

Comparative Politics

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Research Paper

Three non-transition cases: Myanmar, Cuba, and Laos

Introduction

Most scholars of comparative politics only delve into transitions to democracy case studies. For instance, *The End of the Communist Power Monopoly* (Waller 1993) analyzes the former communist-ruled eastern European states' unlikeliness of reproducing their previous government type (Waller 1993, p2). Another example is *Hungary's negotiated revolution. Economic reform, social change, and political succession* (Tokes 1996), which explores Hungary's democratization upturn. However, not many academics discuss the remaining authoritarian regimes; when they do, they consider them vestiges of a dead group. This is the case of Richard Sakwa's work *Postcommunism* (1999) and Archie Brown's *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (2009). Thus, it is crucial to have case studies about non-transition regimes since authoritarian nations such as China and North Korea have gained significance in the global arena.

In this research paper, I assess three non-transition cases: Cuba, Laos, and Myanmar. No scholarly work has compared these instances. Hence, I believe it is relevant to carry out a study that includes authoritarian regimes to comprehend why despite the increasing spread of democracy worldwide, they are still undemocratic nations. As a starting point, I introduce the democratization checklists in *Democratization and Research Methods* (Coppedge 2012). Next, I compare the non-transition cases of Cuba, Laos, and Myanmar, specifically their similarities and differences. In the process, I analyze whether Coppedge's democratization checklists fail to direct the three countries into a transition to democracy.

Case studies, democracy, democratization, and authoritarian regime concepts.

Before I proceed to my research paper, I will introduce some concepts and theories connected to my work:

Case study	It is an approach to comparative politics that generates thick knowledge (Coppedge 2012, p62); it encompasses many characteristics of what we observe (Coppedge 2012, p14). A case study's thick knowledge might not be genuine, and it integrates loosely into larger theories. It also produces facts, and those studying democratization connect social, economic, cultural, institutional, and transnational causes into a logical, case-specific narrative. Finally, a case study cannot be general since the theories it yields are restricted in time and places (Coppedge 2012, p62).
Democracy	Is one of the most contested concepts. Democracy is a valued label, yet there "are different reasonable and legitimate, yet incompatible, criteria, for judging whether the label is deserved" (Coppedge 2012, p11). Definitions of democracy can be inserted in various models that overlap: "socioeconomic, people participatory, representative, liberal, and deliberate democracy" (Coppedge 2012, p12). Concepts used by comparativists to define democracy can be thick or thin ¹ . The explanation is that each democratic country is unique. Therefore, it is unlikely that a concept of democracy can reflect the singularities of each democratic nation (Coppedge 2012, p14).
Polyarchy	Has been used as a reference by scholars who do not want to come up with their own democracy definition. "Polyarchy has eight components, or institutional requirements: almost all adults citizens have the right to vote; almost all adult citizens are eligible for public office; political leaders have the right to compete for votes; elections are free and fair; all citizens are free to form and join political parties and other organizations; all citizens are free to express themselves on all political issues; diverse sources of information about politics exist and are protected by law; and government policies depend on votes and other expressions of preference" (Coppedge 2012, p21).
Democratization	Democratization is the process in which countries transition to democracies or not, become less or more democratic; put simply, they remain as democracies, or break down (Coppedge 2012, p7). Furthermore, scholars divide democratization into different possible stages. A breakdown can be one of those stages if there is a reversal in the democratization process. "A crisis of a democratic regime is a stage before breakdown, and reequilibration is an alternative to breakdown" (Coppedge 2012, p78). Several authors have also talked about the consolidation of democratic regimes, which must be perceived as a more ambitious step than survival. Regimes experience a legitimization process and may accomplish a democratic strengthening or quality improvement of democracy. These attainments favor the regime's survival (Coppedge 2012, p78).
Authoritarian regime	This type of political system "does not have free competition between leaders to validate at regular intervals by nonviolent means their claim to rule. Besides, authoritarian regimes have limited, not responsible political pluralism. This system does not possess an elaborate and guiding ideology but does have distinctive mentalities. Their political mobilization is not extensive nor intensive, except at some points in their development. Lastly, in an authoritarian regime, the power is exercised by a leader or occasionally a small group. The power

¹ **Note:** "Thin concepts focus attention on only one or a few characteristics" (Coppedge 2012, p14).

	is formally ill-defined limits but actually quite predictable ones” (Coppedge 2012, p18).
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I also include a table with the conditions thoughts to promote democracy:

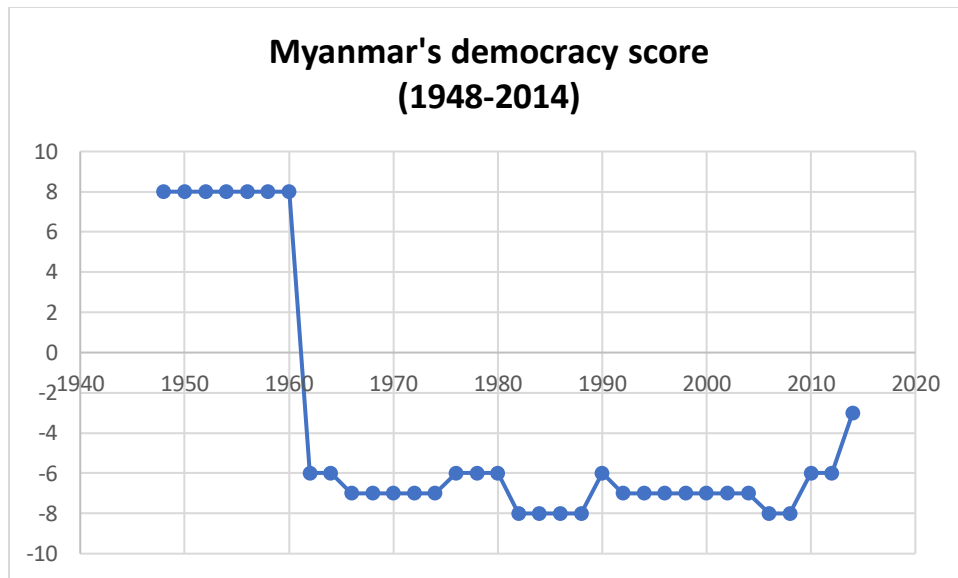
DEMOCRACY CHECKLIST	
Religion (Protestantism and currently Catholicism and Hinduism)	“Protestantism, it is alleged, encourages individualism and resistance to state control...Protestantism also gave rise to capitalism, which then favored democratization by empowering a bourgeoisie to the point that was able to check state authority. More recently, both Protestant and Catholic forms of Christianity, and perhaps Hinduism as well, favor democracy” (Coppedge 2012, p81).
Elite role	“Elite could bring democracy into being as long as they were tolerant, moderate, ready to compromise, pacific, successful at finding solutions to pressing problems, and above all, convinced that democracy is a better form of government than any other” (Coppedge 2012, p82).
Mass culture	“A democratic regime is consolidated where a strong majority of public opinion holds the belief that that democratic procedures and institutions are the more appropriate way to govern collective life in a society such as theirs and when the support for antisystem alternatives is quite small or more or less isolated from the pro-democratic forces” (Coppedge 2012, p82).
Capitalism	“Capitalism itself is a precondition for democracy because...free markets and free societies are inseparable components of freedom” (Coppedge 2012, p86).
Wealth	There is an “association between democracy and wealth (measured by per capita energy consumption, gross domestic product, or gross national product)” (Coppedge 2012, 83).
Economic crisis	“Transitions are more likely when authoritarian regimes experience the same kind of delegitimizing economic crisis” (Coppedge 2012, p85).
Secessionists forces	“Democracy is less likely to survive where there are secessionist forces that challenge the boundaries of the state or where insurgents or large numbers of less violent citizens refuse to recognize the regime’s claim to a monopoly of the legitimate use of force” (Coppedge 2012, p87).
Civilian control of the military	“Democracy is thought to be at risk where the... civilian government does not command the obedience of the armed forces” (Coppedge 2012, p87).
Division of power	“Division of power into separate bodies that are self-governed for certain issues or within subnational territories” (Coppedge 2012, p89).
International pressure	“Some national government themselves have a policy of promoting democracy abroad” (Coppedge 2012, p91).
International aid to pro-democracy movements	External governments with a pro-democracy foreign policy aid “parties and pro-democracy organizations, overseeing elections, mustering diplomatic pressure, and imposing economic sanctions” (Coppedge 2012, p91).
British colonial past	The hypothesis that former British colonies are prone to be democratic comes from the success of democracy in nations such as “India, United States, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland,

Myanmar, Cuba, and Laos, three non-transition cases

Historical background.

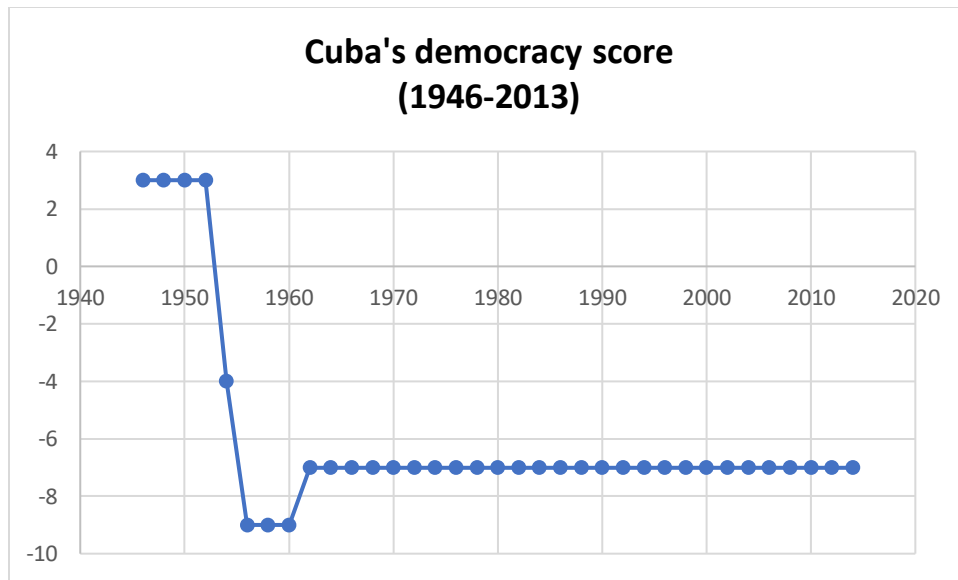
If democracy has spread to most countries worldwide and, on average, has been successful, why have Myanmar, Laos, and Cuba not transitioned? What actors play a significant role in these states preventing a pro-democracy transformation? Do some actors have more protagonism than others? Are conditions favoring democracy nonexistent in these countries? These are some of the questions I will answer shortly. But first, I briefly present a background history of the authoritarianism rise in Myanmar, Cuba, and Laos.

The Republic of the Union of Myanmar, also known as Burma, was a British colony in the XIX century. However, in 1948, Burma became independent with a democratic government until 1962. Then, the military launched a coup that put the country under a Soviet communist ideology. Yet, in 1990, the military held free elections. The National League for Democracy (NLD) and some allied parties won most of the seats. Nevertheless, the military did not cede power by incarcerating the NLD's leader Aung San Suu Kyi (Stokke et al. 2018, p2). Burma, held another free election in 2015, where the NLD defeated the army political party (USDP). As a result, Htin Kyaw became the first non-military president since 1962, whereas Aung San Suu Kyi occupied the State Counsellor position (Stokke et al. 2018, p4). Unfortunately, this democratic period did not last long. In 2021, the armed forces launched a coup after the USDP's defeat in parliamentary elections and the victory of the NLD (Orsitto and Amarasinghe 2021, p106).



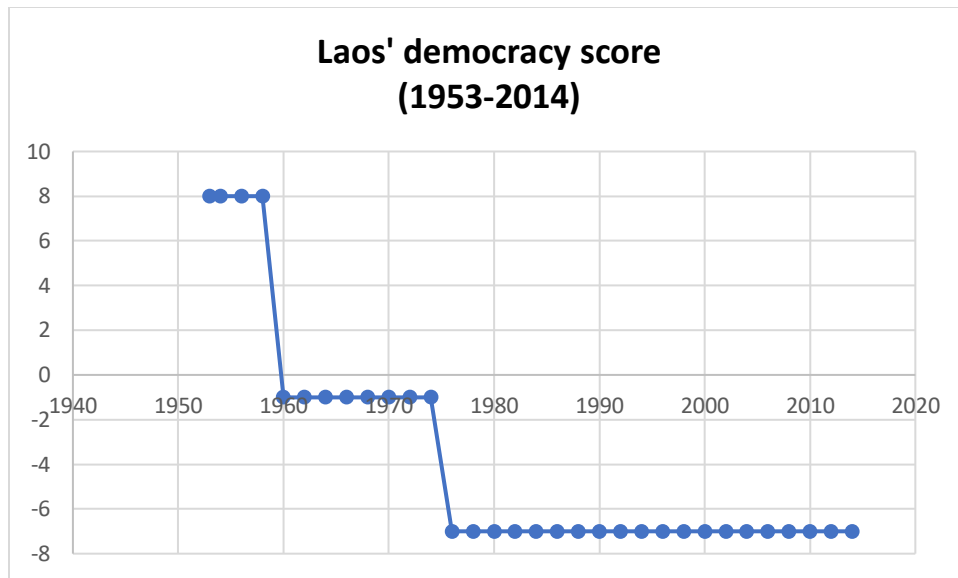
Note: (Source for the graphic: Polity IV Project). The chart shows the democratization evolution of Myanmar. The period of 1948-1962, with a score of 8, is linked to Burma's independence and the democratic government of U. Nu. In 1962, there was an abysmal democratic downturn that positioned Burma on the -6-level due to a military coup that established a communist regime. Then in 1974, there was a slight upturn, from -7 to -6, when the power was transferred from the armed forces to a People's Assembly headed by Ne Win. Next, in the 90s, there was another slight improvement due to the free elections. The final democratic upturn displayed by Polit IV was in 2014, a year before the NLD won the free elections. This process improved Burma's democratic score elevating it to -3.

Fidel Castro's guerrilla war ended Fulgencio Batista's military dictatorship. The Cuban people hoped the new leadership would restart an interrupted democratic period. However, Fidel dissolved the army, replaced and executed many of its officers with loyal revolutionaries, and closed all journals that did not support him (Cuzan 2022, p98). After the Bay of Pigs invasion, Castro declared himself a Marxist-Leninist becoming Cuba's dictator. In the early 2000s, Raul Castro took the presidency after his brother Fidel got ill (Cuzan 2022, p99). In 2019, Miguel Diaz-Canel replaced Raul Castro as the head of state. Currently, the new president maintains the same authoritarian-communist system without any sign of changes.



Note: (Source for the graphic: Polity IV Project). *The chart shows the democratization evolution of Cuba. First, 1946 to 1952 was characterized by two democratic presidential terms, which is why the democracy level is 3. Then in 1952, the military, led by Fulgencio Batista, launched a coup eliminating all constitutional rights, prompting a democratic downturn. Next, the straight line on score -9 denotes Batista military dictatorship (1952-1959). Subsequently, there was a short period of democratic transition upturn until 1962, when IRO turned into the United Party of the Cuban Socialist Revolution (PURSC), which eventually changed to the Cuban Communist Party.*

After a period of French colonization, in 1953, Laos obtained its independence. Later, the Vietnam war incentivized the conflict between royalist Laotian and communist Pathet Lao, who backed up North Vietnam. After the fall of Saigon in 1975, the Pathet Lao took over and created Laos' People's Democratic Republic. The new state adopted the Marxism philosophy, and by 1990, this ideology gave way to a one-party authoritarian system. Yet the state embraced some capitalist characteristics, opening to foreign capital investments and a market economy (Stuart-Fox 1997, p2).



Note: (Source for the graphic: Polity IV Project). *The chart shows the democratization evolution of Laos. The period from 1953 to 1960, with a democratic score of 8, was related to Laos' independence from French control. The 1960-1975 timeframe corresponds to the Vietnam war, which destabilized the whole southeast Asia region. Thus, a profound democratic downturn positioned Laos at a -1 level. Then, in 1975, the communist seized power establishing a one-party system authoritarian regime under the LPRP's rule. Hence, Polity IV scored Laos a -7 in that period.*

Political factors

The democratic period of Myanmar (2015-2021) began debates among scholars about whether Myanmar's transition was military-imposed or elite-negotiated associated with the third wave of democracy (Stokke and Aung, p3). Most opinions lean toward the former for the military's (Tatmadaw) strength, power position, and the establishment of a hybrid (semi-authoritarian) government. This form of rule, characterized by constitutional regulations, guaranteed the Tatmadaw retained its strength and kept public affairs from popular control. These regulations reduced the essence of democracy in Myanmar, preventing the nation from fully transitioning to a democratic state (Stokke and Aung, p4).

The military-appointed National Convention drafted the Myanmar Constitution in place by the time the 2021 coup occurred, safeguarding the armed forces' dominance:

Section 20(b): the armed forces' control was not in charge of civilians.	"Gave the Defense Services the right to independently administer all affairs of the armed forces (Stokke et al. 2018, p10)."
Section 232(b) and 234(b): offered the military the supervision of three significant ministries	"The Commander-in-Chief is to nominate military personnel for Ministers and Deputy Ministers for Defense, Home Affairs and Border Affairs" (Stokke et al. 2018, p10).
Sections 74, 109(b), and 141(b): the military held the right to participate in the legislative bodies.	Authorized the presence of the military in the parliament and a representation of 25% of the legislative body (Stokke et al. 2018, p10).
Section 445: amnesty	Granted amnesty to any officials that committed crimes in the past while performing duties (Stokke et al. 2018, p10).
Sections 40 and 419: emergency situations: The armed forces used this section to justify the coup in 2021 when a news anchor alluded to the 2008 Constitution through their T.V. station to proclaim a national emergency (The New York Times 2022).	Gave the military powers in situations of emergency (Stokke et al. 2018, p10).

Furthermore, during the hybrid regime, the Tatmadaw's sway in Myanmar was present in the public administration. The army operated the General Administration Department (GAD), the nation's leading institution for public administration coordinating government ministries (Stokke et al. 2018, p14). Additionally, the military handled the economy. Senior officers created two business conglomerates: The Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Ltd in 1990 and the Myanmar Economic Corporation in 1997 (Stokke et al. 2018, p37).

To conclude, the military is the foremost influential actor who sees itself as Burma's protector but not under a real democracy. The army has become an economic elite with economic interests that reinforce their rule. Therefore, Aung San Suu Kyi could not lead Myanmar to a complete democratic transition. The Tatmadaw transferred some of its power during the hybrid regime

without undermining its monopoly over force and political authority (Orsitto & Amarasinghe 2021, p111).

In Laos, the Communist Party is linked to the country's non-transition. First, the party-government division line is unclear. The LPRP oversees ministerial appointments, controls the bureaucracy at the ministry and provincial levels, permits mass organizations, manages the trade union movement, and decides policies, making the government the party's executive arm. Second, every initiative is decided by the LPRP, and decisions are made based on maintaining the power ground of the party chiefs and the party's political power (Stuart-Fox 2005, p12-14). Third, the party controls the army as most of its officers are party affiliated. This bond between party and military prompts the absence of a civilian government hegemony over Laos' armed forces. Finally, the party's extension reaches the Security Ministry and the police, giving the LPRP a monopoly over repression forces; thus, Laos continues as a one-party country (Stuart-Fox 2005, p15).

Loyalty and competence are insufficient to be part of the LPRP. Applicants must be associated through birth or marriage with the old revolutionary elite (Creak & Sayalath 2017, p184). For instance, in 2016, The Lao People's Revolutionary Party's tenth congress elected the "princelings, the children, nephews/nieces, and grandchildren of former revolutionary leaders" (Creak & Sayalath 2017, p184). Subsequently, during the eleventh LPRP's congress, new delegates were elected to the Politburo, including members of the Siphadone family and the Vienthong clan. These elections disclosed that the powerful Laotian political families still define the fate of the state by preventing the rise of soft liners that can jeopardize the status quo (East Asia Forum 2021).

Similarly, the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) presides over Cuba. However, in this case, the Castro brothers have ruled the party since its creation as First Secretaries (Backer 2016, p5). The PCC's leader selects Politburo's membership, which holds the supreme power when neither the

central committee nor PCC's committees are assembled (Backer 2016, p6). Through this mechanism, the Castros, in their role as the party's First Secretaries, could use personal authority to rule the country (Backer 2016, p7).

The PCC commands the military and exercises control over all the mass organizations, constraining civil society organizations. Thus, they cannot become autonomous of the PCC's supervision authority (Backer 2016, p7). In Cuba, the state-party borderline is not well-delimited. The PCC's leadership commands crucial state institutions. For instance, the party's First Secretary heads the State Counsel and Ministries. The Second Secretariat is the State Counsel's and Ministries' Vice President (Backer 2016, p8). As in Burma, The Cuban Communist Party oversees the Ministry of Interior and the police, which represses any opposition.

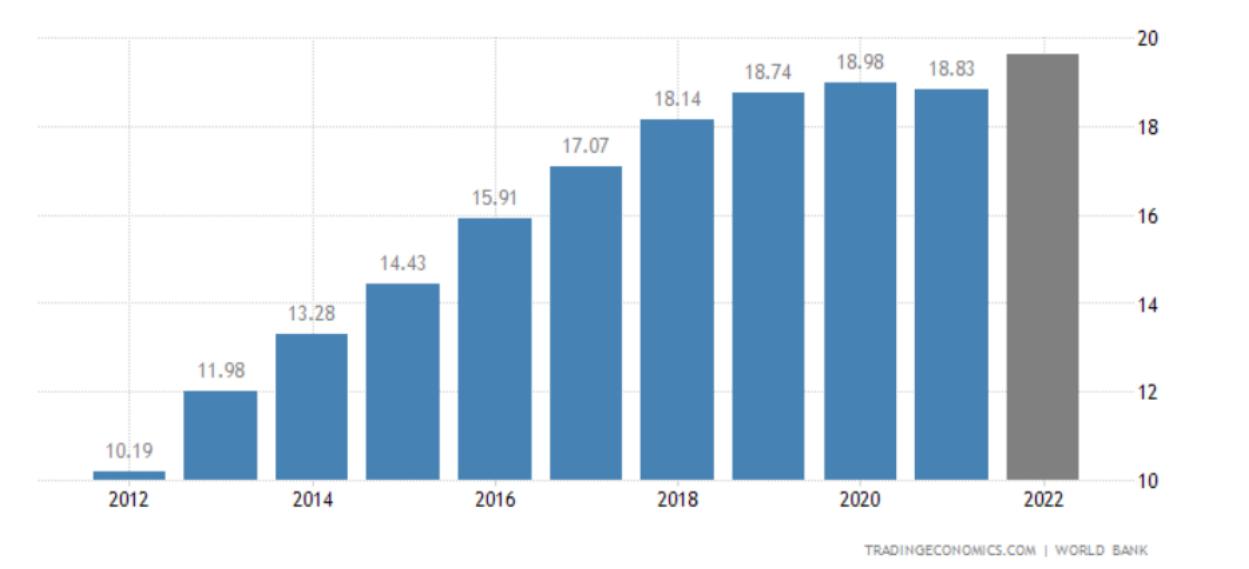
Repression in Cuba affects the presence of pro-democracy actors by intimidating individuals and organizations from claiming change (Hawkins 2001, p451). Furthermore, the Castro brothers removed old rivals, used overhauls through changes in the cabinet and the Communist Party hierarchy, and ensured that younger generations in power positions were loyal to them and the system (Backer 2016, p452). Through these mechanisms, Fidel and Raul guaranteed that soft liners are not born. In conclusion, the one-party system in Cuba and Laos confirms Coppedges' claim "the centralization of power is a greater threat to overall democratic stability...the centralization of power in the hands of one party is an obstacle to democratic improvement for countries at lower levels of polyarchy" (Coppedge 2022, p183).

Economic conditions for democracy in Myanmar, Laos, and Cuba.

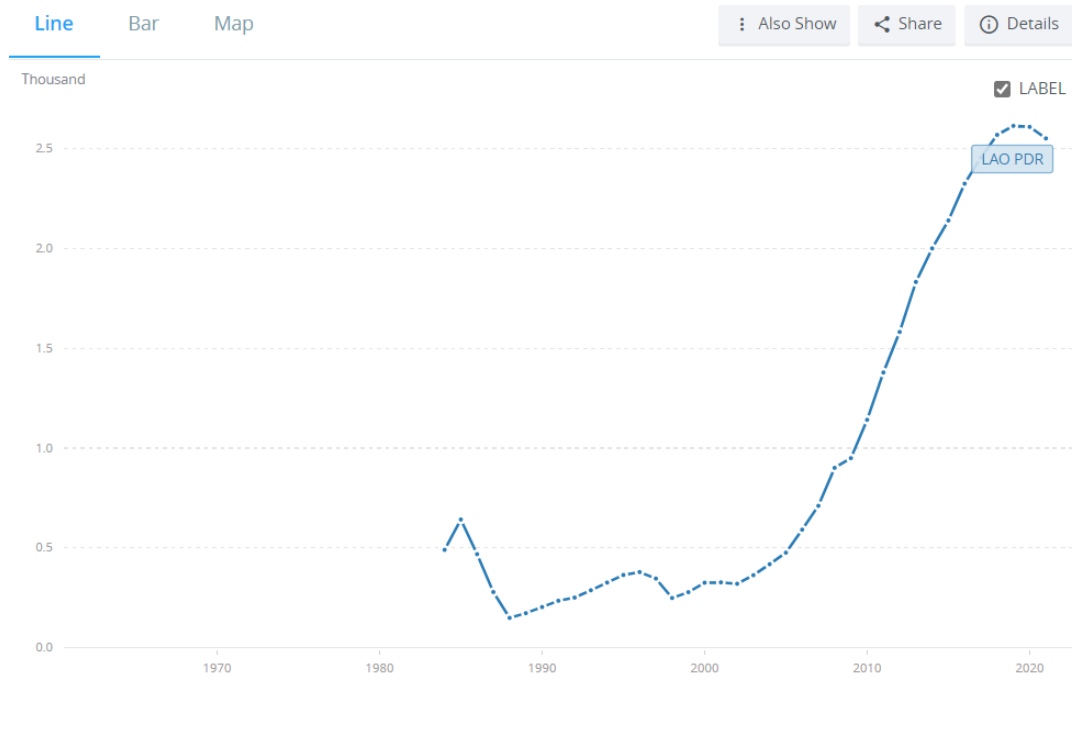
Capitalism's free market and free society are indispensable for democracy. However, Myanmar and Laos did not transition after opening their economies decades ago. According to a theory of

non-transition cases, where the economy has grown through free market reforms, the regime convinces the population to acknowledge its authority on the arguments that the living standards improve for everybody (Saxonberg 2013, p32). Yet, this theory contradicts the association between democracy and wealth estimated in GDP or GNP (Coppedge 2012, p83).

Laos and Myanmar are examples of the abovementioned phenomenon. Their economies have grown since their opening. However, their regimes have used progress to legitimize their supremacy (Creak & Sayalath 2017, p194).

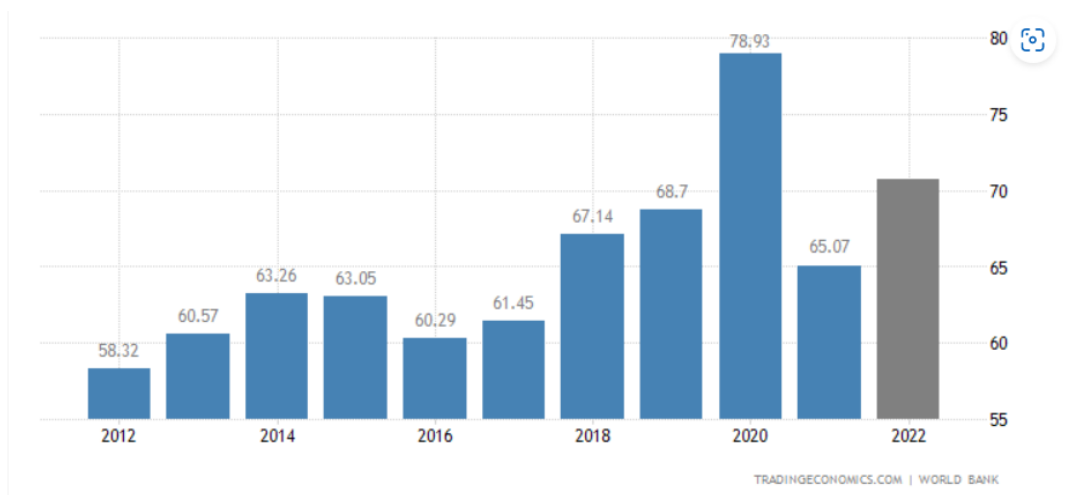


Note: (Source: Trading Economics). *The chart shows Laos' GDP increase*

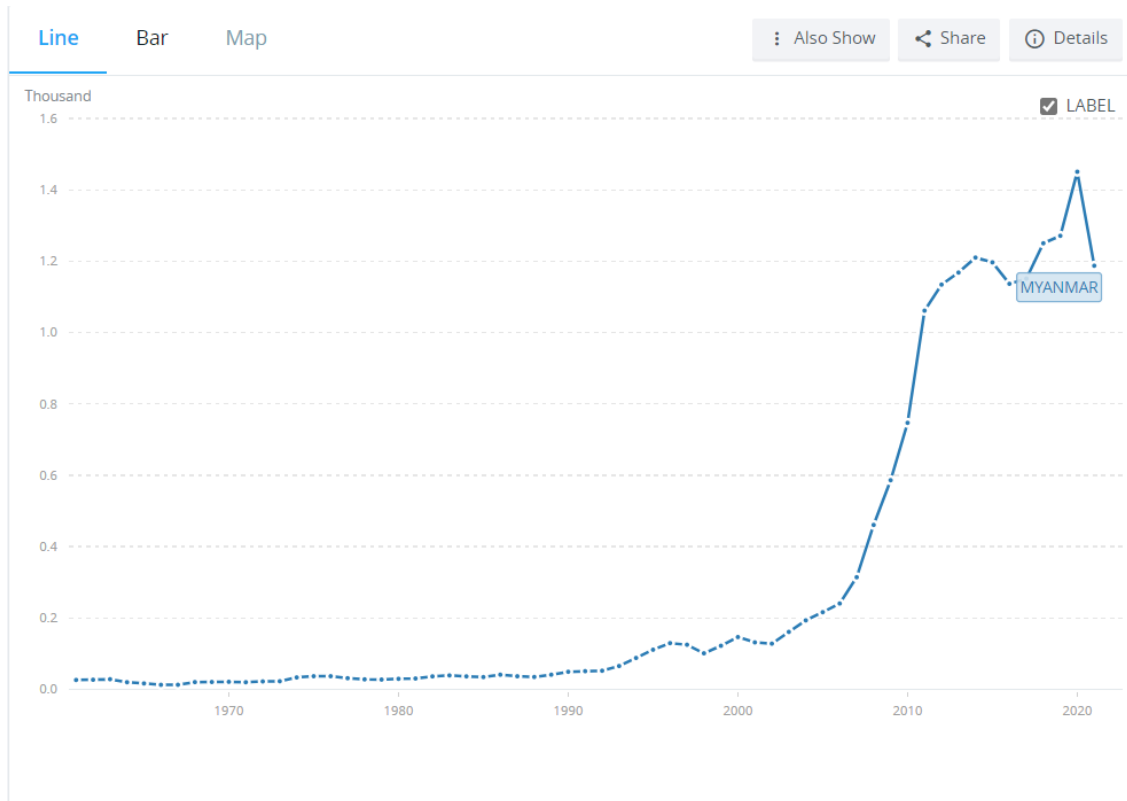


Note: (Source: TheWorldBank). The chart shows Laos' GDP per capita income growth. "Per capita income passed the US\$ 2,000 level in 2016 and quadrupled since 2005" (Rehbein 2017, p201-202).

Similarly, Myanmar, in 2012, adopted reforms to change its relations with the west, specifically the United States, which took the country on the capitalist path (Stokke et al. 2018, PXIII). As a result, Myanmar's GDP and GDP per capita income increased.



Note: (Source: Trading Economics). *The chart shows Myanmar's GDP increase.*



Note: (Source: TheWorldBank). *Myanmar's per capita income raised from \$216 in 2005 to \$1,450 in 2020.*

Yet, the reforms did not cause a complete transition to democracy, for the military possesses absolute control of the country. A further explanation could be that Burma and Laos confirm the theory that high-income levels stabilize all political regimes by decreasing the probability of upturns and downturns (Coppedge 2022, 159).

Conversely, Cuba embraced a “cautions reform strategy” (Kong, 2014, p73), which limited capitalism to a small scale (Kong, 2014, p74). These reforms occurred after Cuba lost its primary financial benefactor, the Soviet Union. The Cuban communist government resorted to foreign

investments in the hospitality industry to save the economy from a crisis.² Although the critical economic period slightly enhanced, the problem persists without a possible transition to democracy result on the horizon. Therefore, the claim that economic crisis leads to transitions does not apply to Cuba, at least for now (Coppedge 2012, p85).

Another theory that attempts to explain Cuba's non-transition despite its cautious capitalist economic transformations states: "the longer autocratic revolutionary leaders and their ruling coalition are away from holding power, the more dramatic an opening the country will experience (Pumar 2009, p58)." This statement clarifies why significant opening economic reforms occurred years after the revolutionary ruler's death in the case of Vietnam (Ho Chi Min) and China (Mao). However, the Castros' influence remains untouched, which has not prompted any policy reform (Pumar, 2009, p58).

As opposed to Laos, which persuaded their people to accept their law based on economic expansion, Cuba's hereditary rulers reinforced their authority by arguing that they were heroes who watched their children as the nation's fathers. This type of regime does not lose control quickly because it gives little faith to the people that any genuine changes can occur as long as the family is in power (Saxonberg 2013, p303).

International Actors

Academics have debated the impact of international actors in democratization throughout the years. Michael Coppedge mentions that some countries have a foreign policy of promoting democracy through diplomatic pressure and aid to democratic organizations and political parties

² **Note:** I did not include Cuba's GDP growth and GDP per capita because the data is not accurate. The regime constantly distort and manipulate this information. Also, international organizations do not have access to Cuba's economic records.

(Coppedge 2012, p91). He also establishes that democracy can spread to nearby states (Coppedge 2022, p80). Michael Colaresi and William Thompson support this statement: “the greater the proportion of a region that is democratic, the greater is the expected democracy score for a state” (Colaresi & Thompson 2003, p397). Additionally, the connection between the colonizer and the colony can spread democratization (Coppedge 2022, p80). Nevertheless, this phenomenon has not brought about a democratic transition in Myanmar, Cuba, and Laos.

Western countries attempted to overthrow Burma’s authoritarian regime through economic and political sanctions. However, these penalties did not succeed, prompting a policy change from both parties. For the west, the growing Chinese competition led them to reevaluate their policy pressure towards Myanmar. On the other hand, Myanmar’s military, economic and political reforms intended to reestablish relations with western countries to balance China’s and India’s influence in Southeast Asia (Stokke 2018, p31). After the military coup of 2021, the U.S. reinstalled economic sanctions on the Tatmadaw (U.S. Department of State 2021). Last but not least, Myanmar’s network with its former British colonizer haven not resulted in a democratic path like the cases of Australia, India, the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean islands.

Like Burma, the United States pressures Cuba to change its political regime through the embargo that exacerbates Cuba’s economic crisis. On the other hand, Latin American nations condemn internationally all human rights violations perpetrated by the communist regime and use diplomatic efforts to promote change within the island. Finally, western countries exclude Cuba from important hemisphere activities (Hawkins 2001, p448). Yet, the regime remains unaltered essentially because the Castros convinced the population that surrendering to international pressure amounts to giving up on self-determination. Therefore, to disagree with them is to oppose Cuba’s sovereignty (Dominguez 1996, p298).

Moreover, the communist regime accuses the U.S. embargo of its economic difficulties and gathers the Cuban people behind to face a common enemy (Hawkins 2001, p448). In conclusion, neither international coercion nor Cuba's geographic location among democratic nations has democratized the island. Instead, the leadership sway over the people has played a more significant role.

If the democratization theory states that the more democratic states in an area, the greater the chance for a nation in the same region to be more democratic, this trend can occur the opposite way. For instance, Laos' neighbors China and Vietnam, are authoritarian countries sharing ideological values and competing for influence on Laos' regime by supporting the LPRP's monopoly on political power. However, for historical reasons, Vietnam has an advantage over China. The communist parties in Vietnam and Laos shared a common origin in the thirty-year struggle when both militaries developed a close bond (Stuart-Fox 2005, p44).

Repression, internet, and civic mobilization

In authoritarian regimes, an unexpected crisis can trigger public protests. However, those involving contentious mobilization rarely accomplish their aims, including democratization, except when it reaches a particular participation level (Freedom House, p7). One of the factors that impact whether a mobilization grows or not is state repression. All autocratic regimes use this tool. Yet, repression timing matters (Freedom House, p21). "Preemptive or severe repression early on is often effective at preventing a movement from gaining momentum, while repression after a movement has grown often leads to further expressions of popular discontent" (Freedom House, p5).

In Cuba, protesters' leaders were arrested while organizing activities during the July eleventh events. Nevertheless, the popular mobilization scaled up instinctively, lasting two days without

leadership. There are situations where the mobilization's trigger is a "particular state decision or policy change, the state might anticipate resistance but not know how strong it might be" (Freedom House, p21). For instance, Myanmar did not predict the widespread mobilization magnitude after the 2021 coup. The armed forces anticipated protests but not their strength. According to the New York Times, the military leadership did not directly act during the first protests. Then, disobedience and strikes spread (The New York Times 2022). On the other hand, Laos has not seen any significant outcry.

Another factor that influences mobilization growth nowadays is the internet and social media. Unluckily, authoritarian regimes' control over information has challenged civil resistance. For example, in Cuba and Myanmar in 2021, the governments resorted to shutting down the internet to halt the protests (Freedom House, p19).

Religious factors

Religion, specifically Protestantism and Catholicism, favors the condition of democracy. The former is associated with individualism and capitalism. On the other hand, more recently, Catholicism is believed to encourage democracy (Coppedge 2012, p81). Additionally, some scholars have concluded that Buddhism is compatible with democratic values. For example, Buddhist monks emphasize that personal freedom and political morality in Buddhism are consistent with and relevant to democracy. Independence from political tyranny and liberation of the mind are interconnected struggles for liberty (Stokke 2018, 30). For this reason, Laos' Buddhist practice is constrained by the LPRP's control of the clergy and temples. On the other hand, Christians are also victims of detentions for practicing in Laos (Freedom House 2020).

Buddhism in Burma plays a nationalist role in the country's political arena against Muslim minorities. However, this nationalism became a merging point between Buddhism and the armed forces. Therefore, Buddhism in Myanmar needs to be understood as a "mobilization structure" that is exploited by various political groups and agendas (Stokke 2018, p31).

Regarding Cuba, before 1959, most of the population was catholic. However, the Castros expropriated and expelled all the catholic priests and nuns for their democratic approach. Afterward, Marx and Lenin became the new gods, whereas religious practices were banned. In the 1990s, the Castros reestablished relations with the Vatican, and Catholic churches reopened. Yet, they lack autonomy and political influence (The Atlantic 2015).

Conclusions

Myanmar's military control of the country makes the existence of a civilian government with the faculty of managing the armed forces impossible. Regarding Cuba and Laos, the communist party administers the military, but at the same time, most of its officers and high-rank officials are members and leaders of the party. Thus, this narrow military-party linkage prevents Coppedge's assertion that "a civilian government commands the obedience of the armed forces" (Coppedge 2012, p87).

The lack of soft liners in Cuba and Laos has a common causality. In the former case, the Castros ensured that their authority and the current Cuban system remain immovable through different tools: purge of the party of adversaries, shakeups in the party's leadership and cabinet, repression, and the promise of loyalty to the system and the Castros. On the other hand, soft liners in Laos cannot succeed due to the party's elective procedure of family connections by marriage or birth to

former revolutionary leaders. Nevertheless, in Myanmar, the soft liners (the NLD) were cast out by the military in the 2021 coup.

Laos and Myanmar opened their economies to free markets, which took the countries in the capitalist way. However, they remain authoritarian regimes. In the former, the communist government received legitimation by persuading the population that the living standard improved for most people. In Myanmar, despite the economic reforms, the armed forces' complete control keeps the nation from democratizing. Finally, the Castros limit capitalism to a small scale and play the nation's father's role giving little hope to the people of any real change as long as the family is in power.

Concerning international factors, they did not trigger a democratic transition in Myanmar, Laos, and Cuba for various reasons. First, Laos' close relationship with China's CCP and Vietnam's communist government guarantees support for the LPRP's domination for ideological and strategic reasons. Second, western nations and Myanmar reestablished mutual relations to stop China's influence in Southeast Asia. However, after the 2021 coup, the United States reinstalled sanctions to harm Burma's military, so its future impact cannot be yet explained. Third, the Castros convinced the people that Cuba's economic crisis resulted from the U.S. sanctions and that surrendering to international pressure was equivalent to giving up on self-determination.

On the other hand, authoritarian states use repression and internet control as tools to prevent civic mobilization. For example, during the 2021 protests in Cuba, leaders were arrested quickly, and the internet was shut down, which stopped the protest from extending. In Myanmar, the military responded to the coup by closing access to the internet but did not act immediately against the first peaceful protests, which spread. Last but not least, Laos has not seen any recent significant demonstrations.

Finally, religion has not affected the authoritarian system in Laos, Myanmar, and Cuba. In the former, the LPRP restricts Buddhist practices to closed spaces. In Myanmar, Buddhism is a toy used for different political intentions depending on the party. In contrast, in Cuba, the Castros suppressed the Catholic church's power eliminating its political importance.

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