

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

FRAGILE DEMOCRACY IN TIMES OF THE PANDEMIC IN MYANMAR: DEMOCRACY, POLITICAL ATTITUDES, AND POLITICAL BEHAVIORS

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Abstract: This dissertation focuses on two critical changes within Myanmar society that have taken place in the recent past—the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (beginning in March 2020) and the breakdown of democracy (February 2021)—and examines their impact on individuals’ political behaviors and attitudes. Specifically, it aims to understand how the attitudes and behaviors of Myanmar people toward politics, government, and society have been impacted as a result of the pandemic and political instability via three independent essays. All three essays use data from a survey of 756 Myanmar citizens conducted online in June 2022 through a survey firm in Yangon. The first essay examines whether political trust declined after the military coup and whether the change in the level of trust explains health-protecting behaviors during the pandemic. The findings demonstrate that trust in government and compliance with health-protecting behavior was lower in the post-coup period in comparison to the pre-coup period. It is also evident that health-protecting behaviors declined more substantially among those who lost faith in the government. The second essay focuses on people’s willingness to participate in volunteer activities to help society deal with

the pandemic and examines whether this willingness has been influenced by descriptive social norms. These results suggest that the motivation to volunteer is greater under hypothetical conditions in which the participation rate of the entire country is higher compared to a scenario in which the participation rate at a national level is low. The third essay examines the level of support for democracy and whether it has been influenced by the severity of the pandemic, with the findings suggesting that respondents prefer democracy to authoritarian regimes by a substantial margin in all circumstances. However, this preference is less pronounced at times when the COVID-19 pandemic is having a more severe impact.

Overall, this dissertation contributes to the research on government, society, and democracy under unique real-world conditions in a survey conducted in a unique setting that incorporates experimental designs.

Keywords: *Political Attitudes, Political Behaviors, COVID-19, Political Change, Trust and Compliance, Descriptive Social Norms, Democracy, Myanmar*