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Studies of democratic transition are gaining popularity in contemporary discourse and yet there is no single explanation for understanding such transitions, since it means different things to various states. Today, Myanmar is passing through a path to transition full of challenges and its process is overwhelmingly anticipative. For the purpose of this study, the author began with an introduction on theoretical debates of democracy. Using this theoretical frame, the study assesses the extent of democratic transition in Myanmar by using some elements relevant to transition theory: the role of elites, civil society, external agencies and institutions. Key to the analysis is in-depth interviews of the military and civilian elites and experts in Myanmar studies.

A close look at Myanmar's political developments since independence reveals more than one form of government. After the colonial rule, Burma began with a parliamentary form of democracy (1948–1958) succeeded by a caretaker government until the complete military takeover in 1962. With a weak civilian leadership, Burmese society was easily militarised under the leadership of General Ne Win. This was the period when the military constructed a power base for itself, thereby institutionalising the role of the military in the succeeding years. The aspirations of ethnic nationalities were shattered on the pretext of the fear of disintegration of the Union of Burma (Unitary). The Burmese way to Socialism led to nationalisation of the economy, which further led to rampant economic problems. The fall of civilian rule and the success of authoritarianism consolidated the role of the military in all walks of Burmese society. Therefore, the Myanmar Armed Forces, known as Tatmadaw, saw itself as the only organised and disciplined institution that was a guarantor of national unity and is the key variable in explaining the political development inside Myanmar.

In Chapter 3, the author examines the nature and role of civil society under different regimes, such as Anti-Fascist Peoples Freedom League (AFPFL), Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP), State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) and State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). He highlights civil societies inside the country and at cross borders under the SLORC regime and notes the challenges faced by and limited role played by students and media (state controlled) as an agent of change. Further, the conditions necessary for the emergence of vibrant Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) was never present in a country where freedom of association and expression were absent. Since 1962, civil society was largely restricted to activities within the agenda

and control of the military, leaving a highly restricted space for civil society to emerge and participate or act as democratising agents.

The role of elites and their policies in the process of regime transformation are not so simple. The key discussion centres on the role of the military elites who, as a dominant group, has engineered the transition process. The military was the last resort in the 1958 political impasse and its intervention showed the lack of trust between elites within AFPFL, the military and the ethnic groups. Indeed, it was the split of AFPFL that subsequently invited the army to form a caretaker government. Since 1962, the military elites seemed to have established a coherent power base that could maintain the *status quo*. During the BSPP regime, it was the military elite under Ne Win who felt the necessity for political transition. With Ne Win's retirement, there was no civilian body to fill the power vacuum whereas the army mostly retreated to its barracks. This trend was also followed by the military (under SLORC) after the 1990 election. Under the SPDC regime, the hope for democratic transition began under Prime Minister Khin Nyunt (the seven-step roadmap to democracy) even though he was sacked later. Consequently, in 2011, power was transferred to civilian rule under the leadership of President Thein Sein who was a retired military general. Another interesting feature in assessing elite politics is the role of elites within National League for Democracy (NLD) under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi. The author argues that NLD has been the voice of the people condemning the military government by accusing it as a hindrance to change. Consequently, it is the combination of the pressure from the NLD and more to the willingness of the military that led to the current transition path.

Another important area in assessing democratisation in Myanmar is the role of external agencies. External agency can be the foreign policy of one nation or collective of international organisations, regional bodies or alliances. The author analyses sanctions versus engagement policies pursued by international community. Sanctions imposed by the US and EU was to send a message of disapproval to Myanmar's government and to express support to the democracy movement. However, the sanctions imposed by the US and EU were limited and had little impact. The UN and its agencies had been vocal in pressuring the military government in Myanmar towards democratic change. It had passed non-binding resolutions, initiated consultative dialogues and issued press releases in their attempt to put pressure. Finally, the engagement policy of ASEAN, China and India had been limited, hence having less impact in regime change. The author concludes that sanctions and engagement policies did not trigger democratic reforms. Essentially, transition occurred from inside, and the scale that external actors played were inherently limited.

Studying political institutions is a means to determine to what extent they influence the process of consolidation of democracy. In Myanmar, the SLORC began by introducing the National Convention—a system designed to include a significant role for the military in all the three branches of the government. And the seven-step roadmap (SPDC) was made without any pressure from civilian forces. As election is an integral part of democratisation, political parties played an important role even though they had a minimal impact. The Buddhist Sangha also found a role for itself by pressing the government for change. The author argues that the military elites tend to be more inclined to relinquish political control when institutional arrangements are worked out in such a way as to ensure a place for military elements in an alternative democratic set-up. Myanmar, with its autocratic settings, has clearly demonstrated that institutions make a difference for the political system and it was the military that formulated as to how the institutions should be structured and functioned.

To sum up, the transition process in Myanmar is largely the interplay of different forces in trying to act as democratising agents. Nonetheless, the process is largely structured and engineered by the military or its willingness to change. Today, a question that should have been posed is to what extent is Myanmar moving towards democratic transition? Crucial to understanding is the civil-military relations, ethnic problem and mutual trust within the various forces in order to bring a genuine democracy suited to Myanmar. And, as we know that building of a democratic society is a long-term project, much success will depend on the quality of leadership at all levels operating within the transitional phase to democracy.

For those seeking to gain knowledge of the nuances of democratising agents, as well as to understand the contemporary changes from authoritarian rule to a civilian rule in Myanmar, it is an invaluable tool, encapsulating vast amounts of information in a single book.

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View Democratization Research Papers on Academia.edu for free. We argue that the substance of democratisation depends on popular representation through political parties but question their capacity to provide such representation. Examining capacity through the concept of party institutionalisation, we find that most parties have not been able to build effective organisational structures. However, we also find a degree of party institutionalisation in the form of rootedness in society. Political cleavages between those favouring authoritarian rule over democratic rule and Burman nationhood over ethnic notions of nationhood have produced divisions between s Democratisation of Myanmar and millions of other books are available for Amazon Kindle. Learn more. Democratisation of Myanmar 1st Edition. by. Nehginpao Kipgen (Author). He has published peer-reviewed academic articles in many reputed journals and over 100 articles in various leading international newspapers and magazines across the world. Read more. Product details. Home /Burma/Myanmar, Ethnic Minorities, Migration, Uncategorized/Book review: Liberalism and Democracy in Myanmar. Burma/Myanmar, Ethnic Minorities, Migration, Uncategorized |. That the outbreak of atrocities against ethnic minorities has occurred during the course of Myanmar's democratisation process is somewhat bewildering, and it is this subject that is probed by Professors Roman David and Ian Holliday in their book Liberalism and Democracy in Myanmar, across six substantive chapters. Repression from above and endorsement from below explain why international pressure is deemed ineffective to mitigate the Rohingya crisis.