



Burma/Myanmar: What Everyone Needs to Know

David I. Steinberg

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In the past two decades, Burma/Myanmar has become a front-page topic in newspapers across the world. This former British colony has one of the most secretive, corrupt, and repressive regimes on the planet, yet it houses a Nobel Peace Prize winner who is and in and out of house arrest. It has an ancient civilization that is mostly unknown to Westerners, yet it was an important--and legendary--theater in World War II. A picturesque land with mountain jungles and monsoon plains, it is one of the world's largest producers of heroin. It has a restive Buddhist monk population that has captured the attention of the west when it faced off against the regime. And it recently experienced one of the worst natural disasters in modern times, one effect of which was to lay bare the manifold injustices and cruelties of the regime.

Burma/Myanmar: What Everyone Needs to Know(r) offers a concise synthesis of this forbidding yet fascinating country. David Steinberg, one of the world's eminent authorities on the region, explains the current situation in detail yet contextualizes it in a wide-ranging survey of Burmese history and culture. Authoritative and balanced, it will be standard work on Burma for the general reading public.

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Burma/Myanmar: What Everyone Needs to Know Details

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Wouter Sligter says

This book is insightful and it is clear that Steinberg is an expert on Burma. The book is structured by means of Q&A. Due to this choice of structuring and the author's (very) extensive answers full of small facts the book reads more difficult than necessary, in my opinion. Also, the book is partly outdated because it was written when the country was still very closed off and Aung Sun Suu Kyi was still under house arrest.

If you're looking for a factual representation of Burmese history with socio-political observations, this is a good book. For the more laid back reader or holiday enthusiast I suggest reading other books.

Azeem Azimuddin says

I do not necessarily agree with some of the opinions but still it as important read for anyone interested in Myanmar. These are exciting times with risks but potentially open upside. Understanding some of the historical, ethnic and social context can be an important differentiator separating success and failure.

SpaceBear says

An very comprehensive look at Burma, in terms of culture, history, politics and its present transformation. Because of the massive scope of this work, it is necessarily broad. However it is the perfect starting point for anyone who wants to better understand the nature of the Burmese regime, and knows little or nothing about the country. Great for the academic or non-academic to use as a starting point on Burma.

Chandni says

Good introduction to the political history of Burma/Myanmar. Particularly fascinating to see the role and centrality of Buddhist philosophy (or what it is interpreted to be) in Burmese polity. A big downside is constant repetition within and between chapters which takes away from narrative flow. An update with a commentary on the current political regime would be a valuable addition!

Sshelline says

I was hoping for something that showed Burma up close, but this book seems to have been written from afar, digging little deeper than a college-level essay written from materials found in the campus library. Steinberg certainly has domain expertise, but this book came across as sterile and shallow.

Ahkeno says

“The most effective way to destroy people is to deny and obliterate their own understanding of their history.”
? George Orwell

I am born and raised in a Burmese around Military government era. The history we have been taught are not the history we had. We used to pray god harder how we have been born poor. We used to donate whenever tragedy happened, especially like 2008 Nargis cyclone but we haven't prepared, warning and educated enough to prevent the natural disaster. There were lots of history I haven't known as Burmese and I am quite astonished by the facts of most resourceful country became the world's poorest country in the world. I wish most of Burmese, especially young kids should read this book of where we come from and what made us and how we built up our nation without repeating the same failure we had last century

Philippe Lazaro says

Myanmar is probably one of the more perplexing countries out there, and while traveling through Southeast Asia and meeting some refugees from the country, I became really interested in learning what was going on.

This book served as a pretty good primer. It leaned a little to the academic side, but in spite of that it wasn't too dry. Not exactly a page turner, either, but the information was rich and well presented.

Karen says

To be honest, I knew nothing about Myanmar before I read this book, I was able to get a feel for some of the problems that face the country.

The reason that I didn't rate this book higher is because I didn't like the style. The author set forth questions, and then answered them. The problem with this is that the answers were repetitive, and I found myself becoming very bored.

So, what did I learn? Myanmar is very similar to North Korea (in my estimation). The military rules the nation, and will not allow any other political entities. Every aspect of the country is ruled by the military, and it does not have any checks or balances by the judiciary or legislature. Buddhism is the main religion, yet the military has tight control over it. The people are poor and social reform is very low on the government's list. Myanmar is terrified of foreign intervention and criticism, and yet most worrisome is that they are friendly with China.

Lucy Cruickshanks says

The best introductory book I've found on Burma/Myanmar. Clearly and concisely written and structured in a Q&A style, it's great for flicking through and finding information about specific issues in an extremely quick and accessible way. Critically, it also provides balanced opinions, presenting information as much less black

and white than many commentaries. Instead it acknowledges the complications in society that drive and prevent progress, without passing judgement explicitly.

If you're looking for in-depth analysis, this book won't satisfy, but if you want to know the basics (historical, religious, social, cultural and political and why they matter internally, regionally and globally today, it is an excellent place to start.

The suggested reading at the back of the book is a goldmine, too, for anyone looking to investigate deeper. Would highly recommend.

Jhawn says

With all the changes that have just recently taken place in Maynmar, it is hard not to feel like something is missing from this book. That said, it does provide a good background. The book takes the format of questions and answers, a format I normally don't like. But unlike sometimes where the answers skirt around the questions, this book doesn't. The questions are provided by the author who then proceeds to answer them. Anyone who is interested with Mayanmar/Burma would do well to read this book.

Aaron says

Good for the info, but the construction is all over the place.

Ekta says

A good first read about the socio-political and cultural world of Burma/Myanmar (political reasons for dual names). The book does not have any reference as the views expressed are authors interpretation of the situation. So one cannot use it to make any claims but it is a concise read about the people, foreign policy and issues within the country. The writing is in a question and answer format.
It helped build an understanding of the country that one can use to read further.

Tom DiChristopher says

The presentation is no nonsense, very matter of fact, but Steinberg provides a fantastic framework for considering Burma/Myanmar. Particularly strong: tracking the political path towards the rise of the junta, contextualizing the regime's paranoia, analyzing how confrontational policy may only make matters worse and acknowledging the dangers of having a four-word policy towards Burma/Myanmar: Aung San Suu Kyi.

Patrick says

A very good (and very current) overview of the current political situation in Myanmar. Covers the past context, with its largest section looking firmly at events since the 1988 "coup". Balanced in its opinions and discusses why the current "sanction and embargo the crap out of them" approach isn't working (and hasn't ever worked).

The book is a quick read for a dry topic, and is organized in chapters chronologically, with each chapter divided into sections addressing different questions ("How does Burmese history relate to contemporary events?" and "What is the status of the cease-fires with minority insurrections in Myanmar?") The format leads to some repetition, as the answers to some questions necessarily overlap. Steinberg states early on that he doesn't intend for people to read it straight through (although I did), but to treat it as a reference to answer specific questions.

Great reading for anyone who wants to know more about the situation in Myanmar, and who wants a more balanced opinion than the standard mantra "Generals = Bad; Aung San Suu Kyi = Good!" or the even more misleading "Generals = Good! Aung San Suu Kyi = Chaos!" view that the current government espouses.

Jaymee says

A good primer, very easy to follow. But the forced optimism is off-putting; you can feel the author himself doesn't quite believe his positive predictions for the country's future. I felt that he could have just stayed neutral instead of putting up false optimism for his readers.
