

Liberalism and Democracy in Myanmar

Abstract

Historic Myanmar elections in 2015 and the installation of a National League for Democracy government effectively led by Aung San Suu Kyi in 2016 contrast with ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslims in 2017. One critical question that now confronts the 50 million people of this Southeast Asian nation is whether the push for greater democracy is strong enough to prevail over a powerful military machine and spreading undercurrents of intolerance. What are the prospects for liberal democracy in Myanmar? This lecture will address this question by examining historical conditions, constitutionalism, democracy, major political actors, ethnic conflict, and transitional justice. It will draw on a rich array of evidence focused on 88 in-depth interviews and three waves of surveys and survey experiments conducted in 2014-18. It will present the concept of limited liberalism, reflecting a blend of liberal and illiberal attitudes. It will conclude by casting doubt on the prospects for liberal democracy in Myanmar.