P04 / Navigating post-conflict Myanmar: Institutions and Policies

Topic : POLICY, POLITICS AND POLITICAL REGIME

Chair : Kai Ostwald (University of British Columbia)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

This panel assesses potential post-conflict scenarios in Myanmar, a nation embroiled in a prolonged civil war following the 2021 military coup. As Myanmar's political, social, and economic landscapes remain deeply fractured, a forward-looking analysis is essential to support post-conflict governance planning. This panel is grounded in an interdisciplinary project involving the UBC Myanmar Initiative and the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, which collectively examine Myanmar's potential pathways post-conflict across critical policy and institutional domains. The panel will specifically address how Myanmar can transition from military rule to a more stable and inclusive state by focusing on areas pivotal to public policy and institutional transformation.

The primary research question driving this panel is: What institutional, constitutional, and economic frameworks are viable in a post-conflict Myanmar to ensure stability and inclusiveness? Within this question, the panel explores hypotheses regarding the effects of institutional and constitutional reforms, the role of federalism, shifts in civil-military relations, and the stabilization of Myanmar's economy. Each hypothesis addresses scenarios where anti-junta forces or the military consolidate power, achieve negotiated settlements, or entrench along territorial lines, influencing the nation's path toward or away from inclusive governance and democratization. A review of recent literature highlights gaps in conflict and post-conflict governance studies, specifically around Myanmar's unique ethnic dynamics, institutional complexities, and persistent economic instability. While existing literature emphasizes ethnic divisions and civil-military tensions, fewer studies focus on sustainable governance models in the context of Myanmar's resistance-led federalist movements.

The format of this panel is onsite, fostering dynamic discussions among policy scholars, analysts, and practitioners on public policy applications in transitioning states. Each presentation in the panel will advance a scenario-based analysis grounded in empirical research, exploring various pathways for post-conflict institutional stability and development. The panel's scientific relevance lies in its interdisciplinary approach, blending political science, economics, and conflict studies, and its potential contributions to understanding how institutional and constitutional restructuring can promote stability in fragile states.

CALL FOR PAPERS

The panel will showcase papers that focus on public policy and institutional analyses relevant to post-conflict governance in Myanmar. The contributions will address themes such as constitutional reform, federalism, civil-military relations, and economic restructuring to foster a resilient post-conflict state. Papers will engage with one or more of the following topics:

* Institutions and Constitutional Design: Analyses that explore constitutional models and institutional frameworks to reduce conflict by balancing civil and military power. Papers could examine transitional governance arrangements, power-sharing, or innovative constitutional mechanisms for multi-ethnic societies in a post-conflict Myanmar.

*Federalism and Decentralization: Submissions that address federalist models that reflect Myanmar's ethnic diversity and historical resistance to centralized authority. Papers are encouraged to assess bottom-up federalism initiatives already emerging in resistance-controlled regions and discuss how these frameworks could be expanded or institutionalized.

* Civil-Military Relations: Papers examining the restructuring of Myanmar's civil-military relations to limit military influence in governance. Relevant topics include the potential for civilian oversight, demilitarization of politics, or comparative studies of similar transitions that balance military power without compromising national stability.

*Economic Stability and Reconstruction: Analyses focusing on economic frameworks for recovery, including stabilization mechanisms, the reintegration of conflict economies, or strategies for sustainable development. Papers will investigate Myanmar’s dual economy of state-controlled and resistance economies and propose policies for harmonizing these in a post-conflict scenario.

This panel aims to create a rigorous and interdisciplinary space to explore practical public policy solutions for Myanmar's path forward, supporting resilient institutions and fostering democratic governance.

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Session 1

Friday, July 4th 10:15 to 12:15 (B5)

Civil-Military Relations in Myanmar: Scenarios and Prospects for Post-Conflict Governance

Nay Yan Oo (University of British Columbia)

What will civil-military relations in post-conflict Myanmar look like? This paper examines the enduring dominance of Myanmar's military in national politics and explores possible trajectories for civil-military relations in a post-conflict context following the 2021 coup. Three potential scenarios are outlined: (a) the decline of the military, leading to genuine civilian control; (b) a power-sharing arrangement, which may involve either a regional division of authority or a jointly governed central administration; and (c) the re-militarization of politics, in which the military consolidates power and retains ultimate control. Each scenario highlights the complexity of balancing military influence with aspirations for civilian governance, emphasizing that Myanmar's political future will depend on negotiations among internal factions, external support, and the evolving dynamics of armed resistance.

Federalism in Post Conflict Myanmar

Saw thulayphaw (University of British Columbia)

Federalism in Post Conflict Myanmar

Ngwe Min Tar Yar (Alias) Saw Benjamin Thulayphaw

Abstract

Myanmar is a plural society (Hlaing, 2008), with a huge diversity of people who are descended from Austronesians, Mon-Khmer and Tibeto Burman which branched out into various races. Based on the result of 2014 census, Myanmar has a population of 51.4 million people, but the census did not have clear enumerated data on races population leaving out the crucial elements of basic rights and participation in politics (ICG, 2020). This issue was rooted in the unfulfilled promises (equal rights and autonomy for all ethnics) of Pang Long agreement after the Independence (1948). Instead, post-independence chauvinistic Burmese leaders pushed through with Burmese rule largely focusing on Burmanization by putting secularism as a priority imposing cultural and religion (Melissa Crouch, 2021). Thus, this unsettled issue on ethnics identity and rights has created long protracted tensions between the Burmese military (not necessarily the Bamar people living in the Burma Proper - central plain) and ethnic minority living in periphery of the country.

Incessantly, the repercussion of the crisis happens every now and then pushing youth to form their own resistance forces or join ethnics armed resistance groups. Unlike previous movements (i.e., coup in 1962, 1988 uprising and 2007 Saffron Revolution), the current resistance has triggered the involvement of youth, civil servants and all ethnics including majority Bamar in the central plain. This landscape is potentially leading to a new Myanmar possibly in the federal form. Federalism in Post Conflict Myanmar is now seen as a feasible solution to end a long protracted conflict in the country.

This paper proposes what potential federal arrangements might look like in a post-conflict environment. The following four scenarios are imagined carefully as followed.

If the resistance wins and the agreement is reached fully among the stakeholders, scenario (1) symmetric federalism, where the states have roughly equal rights and competences and/or scenario (2) Asymmetric federalism, where competences/ rights/resources/etc vary by state and central federal government has less influence on the state will likely happen. However, if resistance still wins and the agreement is only reached to a certain level, scenario (3) loose confederation of states, where the central/federal government is weak

and coordination is limited will likely happen. If the situation is indecisive and conflict ends, scenario (4) De Facto Fragmented system, with a range of actors each projecting control over their own territories, but with no clear central government will likely happen.

Keywords: symmetric federalism, asymmetric federalism, loose confederation, De Facto Fragmented system

Assessing Post-Conflict Economic Scenarios for Myanmar: Collapse, High instability and Slow recovery?

Ngu Wah Win (Chiang Mai University School of Public Policy)

Myanmar's post-conflict economic trajectory remains highly uncertain, with outcomes ranging from systemic collapse to fragile recovery. This paper examines three potential scenarios—economic collapse, prolonged instability, and slow recovery—by analyzing the structural challenges, economic mismanagement, and external pressures that shape Myanmar's economic landscape. The study highlights key drivers such as currency stability, trade disruptions, labor market deterioration, and the expansion of the informal economy, which have deepened the country's economic fragmentation. The collapse scenario envisions a rapid economic downturn driven by intensifying conflict, supply chain disruptions, and a shrinking formal economy, exacerbated by international sanctions and policy missteps. The prolonged instability scenario suggests stagnation, where persistent volatility, inflation, and weakened state capacity prevent meaningful recovery. In contrast, the slow recovery scenario outlines a pathway to stabilization, contingent upon political settlements, targeted economic reforms, and international cooperation. This analysis underscores the urgency of monitoring key economic indicators, including foreign exchange reserves, inflation trends, employment levels, and trade performance, to anticipate economic shifts. By identifying the conditions necessary for stabilization and recovery, this study offers a structured framework for policymakers, international organizations, and stakeholders to navigate Myanmar's uncertain economic future.

Navigating post-conflict Myanmar: A Reflection on Future Scenarios

Htet Thiha Zaw (University of British Columbia)

Four years since the military initiated a coup against the civilian government and ended a decade of partial democratization, the political and economic situation in Myanmar remains fraught with multi-faceted crises and uncertainty. As the fight continues between the military, supporters of the civilian government, ethnic organizations, and numerous decentralized forces, there needs a clear understanding of the ongoing situation, or the critical tasks at hand for civil society and international actors in response to future conflict dynamics. This paper serves as a conclusive piece to "Futures of Myanmar," a series of analyses that takes up the challenge to provide several plausible scenarios on six aspects of the country one year from the present: collective identity, institutional design, federalism, economy, civil-military relations, and international relations. It then identifies the links between scenarios to provide a holistic future outlook on the country under four conditions: (1) continued violent conflict between key actors, (2) consolidation under military rule, (3) fragile peace under a new civilian government replacing military rule, and (4) a move toward restorative justice and peace-building. The findings will closely examine recent developments and imagine upcoming trends for productive near and medium-turm policy engagement with the country.