



# SOUTHEAST ASIA

The opening in Myanmar has created a momentous but uncertain opportunity to move the country to democracy, while elsewhere in Southeast Asia, including Cambodia, authoritarian rule remains firmly entrenched. Freedom House leverages the space available for citizens to assert their rights and supports their efforts to gain a greater say in how they are governed.

## Myanmar

Democracy activists in Myanmar had grown used to dealing with the government only as an adversary and responding to repression with protest. With Freedom House's assistance, they learned to make progress by engaging with the government. Freedom House advised local groups in a year-long discussion with the government on a draft Association Registration Law. The original draft mandated registration for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and stipulated harsh punishment for unregistered groups. Democracy activists persuaded the government to make NGO registration voluntary and remove the punitive measures. The law passed in 2014 is among the most progressive of its kind in Southeast Asia.

The discussions on the draft Association Registration Law set a precedent for constructive and successful engagement with the government. Freedom House continues to support efforts by democracy activists to remove legal restrictions on the basic freedoms of Myanmar's citizens.

## Cambodia

The authoritarian government of Prime Minister Hun Sen, who has held power for over 30 years, dominates broadcast media and has drafted a law to criminalize online criticism and step up surveillance. The draft law would greatly restrict a vibrant online space, where more than  $\frac{3}{4}$  of internet users access news they can't get through traditional media. Local activists, with Freedom House's support, have led public discussions on the draft law's restrictions and produced an alternative bill to protect internet freedom. They are collecting crowd-sourced input on their bill—with over 2,400 comments received to date—and plan to present it to the government for consideration.

