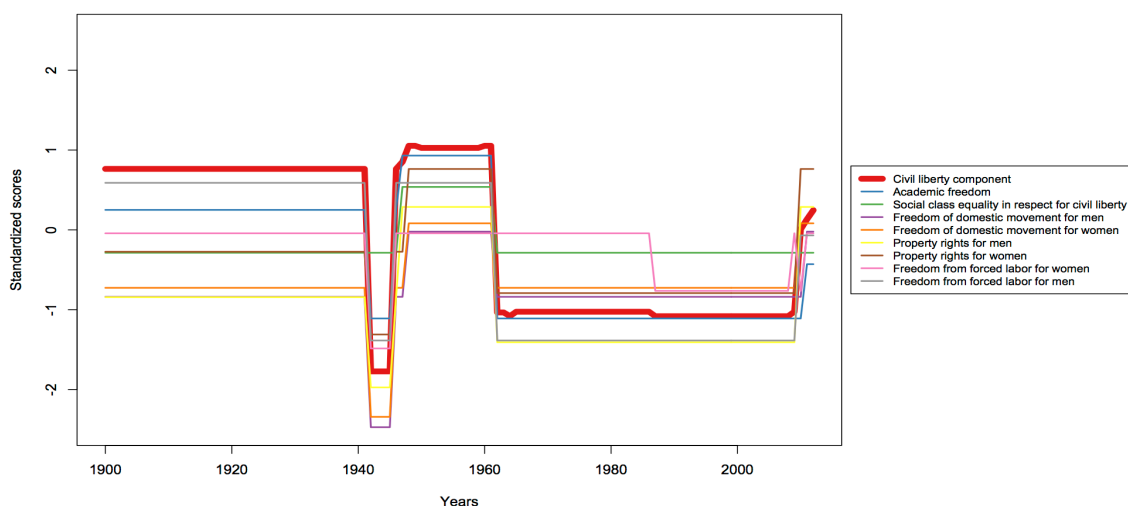


It suggests that the levels of civil liberties were higher during the colonial era before World War II, during the period after the independence and before the military rule, and after almost 40 years of repression, began to improve in 2010.

The measure of civil liberties is aggregated from no less than nineteen indicators. Higher values on each of the indicators mean higher levels in the “democraticness” in the areas of civil liberties.

Figure 15 shows six of the indicators. These six have lower values on average across the entire period than the overall measure, which is displayed through a thicker red line. This makes them in some sense “the least democratic” indicators.

Figure 15. “Least Democratic” Indicators of Civil Liberty in Burma/Myanmar Disaggregated (1900-2012)



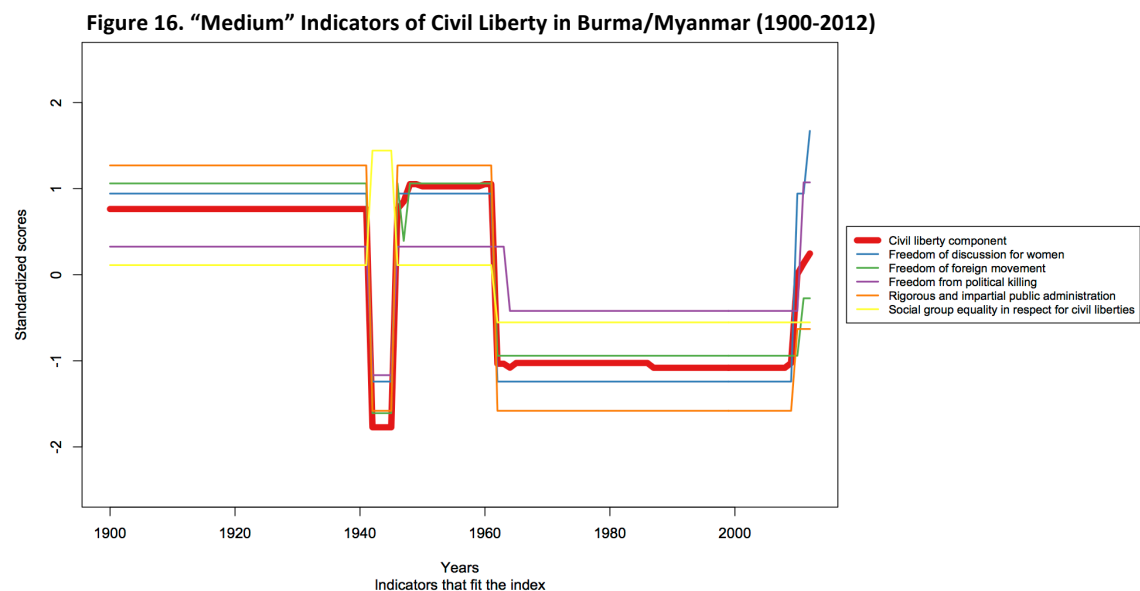
However, all six are in general varying over time in ways that are consistent with the overall pattern. The indicators included in Figure 15 focus on academic freedom (thin blue line);

social class equality with respect to civil liberty (thin green line); freedom of domestic movement for men (thin dark purple line) and for women (thin orange line); property rights for men (thin yellow line) and for women (thin brown line); and lastly, freedom from forced labor for women (thin pink line) and for men (thin grey line).

Equality between social classes with regard to civil liberty was apparently not affected by World War II and the military-cum socialist one party regime. It is noteworthy that in this regard, levels of inequality has remained similar to the colonial era throughout, and seems to constitute a significant issue up till today.

Women's access to civil liberties has been a major concern in Burma/Myanmar as well, and while the last couple of years has meant significant gains, it remains an issue. *Women's freedom from forced labor* was not significantly improved in the late 1940s and the 1950s. The military government used the forced labor extensively in their mega development projects, and apparently women were first spared some of these exercises. *Women's freedom of domestic movement* is also generally less widely acknowledged than men's in Burma/Myanmar political history.

Figure 16 includes five other indicators. These have on average similar values to the overall index of civil liberties (thick red line) and can be regarded therefore as "medium" in terms of democratic qualities. *Freedom of discussion for women* is represented by the thin blue line; *freedom of foreign movement* by the thin green line; *freedom from political murders* by the thin purple line; a *rigorous and impartial public administration* by the orange line; and *social group equality with respect to access to civil liberties* by the thin yellow line.



Among these five indicators, we note in particular that the *equality between social groups* with regard to enjoyment of civil liberties has been a constant weakness in the history of Burma/Myanmar and still remains an area of concern as indicated by the V-Dem coders. It was less affected by the military rule than many other aspects of civil liberties. The socialist government under General Ne Win and the military government had significant policy implementation for Indian and Chinese immigrant decedents and other ethnic minorities.

However, it is also the only area along with religious freedom (see below) not affected at all by the present liberalization and democratic opening the last few years.

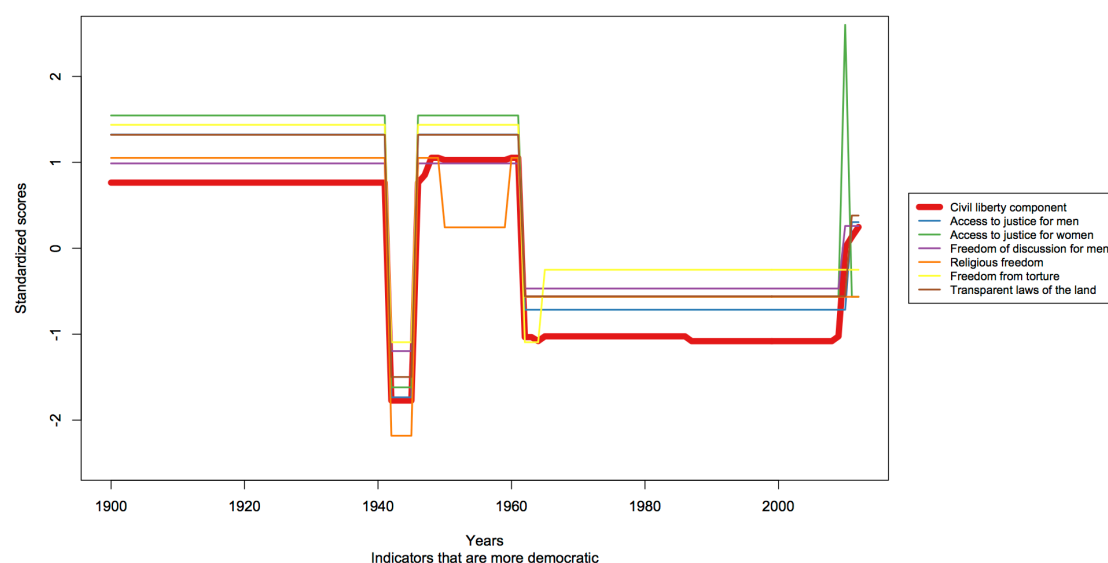
The level of *freedom from political killing* remains constant under the British rule but it falls during the mid 1940s, when the Japanese occupation forces were allegedly conducting extensive killings of civilians under the suspicion of being spies. The number of *political killings* remains unchanged during the parliamentary period before 1962 military coup when the one-party system of General New Win and the military government started executing political activists and ethnic insurgents without fair trial. Today the situation has improved dramatically with an almost perfect score and close to complete absence of government orchestrated murder of political opponents.

Figure 17 includes the six indicators for civil liberties that on average expose higher democratic values than the overall measure. They are also in general moving in ways that are consistent with the overall index for civil liberties. It is mostly that these six indicators tend to perform better than the others.

The indicators included in Figure 17 are: *Access to justice for men* displayed by thin blue line and for women with the thin green line; *freedom of discussion for men* indicated by the thin purple line; *religious freedom* is portrayed by the thin orange line; *freedom from torture* showed by the thin yellow line; and finally the indicator for *transparent and predictable laws of the land* is found by the thin brown line.

According to the V-Dem coders *religious freedom* was significantly affected in the 1950s after Buddhism was officially recognized by the U Nu Government and became a state sponsored religion. But with the military, on party socialist regime from 1962 freedom of religion was negatively affected along with all the other civil liberties. The *freedom of religion* for other beliefs has been constrained by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, for example with restrictions to build churches, mosques and temples. The level of "democraticness" in this area has still not changed and remains an important issue.

Figure 17. "Most Democratic" Indicators of Civil Liberty in Burma/Myanmar (1900-2012)

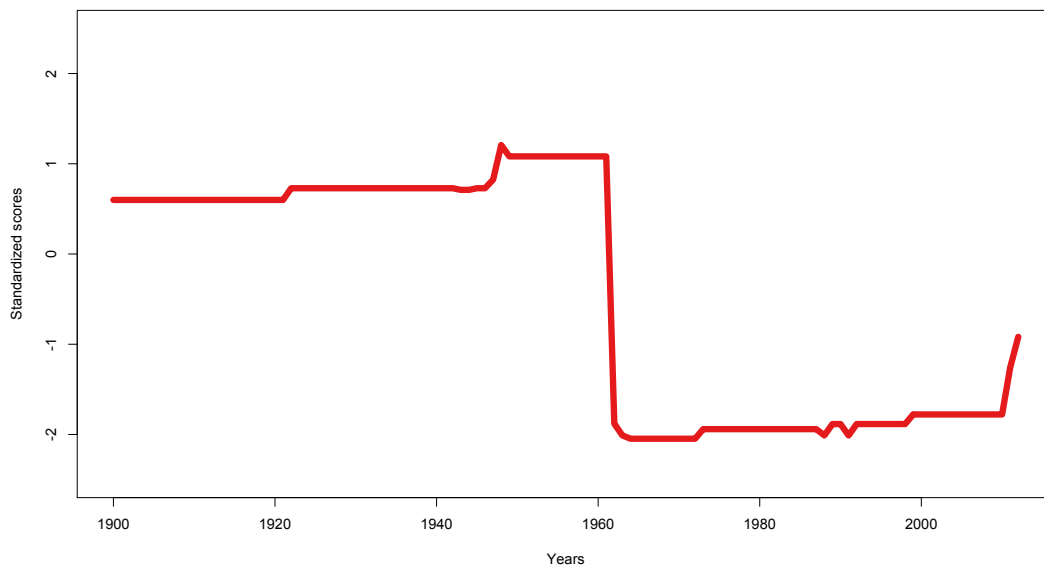


Significantly, *access to justice for women* follows the general pattern up to late 2000s, it apparently rose higher than other values when the Civil Society Organizations focused on women issues and advocated by Aung San Suu Kyi lobbied the new semi-civilian government to lift the restrictions on women with trials.

Judicial Sector: An Area of Concern

To have an independent judiciary that can implement laws and autonomously adjudicate on cases that also involve the government, is a critical aspect of the foundation for a democratic country. Figure 18 presents the index for a judicial independence and autonomy component in the V-Dem measures.

Figure 18. Judicial Independence in Burma/Myanmar (1900 - 2012)



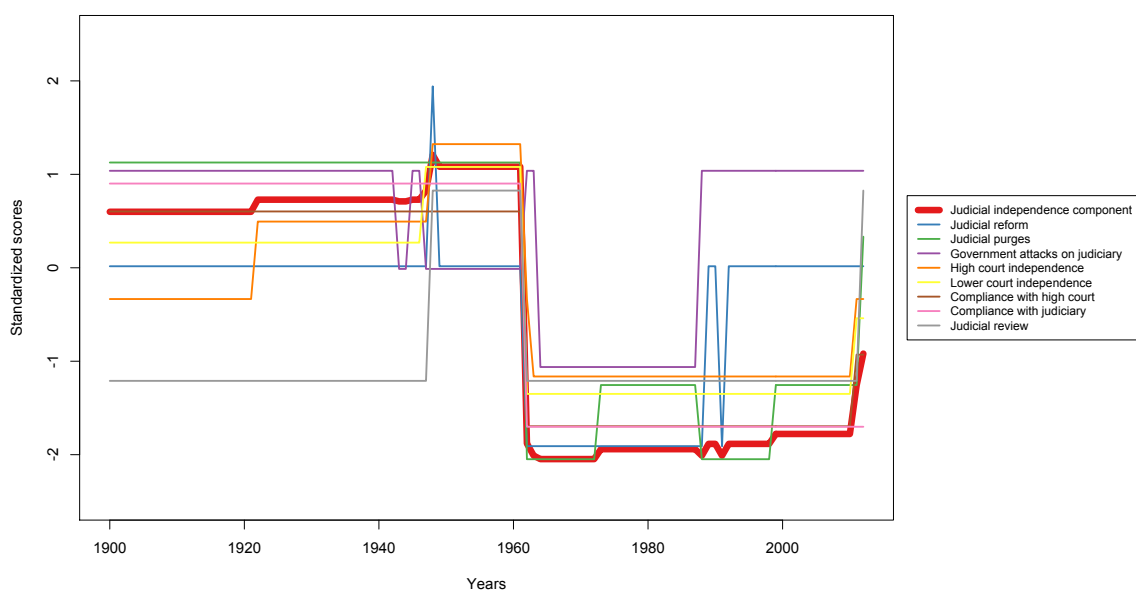
The index of judicial independence displays one of the most radical patterns among all the V-Dem measures. While the colonial period was definitely oppressive in many ways, it seems that the country experts for Burma at least judge it moderately predictable and that the rulers adhered to its judgments. After some incremental improvements with independence, the 1962 military take over brought the index of judicial autonomy down very close to the theoretical minimum. In other words, it is hard to imagine a worse situation for the judicial sector than Burma/Myanmar from 1962 to very recently.

The measure of judicial independence is aggregated from eight indicators that are displayed separately in Figure 19. They include reforms that improve *judiciary's formal power* (thin blue line); the level of *arbitrary removals of judges* (thin green line); the prevalence of explicit *government attacks on judiciary* (thin purple line); the degree to which both *high and lower court independence* is respected by the government (thin orange and yellow lines); the degree of *government compliance with the high court's decisions* on matters involving the ruling group and/or government institutions (thin brown line) and the government's *compliance with lower courts' rulings* in the judiciary (thin pink line); and lastly, the degree to which *judicial review* of new laws and regulations is practiced

(thin grey line). Higher values of these indicators indicate more judicial independence and autonomy and less government control of the judiciary.

The people in Burma/Myanmar enjoyed a somewhat predictable and impartial judiciary under the British rule but the rule of law was lost during the Japanese fascist occupation. The judiciary system worked effectively and independently from the executive and legislative branches during post-independence years before 1962 coup. General Ne Win effectively intervened into the judiciary system to kick out the generals who attempted the coup against him and detained without trial the activists who tried to dethrone their authoritarian rule. The military government followed and gave orders to the judges to imprison political activists.

Figure 19. Judicial Independence Disaggregated in Burma/Myanmar (1900-2012)



Most indicators declined radically after the 1962 events and hit bottom, or close to bottom levels. Real improvements have come mainly after 2010.

The indicator of judicial purges fluctuated between the two lowest levels during the military rule and it shows that the military directly controlled the judiciary. The indicators of government attacks on judiciary and judicial reforms started to improve since 1988. The figure also shows that the courts had the authority of judicial review only during 1948 and 1961, and since 2012. The levels of high and lower court independence both significantly improved during the period of late 1940s and the 1950s because the courts were independent from the executive branch.

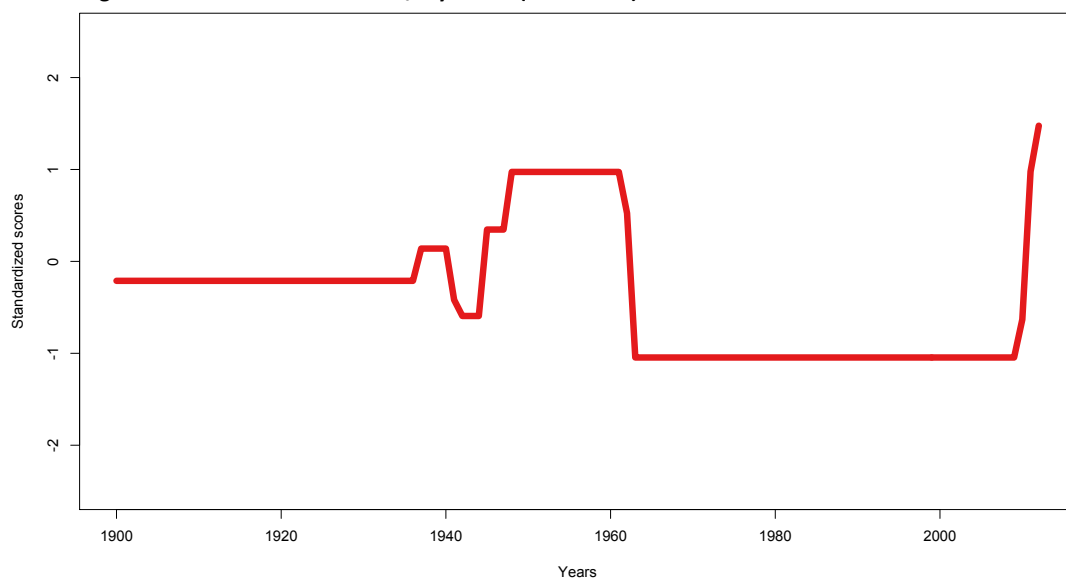
Overall the democratic qualities of the judicial sector in terms of autonomy and impartiality for the judiciary, are still at low levels. The improvements in this area following the 2010 elections and recent reforms are much less pronounced than in others areas. It remains a general concern.

Deliberation: Back on Track

Deliberation is a democratic dimension in the V-Dem project that seeks to measure the extent to which inter-elite reasoning, discussion, and justifications are characterized by rational dialogue, exchange of views, and by respectful dialogue and reasoning with the citizens. Figure 20 presents the aggregate *deliberation* component index.

In the overall index, there are no big surprises. The colonial period score relatively low on this dimension of democracy, while the early post-independence period was much better to be followed by very low figures during the military-socialist regime. The last few years record an upsurge in the index as expected. In general, it seems to portray the political developments in this dimension relatively well.

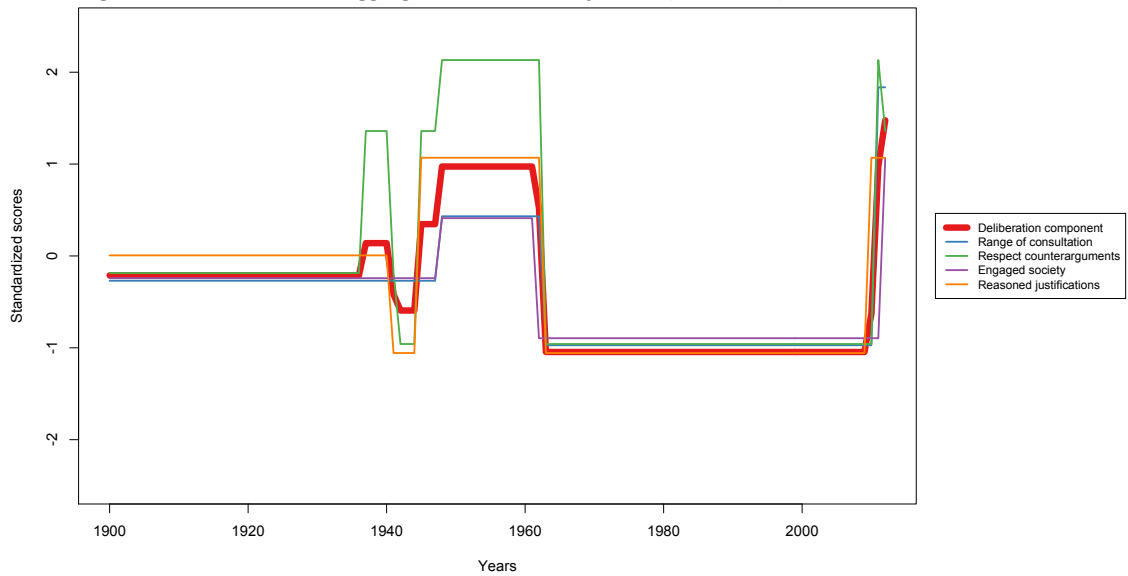
Figure 20. Deliberation in Burma/Myanmar (1900-2012)



The measure of political deliberation (thick red line) is aggregated from four indicators displayed separately in Figure 21. In the graph, the *range of political consultation* is presented by the thin blue line; the extent to which *political elites respect counterarguments* and whether they provide *reasoned justifications* are indicated by the thin green and the thin orange lines; while the level of elites' efforts at *society engagement* in public deliberations is portrayed by the purple line.

The general pattern of the indicators of deliberation remains unchanged at a low level until 1937 when Burma was separated from the British India. Policy-making and implementation was controlled by the Governor of British India and the British Prime Minister. With the rise of political activity, increased by nationalism during these years and the participation of educated Burmese politicians or bureaucrats in the executive and legislative branches, the indicator measuring respect for counterarguments significantly improved before the 1943 overtake by the Japanese. It also rises again during the post-independence years before the military coup of 1962 where we see the sharp fall and virtually no deliberation is recorded until up to the early 2010s.

Figure 21. Deliberation Disaggregated in Burma/Myanmar (1900-2012)

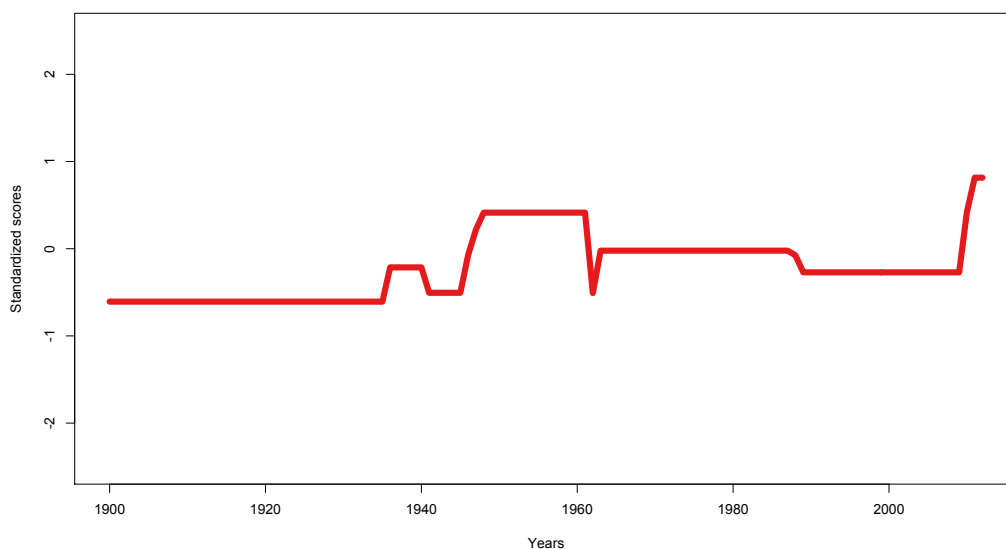


A similar but less pronounced pattern is evident for the indicators of reasoned justification, engaging society, and the range of consultation. They all move in very similar ways across time to reflect the overall pattern of this dimension. The last two years have brought a sharp, almost cataclysmic increase in the democratic qualities of deliberation.

Equality

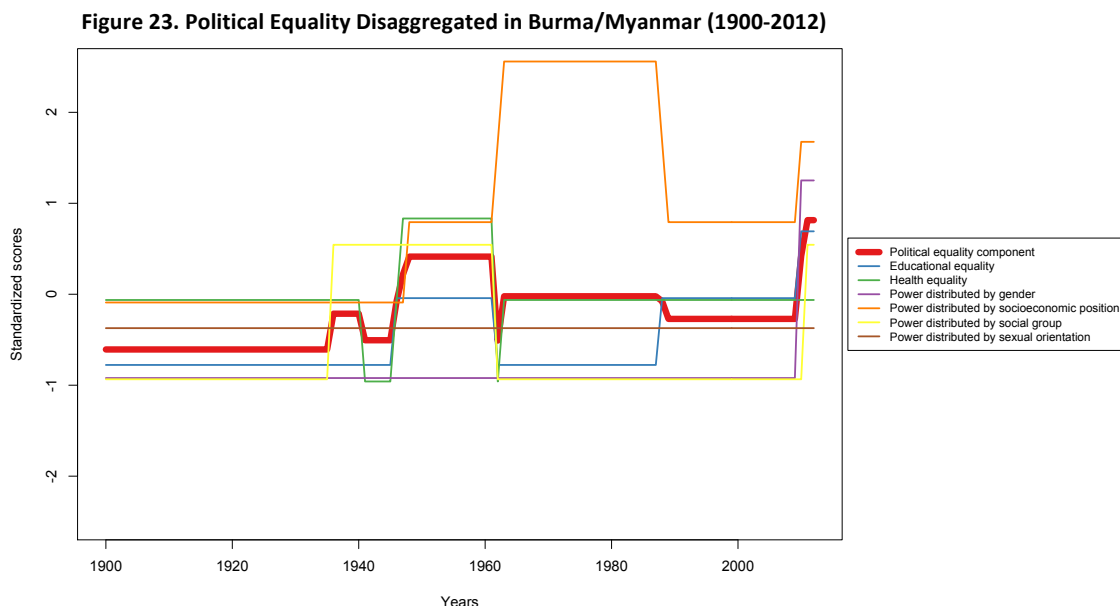
Political equality is in V-Dem seeking to address the extent to which socio-economic, educational, health, and social group inequalities translate into dissimilar abilities to actually use one's democratic rights. The overall measure of equality in the Burmese society is inspected in Figure 22. Compared to other components, political equality was less affected by World War II and the military rule.

Figure 22. Political Equality in Burma/Myanmar (1900-2012)



The overall measure was at its lowest level during the colonial era but on average, this dimension fares relatively bad in terms of its democratic qualities as reflected by the less than zero score for most years even if again an improvement is indicated for the last couple of years.

The measure of political equality in Burma/Myanmar (thick red line) is aggregated from six indicators. Higher values of the indicators mean more equal power distribution and this better democratic qualities in this dimension. In Figure 23, the changes in educational equality as assessed by V-Dem coders are presented by the thin blue line; health equality is portrayed by the thin green line; the power distribution by gender is indicated by the thin purple line; equality in terms of power distribution by socioeconomic position is displayed by the thin orange line; power distributed by social group is depicted by the thin yellow line; while finally the equality of power distribution by sexual orientation is represented by the thin brown line.



Among the individual indicators, the most eye-catching outlier is the *power distribution across socio economic status* was significantly more equal during the military rule than both before and after it. Meanwhile, the *power distribution across social groups* began to become more equal from 1936 when Burma was separated from the British India and more immigrants from India and China and ethnic minorities took part in major policy making process. But on this aspect of political equality, things deteriorated to bottom levels with immediate effect after the take over by the military in 1962.

Health care equality is the only indicator affected during the wartime. Under the military rule, the indicators of *educational equality* and *power distribution across social groups* more significantly declined in part perhaps because the military spent two thirds of the annual budget on defense and a small portion of the budget on education and health care. The levels of *power distribution by sexual orientation* were constant and at a low level of democratic quality across the entire period before 2011 when the female activists took part in parliament, advocacy and media. The power distribution by gender began to improve only after 2010.

4. Conclusions and Reflections

The scores and indicators of V-Dem are useful to show the development of democratic system in Myanmar. Most of the indicators follow the general pattern based on the regime changes. They contribute to a better overview of the country's political development, characterized by a pullback from the promised democratic development after the early post-independence period. In most areas V-Dem measures, the last few years also registers significant improvements in the last few years after the country's regime decided to start opening up.

The diverse V-Dem component indicators show some improvement of civil societies, civil liberties, media, deliberation and equality during late 1930s, from 1948 to 1962 and early 2010s when democratic practices prevailed to some extent while there are significant drops of those indicators in World War II (early 1940s), the socialist regime (1962-1988) and the military governments (1988-2010).

Electoral contestation is now on the rise with many individual aspects improving as demonstrated by the detailed V-Dem indicators. In this area, the lacking capacity and autonomy of the electoral management body remains a point of concern, as well as the constrained equality in access to national media for various political parties.

The legitimacy of electoral processes in Burma/Myanmar has varied highly over its history but the country seems now to be on track in making advancements in this area as judged by all the V-Dem indicators.

The democratic qualities of the party system lags behind this general positive development. There are still significant limitations in barriers to political parties, autonomy of parties, the extension of party organizations and branches, and in clarity of platforms for example, limiting citizens ability to exercise choice.

The judicial sector is faring the worst. In most aspects as judged by our indicators little or nothing has changed significantly even in the past few years. A predictable and impartial environment of rule of law is necessary for a democratic development and this area needs further attention in Burma/Myanmar.

Meanwhile, civil society appears to have re-emerged as a relatively strong and democratic force. There are still some concerns about the control of entry and exit of CSOs by government, and for women's equal access to CSOs, but overall we note mostly a strong positive development.

Similarly, the media is developing much stronger democratic qualities as judged by most detailed indicators after some 40 years of almost complete closeness. Specific concerns remain about government harassment of journalists who are critical of the government, and about the media in general lacking critical voices toward government policy and actions.

Civil liberties show an uneven and partially positive development. The military/one party regime naturally constrained most civil liberties for a long time. Property rights, freedom from forced labor, freedom of discussion for women, freedom from political killings, and freedom of domestic movement for both women and men have improved but still are far

from perfect. Meanwhile things like academic freedom, equality in terms of civil liberties for all social group, freedom of foreign movement and torture, and transparent and predictable laws are lagging far behind other rights and remain concerning.

At the same time, the deliberative qualities of the present situation in Burma/Myanmar seems to have improved radically, which is positive sign.

The findings of this report are applicable to scholars of political science and practitioners who would like to have a close observation on specific time frame and regime type.

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