The Sri Lankan Constitutional Transition: From Populist Authoritarianism to Constitutional Democracy?
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ABSTRACT
The Sri Lankan presidential election on 8th January produced an unexpected and dramatic change of government. A populist authoritarian regime was rejected in favour of a common opposition that promised deep constitutional reforms in respect of substantial reductions in the scope, nature, and form of executive power. In this presentation I will look retrospectively at how the reform movement gathered pace, discuss the new government’s ‘100-day reform programme’ and its main substantive proposals (abolition or major reform of the executive presidential system), what is missing in this process (especially the question of accommodating minority aspirations) and why, and speculate about the constitutional challenges that remain. I will also attempt to place these rapidly evolving events in some kind of conceptual framework (drawing upon Bell’s framework in Public Law, 2014), so as to better understand the nature of the change, as well as to better focus scholarly and policy interventions in support of it.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER


He is currently working on a monograph on the Sri Lankan constitution for the Hart Constitutional Systems of the World Series, a co-edited collection (with Sujit Choudhry and George Anderson) on territorial cleavages in constitutional transitions (Oxford UP), and a collection of essays on Sri Lanka’s on-going constitutional reform programme. In addition to Sri Lanka, he has worked on aspects of constitutional and legal reform in a number of countries including Iraq, the Maldives, Nepal, Indonesia, Thailand, Nagorny-Karabakh, Ethiopia (Ogaden), Libya and Egypt. His broader research interests lie in comparative constitutional law, applied constitutional theory, and Commonwealth constitutional history.

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