

# With Suu Kyi Barred From Assuming Presidency, Democracy Has Not Arrived in Burma

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**Aung San Suu Kyi, the pro-democracy opposition leader, at the opening of a school in a village near Yangon, Burma, October 25, 2014. (Tomas Munita / The New York Times)**

Burma just completed an election where the opposition to the junta won an overwhelming two-thirds majority victory and 75 percent of parliament seats. The national media are swirling with declarations of progress and forward movement. It's a new era in Burma. Or so the military junta there would have you believe. What no one is saying is that in reality, nothing will change.

On November 12, 2015, Rep. Ed Royce (R-California), chairperson of the powerful House Committee on Foreign Affairs, released a statement regarding the Burmese elections, in which he completely disregarded the elephant in the room: Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of

the winning opposition party, will not be named president. Instead, Royce's statement swirled around the issue, claiming the opposition now "rules":

Moving forward, I hope the [National League for Democracy's] rule will ensure equality for all people in Burma. This includes the Rohingya Muslims ... who've been stripped of their citizenship and barred from voting in this election - and other ethnic groups so that Burma can continue on the path towards democracy. Meanwhile, it is critical that remaining ballots be counted accurately, and expeditiously. If the current ruling party or military meddles in this process, or rejects the results, I don't see why we'd continue economic assistance.

The administration, which worked to re-empower Suu Kyi, agrees with Royce's statement asserting "progress" in Burma. However, even if the junta does everything listed in Royce's statement, and even counts the votes accurately, the majority's rightful nominee will still be denied presidential power because of a provision the military added to the Burmese Constitution in 2008. It bars anyone with foreign children or a foreign spouse from becoming president - meaning Suu Kyi. It just so happens that Suu Kyi's deceased husband was British, and her surviving sons therefore retain British rights. The law was put in with the sole intention of blocking Suu Kyi from assuming the presidency.

Even "The Daily Show" missed the point in a segment on Burma on November 12. While host Trevor Noah poked fun at the outrageous fact that Burma's constitution guarantees the military 25 percent of parliamentary seats no matter the outcome of the elections, there was no mention of the provision that will ultimately bar overwhelmingly beloved Suu Kyi from becoming president.

Royce does receive credit for calling the country Burma, instead of using the junta-backed term "Myanmar," a name established when the junta took control of the country in 1989.

As the National League for Democracy will take the majority of the parliamentary seats from the landslide victory, Suu Kyi has vowed that even if she is not named president, her power will be "above" what it would be if she were: "I'll be above the president ... I'll make all the decisions, it's as simple as all that."

The only problem is, she won't. This is not the first time the National League for Democracy has won the majority of seats in parliament. In 1990, with her party gaining 80 percent of parliament seats, many believed Suu Kyi would become the nation's leader. However, the military refused to hand over power, and Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest for 15

years. This time, due to the recent Obama-Clinton visits and outreach to Burma, she may not go to jail, but the junta still controls the gate to democracy - and it's still closed. Why would we believe that this time will be different?

What took place in November were not free and fair elections. You can't call an election fair when one party takes control of parliament and is denied their leader for the presidency, based on a ridiculous technicality expressly inserted to keep Suu Kyi from taking power.

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League for Democracy is refused the opportunity for its leader to be president, democracy has not arrived in Burma.

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