

# MYAMAR/BURMA:

*A COUNTRY REPORT BASED ON PILOT-STUDY DATA*

**V-Dem Country Report Series, No. 001, February 2012.**

## About V-Dem

Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) is a collaboration hosted at the Department of Political Science at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden; the Kellogg Institute at the University of Notre Dame, USA.

With four Principal Investigators (PIs), eleven Project Managers (PMs) with special responsibility for issue areas, seventeen Regional Managers (RMs), a set of Research Assistants (RAs), and approximately 3,000 Country Experts (CEs), the V-Dem project is collecting data on 329 indicators of various aspects democracy tied to seven core principles of democracy: electoral, liberal, majoritarian, consensual, participatory, deliberative and egalitarian.

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.

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 scores for the 7 core principles of democracy.

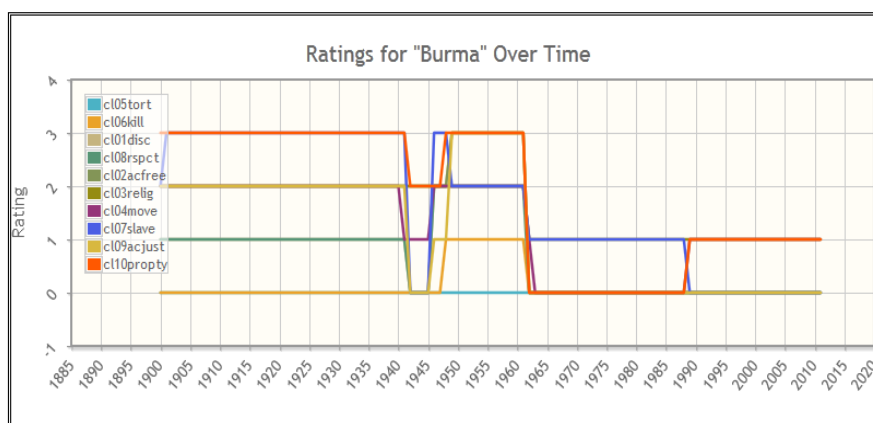
The data will be downloadable from a public V-Dem website. Users from anywhere will also be able to use sophisticated but intuitive and accessible online visualization and analysis tools. All data and tools will be public goods. Students and media across the world will benefit from the nuanced comparative 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.

The Pilot Phase was financed principally by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs-Sweden with supplementary funding provided by the Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, University of Gothenburg, and the Kellogg Institute at University of Notre Dame. In with the support of Hegre's Conceptualization and Measurement of Democracy project at University of Oslo, the Canadian International Development Agency, the European Commission, the Ministry of Foreign affairs, DK, and in partnership with International IDEA (with support from Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sweden), data collection is underway in over 100 countries.

## Introduction

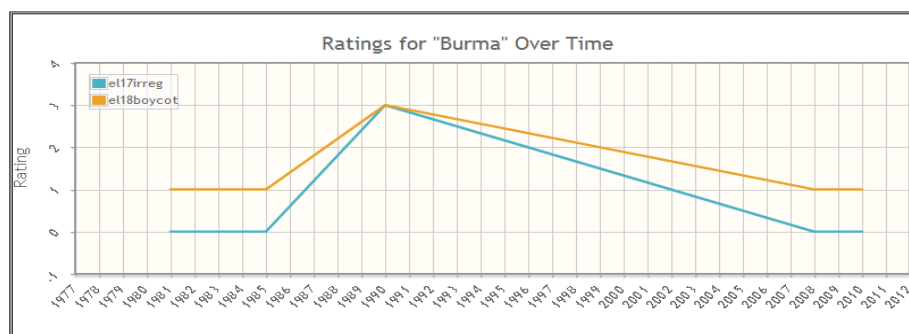
### Authoritarian History

Myanmar, also known to some as Burma, has had a turbulent history. This history is on clear display in preliminary results from V-Dem. The following figure charts the country's ratings across a variety of indicators of **civil liberties**. During the British colonial period most civil liberties were severely restricted, with only private property rights receiving robust protection from civil authorities. Under the Japanese occupation civil liberties declined precipitously, including, notably, a marked decline in the freedom from slavery and forced servitude—reflecting the policy of forced labor by the Japanese forces. During the post-independence democratic experiment we see a broad improvement but the social and political unrest that characterized that period is reflected in lower scores for freedom from political killing and torture. In 1962 the democratic experiment came to an end via a military coup led by General Ne Win. The military junta installed an extremely repressive regime reflected in the figure below by the fall of almost all indicators to the lowest level from 1962 on.



### Brief opening in 1990

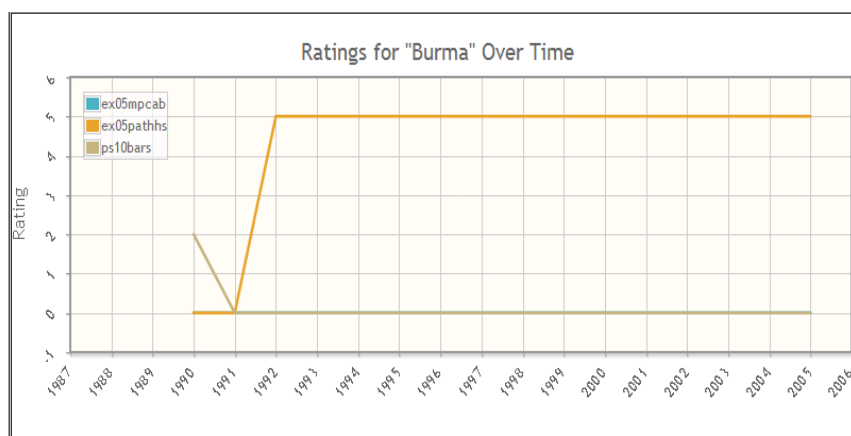
After massive public protests in the late 1980s the military junta agreed to hold



multi-party elections in 1990. To the surprise of many the elections were relatively free and fair, and the opposition party led by Aung San Su Kyi—the National League for Democracy—won a landslide victory. The figure above displays the ratings for whether elections were free and fair and the extent to which the opposition chose to participate in or boycott the election. The scores of 3 for both indicators mean that there were only a “few instances of irregularities” in the election and most parties chose to participate.

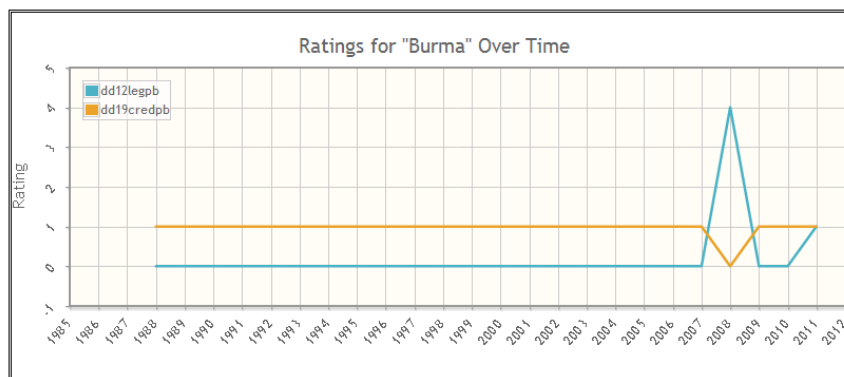
Despite losing the election, the ruling military elite refused to be bound by its results. From the first figure we see that the junta continued severe restrictions on civil liberties in the wake of the elections. The figure to the right provides information about the chief executive. Following the election the junta refused to allow the newly elected legislature to select the head of state and form the government. Instead, the head of state continued to be appointed by the military after the election

(Exec05pathhs = 5). No political parties found their way into the government cabinet (Execmpcab = 0) and political parties were again banned once the elections were over (PS10 moves from 2 to 0).



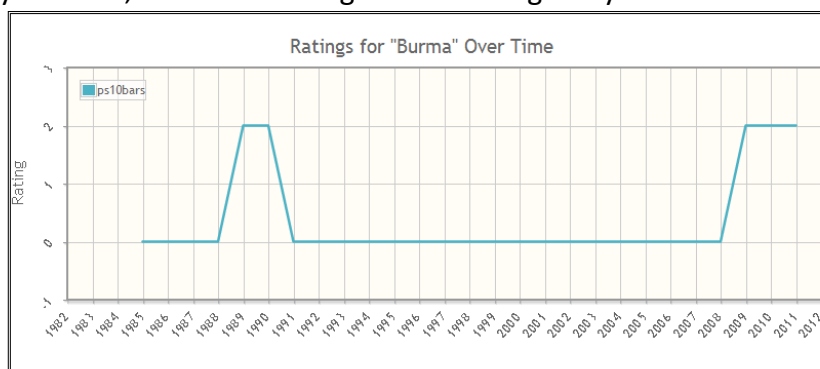
### Winds of Change?

In 2008 the military junta announced a “roadmap for democracy” the first step of which was a constitutional referendum in 2008. This is reflected in V-Dem by the spike in the

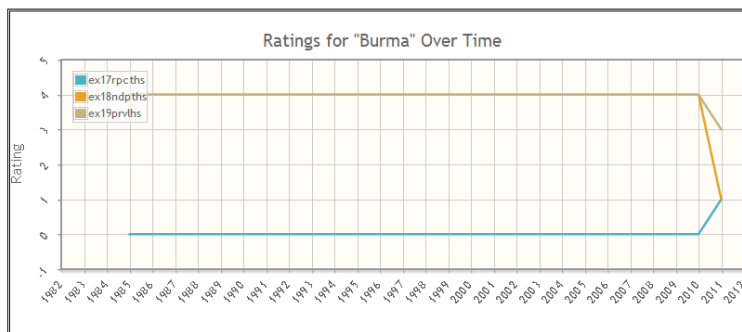


direct democracy indicator in 2008. However, the V-dem coders believe the results in support of referendum were not credible due to unfair election conditions (dd19cred).

Legislative elections were then held in 2010. Like the earlier referendum the elections were widely viewed as less than free and fair. Our coders definitely reflect this sentiment. In nearly every measure the 2010 polls were seen as less legitimate and less democratic than the elections in 1990. There were systematic, nationwide irregularities that greatly affected the one person, one vote principle (el17=0) and a significant number of opposition parties chose to boycott the election, including Aung San Su Kyi's National League for Democracy (el18=0).

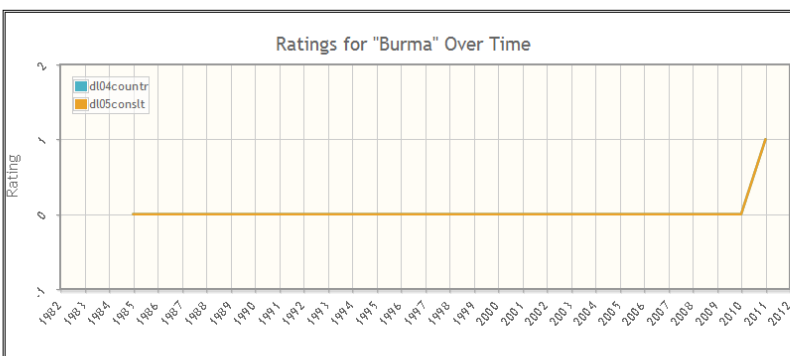


Yet, ironically, this deeply flawed process appears to have produced a tangible, albeit limited, shift towards democratic reform, and this is evident in our indicators. For example, the effective ban on opposition political parties has given way a multi-party system where most parties are allowed to operate, though party leaders still face occasional political harassment by authorities (as indicated by the increase in the score on ps10bars, barriers to parties, from 0 to 2).



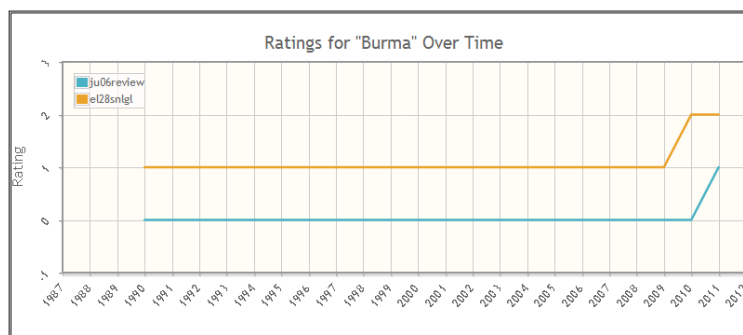
Following the 2010 elections the government is still dominated by military officials but the head of state is now viewed as moderately more respectful of the constitution than previous regimes (ex17), less independent of other actors (ex18), and somewhat less likely to get his way when there is conflict with other actors (ex19).

Whereas in the past the ruling junta ignored opposition or counterarguments to proposed changes, the introduction of a functioning, multi-party legislature has been accompanied by an acknowledgement of counterarguments, even

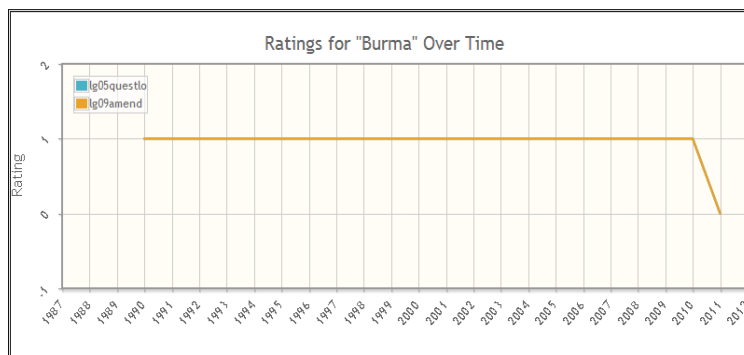


though the arguments and those making them continue to be dismissed and denigrated (dl04contr). Our coders also consider that the circle involved in decision making has widened. Whereas in the past, consultation regarding major policy changes was restricted to the leader and his inner circle (dl05=0), consultation now also includes a larger group that is loyal to the government, including the ruling party and its allies (dl05=1).

The new constitution has also introduced institutions with the potential to check on executive power. This includes, the power of constitutional review by the judiciary (ju06), in place for the first time since the 1960s. It also includes the elections for local assemblies (el28).



These are promising changes, but V-Dem also highlights the great distance Myanmar still has to travel on many dimensions of democracy. While there appears to be more deliberation and consultation than in the past there are still relatively few institutional checks on the power of ruling elite. In fact, the powers of legislature to question government officials or amend the constitution were explicitly dialed back under the new constitution, in a bid, it appears, to



limit the ability of legislators to challenge the ruling elite. (see lg09 and lg05).

## Summary

To summarize, for the first time in decades we see some movement towards democracy in Myanmar. However, this movement towards democracy has largely been procedural and institutional – e.g. allowing opposition parties to compete, holding elections – and is challenged by a lack of progress and even movements towards further authoritarianism in other respects – e.g. civil liberties and the power of the legislature. As V-Dem illustrates, progress has been much slower or non-existent on other dimensions.

By collecting expert opinions on many different kinds of indicators, V-Dem is able to help provide policy-makers with a more nuanced view about democratic developments beyond blanket statements of “better” or “worse.” The information collected and systematized by V-Dem can provide an easily accessible and understandable guide to help target limited resources to issue areas with the opportunity for maximum impact. For example, a glance at the graphs above would suggest that interventions to increase legislative capacities or conduct voter registration and education might prove difficult with little chance of impact. However, there may be opportunities for working with judges (due to the newly acquired power of judicial review), local assemblies, and opposition political parties that are worth further exploration. The specificity of V-Dem indicators can also assist program implementers systematically track results for monitoring and impact evaluations of targeted programming.