Women, Religion, and Democracy in Myanmar

What happens when an undemocratic nationalist and a democratic women’s movement coexist in a new democracy?

**969 Nationalist Movement**
Nationalist monks’ organization, MaBaTha
- Leader, WiRaThu, former prisoner for hate speech
- “Burma for Buddhist Burman,” threatened racial and religious purity

**Women’s Movement**
- Women activists and CSO’s (Civil Society Organizations)
- Gender equality and women’s rights
- Countering ultra-nationalism and sexism

**Methods**
1. The rhetoric and to what extent each has reached the public via social media
2. How each movement has influenced Burmese formal politics
3. Indonesia as a comparator case
   A possibility that results for Burma and Indonesia might be generalized to other new democracies

**Results**
- Nationalists have significantly more social media following
- Laws for the Protection of Race & Religion” (Crouch 2016)
  - The Myanmar Buddhist Women’s Special Marriage Law
  - The Population Control Law
- Strong resistance from the women’s movement, 180 CSOs (Walton et. al, 2015)
- Indonesia: post-Suharto surge of religious nationalism
  - Polygamy & Introduction of Sharia law into legal codes

**Conclusion**
- A power struggle between women activists and nationalist monks to influence the democratic government
- Potential and space for women to enable a future with increased rights
- Decline in quality of life and personal liberty
- Further research

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