

2026 Myanmar Update: Contours of a New Myanmar

Friday 24 July and Saturday 25 July 2026

Abstracts

Opening Address

Andrew Selth, Adjunct Professor, Griffith Asia Institute, Griffith University

Title: *From obscurity to notoriety: Fifty years of Myanmar (Burma) Studies*

Abstract

Over the past 50 years, Myanmar, and the field of Myanmar studies, have gone from obscurity to notoriety. During the Ne Win era (1962-1988) Myanmar (then known as Burma) was *terra incognita* to most foreign scholars and social commentators. After the 1988 uprising, Myanmar was thrust into the international news headlines, prompting a surge in Myanmar studies around the world. This happened again after the 2007 Saffron Revolution and again after the 2021 military coup, albeit from progressively higher baselines. Myanmar studies is now a well-established academic discipline, boasting a large and varied output by a wide range of actors, including many Burmese scholars. However, it still faces challenges. Chief among them are the constraints on research imposed by the latest military regime, the continuing dearth of reliable data and the high level of partisan commentary masquerading as analysis. These problems have given the field a mixed reputation among both Myanmar-watchers and the wider public.

Panel on "Wartime Politics"

Tian Zhang, Associate Professor, Sun Yat-sen University

Title: *Depolitisation and party politics during Myanmar's transitional decline*

Abstract

Why did Myanmar's military, after seizing power in 2021, preserve the apparatus of multiparty elections rather than abolish it? The junta dissolved the National League for Democracy, rewrote party registration rules, and staged a 2025–26 general election that handed its proxy four fifths of the elected seats and made Min Aung Hlaing president. Electoral authoritarianism scholarship reads such exercises as manipulation. This article argues instead that party politics during Myanmar's transitional decline of 2021–2026 amounts to a project of depoliticization: the military preserved the party form while blocking its functions of interest aggregation, linkage, representation, mobilization, and leadership selection, pre-empting politicization through the form. It traces this retention of form and removal of substance through Sartori's hegemonic party system and Habermas's refeudalization of the public sphere. The post-election settlement closed the loop: a president out of uniform, a security council of junta loyalists, a consultative council routing power past parliament. The case extends depoliticization theory beyond its Western sequencing of maturation followed by hollowing: in late developers, depoliticization can be constitutive, introduced before politicization matures to forestall it. The framework also offers a way past the impasse between dismissing the election as sham and mistaking it for transition.

Swe Oo Mon, Postdoctoral Fellow, Australian National University

Title: *Peer influence and voting under perceived illegitimacy: A pre-election experiment in Myanmar*

Abstract

This research examines voting behaviour in Myanmar's 2025 general election held in December 2025. Specifically, following research on social psychology underscoring the importance of peer influence in various social contexts, we hypothesize that voters' intention to vote is greater when the anticipated voter turnout is higher than when it is lower. We also argue that peer influence is greater among those who are more sceptical of the legitimacy of the election. This is because others' behaviours allow people to infer an acceptable behaviour when it comes to difficult decisions. People who perceive the election to lack legitimacy may find it difficult to decide because, on the one hand, voting in the first post-coup election may help Myanmar regain democracy, but it may also legitimize the military government. These expectations are tested by conducting an original survey of voters to be held shortly before the election in December. The survey incorporates an experiment in which the anticipated turnout is randomly varied and asks respondents to report their likelihood of voting in the hypothetical scenario.

Soe Htet, PhD candidate, University of Melbourne

Title: *Federalisation from below? Examining power dynamics, stakeholder contestation, and coalition politics in the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC)*

Abstract

The National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC), established on 8 March 2021 in response to the 2021 military coup, has become a central platform within Myanmar's Spring Revolution, uniting ethnic revolutionary organisations (EROs), political actors, and civil-society forces. Despite its ambitious Federal Democracy Charter (FDC) and consultative role, power relations within the NUCC remain fluid and contested, complicating efforts to translate its normative commitments into coherent governance. This study will investigate how contested power dynamics, struggles over legitimacy, and conflicts of representation within the NUCC constrain the implementation of the Federal Democracy Charter and hinder the development of coherent revolutionary governance in Myanmar. To address this question, the study will examine the layered mechanisms of power, legitimacy, and representation within the NUCC and its role in shaping Myanmar's revolutionary politics. Using a critical realist approach, it conducts critical discourse analyses on the FDC, NUCC statements, NUG directives, and position papers from EROs and political parties, alongside relevant reports. The analysis focuses on the NUCC as a site of inter-ethnic cooperation, constitutional design, and political coordination. The NUCC functions as a pivotal entity, yet remains in a precarious position — facilitating collaboration among diverse groups while acting as a counterweight to centralised and militarised authority. However, internal divisions, contested decision-making, and institutional constraints limit its ability to enforce policy and maintain coherent governance across territories and over constituent groups. The study highlights both the promise of inter-ethnic political cooperation and the practical challenges of implementing a federal democratic roadmap amid ongoing conflict. The findings underscore the NUCC's critical role in Myanmar's revolutionary transition while revealing the structural and political limitations that shape its impact. Understanding these dynamics provides insights into the broader challenges involved in building an inclusive, federal movement and governance in contexts of armed conflict and political fragmentation.

Debbie Stothard and Su Lai, ALTSEAN /CEVAW Partners

Title: *The Inclusive Federal Economic Policy Project: A Blueprint for Development from the Grassroots*

Abstract

Amidst the horror and destruction of the ongoing military coup that has peaked at one thousand armed clashes and attacks on civilians per month, diverse grassroots activists have been creating an economic vision for the country. The Inclusive Federal Economic Policy (IFEP) is grounded in

feminist principles, and developed at the intersection of Federalism, Local Governance and Economic Development. It ambitiously seeks to ensure that economic policies contribute to transitional justice.

“I very much like the participatory and bottom-up process of developing this project. This (project) gives people, policy makers and all actors, including UN agencies, hope about Burma, beyond Burma.” - Professor Surya Deva, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Development, at the launch of the IFEP package.

The project, which began in 2023, has resulted in a package of 437 policies across 8 sectors, drafted by diverse participants from all states and regions. The project has involved 18 partner and 13 participating organizations, in 54 field consultations with grassroots community members. Youth comprised 73% of participants, 61% were women. Persons with disabilities, LGBTQ+, and Rohingya had a leading role. IFEP features actions plans articulating priorities over the first 100 days, 1 year and 2nd year of a new democratic government.

Participants have begun advocating for their proposals. IFEP policies are being integrated at the federal level into the Karenni Interim Executive Council processes. After IFEP was launched in September 2025, the project was presented at the ASEAN Peoples Forum, and the International Civil Society Week.

We propose to share the methodology and learnings of this project, including the voices of participants in this ongoing, innovative project.

Panel on “‘The Chinese border’: conflict, crime, and underdevelopment”

Tamas Wells and Zaw Naw, University of Melbourne (with co-authors

Co-authors: Ivan Franceschini, Qiuping Pan and Tania Miletic

Title: *Stabilising China-Myanmar borderworlds?: the role of scam centres and humanitarian NGOs*

Abstract

International humanitarian actors and scholars often examine borderlands through a state centric lens where borderlands are depicted as lawless and unruly spaces that need to be ‘tamed’, drawn under the ‘good governance’ of a central state. The China-Myanmar borderlands –with a history of conflict, displacement, illicit economies, and shifting governance - have long been viewed through this state centric lens. In this paper we argue that the state centric view limits our understanding of the ways in which different actors are actively expanding and stabilising these borderlands as a hybrid space which both interacts with, and remains separate from, the state. Along with examining the role of ethnic armed organisations, who seek to bolster their control of territory, we highlight the contrasting roles of scam centre operators and humanitarian NGOs (from Myanmar and China) who have radically different values and interests, but in different ways both serve to stabilise borderland governance, economies and identities. We conclude that the dynamics of conflict, crime and humanitarian crisis in the China-Myanmar borderlands have significant implications not just for Myanmar and China, but for the wider region and must therefore be a focus for international policymakers.

Zhengxin Huang, MPhil candidate, Oxford University, UK

Title: *Governing through others: How Myanmar's military regime instrumentalises great powers' cross-border governance for regime legitimacy*

Abstract

Myanmar's incomplete nation-building and the intensification of domestic conflict after the 2021 coup have left the military regime in a long-term condition of lacking effective governing

authority in many border areas. The emergence of governance vacuums in these borderlands has made the participation of external actors in cross-border governance increasingly necessary. However, the Myanmar military regime has leveraged the cross-border governance of neighboring states and great powers to construct legitimacy and sustain political survival. In this framework, political survival constitutes the overarching logic, limited statehood serves as the structural condition, and the instrumentalization of cross-border governance is the central mechanism.

This paper takes China's comprehensive cross-border governance after Operation 1027, including ceasefire mediation and anti-scam law enforcement, as the primary case, while using India, Thailand, and Russia as comparative cases. It finds that the Myanmar military regime instrumentalizes external cross-border governance through three pathways to pursue legitimacy. The first is governance outsourcing, whereby the regime allows external actors to provide security, law-enforcement, humanitarian assistance, and crisis-management functions in areas beyond its control. The second is blame-shifting, whereby the regime attributes governance failures to external interference, cross-border crime, or the interests of neighboring states. The third is multi-directional balancing, whereby the regime employs a neutralist diplomatic posture and engages multiple external actors in order to maintain sovereign autonomy and obtain external recognition. This illustrates how the regime seeks to avoid dependence on any single external patron while maximizing political benefits from external engagement. In the process of instrumentalizing cross-border governance without making substantive political concessions, external actors become not only governance resources but also objects of blame and political manipulation.

The main contribution of this paper is to shift the focus of cross-border governance research from external intervention to regime instrumentalization. It also suggests that external actors engaging in assistance and other forms of cross-border governance in Myanmar should remain alert to the military regime's strategic use of such governance. Further research may explore alternative forms of cross-border governance that can better support post-conflict reconstruction and a more durable and inclusive peace in Myanmar.

D Moon Aung, PhD candidate, Chiang Mai University, Thailand

Title: *Fragmented authority and the accountability gap: gold mining governance in post-coup Kachin state*

Abstract

Gold mining sites in Kachin State expanded dramatically after the 2021 military coup. It is not because of resource governance collapsed, but it reorganised around the interests of the armed actors who control extraction territories. Drawing on qualitative documentary analysis of six civil-society organization's field observation documentation produced between 2022 and 2025, this paper argues that post-coup gold mining is governed through fragmented arrangements in which territorial control substitutes for formal licensing, layered payments to multiple armed actors structure access, and community consent is reconstructed through proxy authority rather than sought from affected communities directly. These arrangements are organised enough to enable extraction at scale, producing no authorities with full responsibility for its environmental and social consequences. This paper introduces the concept of fragmented resource governance under conflict to explain why extraction is more effectively organized than accountability. It argues that this imbalance reflects the incentive logic of fragmented authority, not merely weak regulation. The paper also extends access theory by showing that access to resources in conflict settings is unstable and can be reorganized when territorial control changes.

Lanung Tu Kumbun, PhD candidate, University of Hyderabad, India

Title: *Myanmar's rare earth minerals: The geopolitical competition between China and India*

Abstract

Rare-earth elements (REEs) have become increasingly important in contemporary geopolitics because of their critical role in advanced technologies, renewable energy systems, and defence industries. Although existing scholarship has focused primarily on great-power competition, particularly between the United States and China, less attention has been devoted to the role of non-state armed actors (NSAAs) in shaping access to critical mineral resources and influencing regional power dynamics. This paper examines the emergence of Myanmar's Kachin State as a new arena of strategic competition between China and India following the Kachin Independence Organisation/Army (KIO/KIA)'s capture of Myanmar's principal REE-producing region in late 2024.

The study draws on fifteen semi-structured key informant interviews conducted between January and June 2026 with government officials, political leaders, civil society representatives, religious leaders, business actors, members of non-state armed organisations, and rare-earth workers. It explores how the KIO/KIA has leveraged its control over REE-rich territories to enhance its political and economic influence while engaging competing regional powers.

The findings reveal that China and India have adopted distinct strategies to secure influence over Kachin State's rare-earth sector. China relies on direct engagement with the KIO/KIA through political, economic, and commercial channels to maintain its longstanding dominance of regional REE supply chains. India, by contrast, has pursued a broader and more indirect approach involving diplomatic outreach, business engagement, and relationship-building with Kachin community leaders, local entrepreneurs, regional authorities, and the Myanmar government.

Panel on "Resistance, local governance and proto state building"

Jesua Lynn, Research Fellow, Chiang Mai University, Thailand

Title: *Two paths to governance from below: Governance-building trajectories in post-coup Sagaing and Karenni*

Abstract

Four years after Myanmar's military coup, shifting territorial control and the emergence of new governance structures from below have significantly shaped the direction and intensity of anti-junta resistance. The junta has lost control of more than 90 towns, where alternative administrations have taken root and begun replacing government functions. Among these areas, Sagaing and Karenni have become pivotal centers of the revolution, driving some of the greatest territorial losses for the junta and demonstrating rapid, self-reinforcing development of institutionalized emerging governance. Sagaing's governance is functioned through the People's Administration Body (Pa Ah Pha) and the Sagaing Federal Unit Hluttaw, while Karenni's administration is led by the Interim Executive Council-Karenni and the Karenni State Consultative Council. Although each context differs, both represent governance assemblages shaped by diverse actors, interests, and constraints on the ground. Yet how these actors coordinate, what governance practices they adopt, and which priorities shape their institutional trajectories remain understudied. By comparing their paths of evolution, this paper examines what governance practices lead to which outcomes and how these models inform broader governance formation in Myanmar. It asks: How do two distinct governance assemblages in Sagaing and Karenni illustrate the evolution of local authority, and what lessons emerge from their formation? Drawing on data from remote interviews, document analysis, and indirect observations, the study applies an assemblage theory lens to map actors, institutions, and practices. Among the findings, key notices are areas of divergence in philosophy, as Sagaing's model is MP-dominant, content-first, and seeks structural uniformity (Pa Ah Pha), prioritizing operational reach and rapid expansion.

Karenni's model is ERO-dominant, process-first, and context-driven, resulting in non-uniform structures and a high emphasis on institutional depth and public transparency. The paper contributes to understanding Myanmar's emerging governance formations and their practical and policy implications for future federal and devolved governance models.

Tony Neil, Senior Project Collaborator, D-GESS, ETH Zurich

Title: *Reforming Kawthoolei: Governance repertoires of the Spring Revolution*

Abstract

In 2026 the Karen National Union has done things that look like the founding of a state: ratifying the Kawthoolei Charter, standing up consultative and governing councils, opening its administration beyond KNU membership through the "KNU Plus" coalition, and co-founding a national federal steering council (SCEF). These reforms are widely read as an ethnonational movement maturing into an inclusive, federal proto-state. This presentation sets them in a longer view. Drawing on extended fieldwork and a bricolage approach to rebel governance, it argues that the reforms are best understood as new institutional forms assembled from a shared post-coup repertoire — one with deeper roots than the revolution itself, in the multi-stakeholder, inclusion-oriented practices that civil-society actors developed across the 2011–2020 transition and resignified into revolutionary governance after the coup. Reading governance reform this way shows how, even as the "hardware" of institutional form changes, the rationalities underpinning who governs, and why, persist. I conclude by asking whether a union built upon ethnic federal units solves Myanmar's oldest political problem — ethnicity — or reproduces it.

Sophia Htwe, PhD candidate, University of Melbourne

Title: *Vernacular legitimacy: Community judgements of armed substance governance in post-coup Rakhine state*

Abstract

Rakhine State has undergone a major transformation in political authority since Myanmar's 2021 military coup. By February 2025, the ULA/AA consolidated control over fourteen out of its seventeen townships and Myanmar's entire border with Bangladesh, and as well as Paletwa in Chin State. However, the expansion of territorial control and administrative capacity does not automatically produce legitimacy. Non-state armed actors may govern effectively without being regarded as rightful, fair or acceptable by all communities under their authority. Civilians may comply with rules, pay taxes, attend meetings or cooperate with local authorities for many reasons because of political support, fear, dependency, pragmatic accommodation, lack of alternatives, or the hope of protection. Compliance, therefore, does not necessarily imply consent. Nor can the presence of order be equated with legitimate rule. This distinction is particularly important in Rakhine State, where the AA/ULA governs across deeply unequal and ethnically diverse communities, including Rakhine, Rohingya and other minority groups whose experiences of conflict, belonging and authority differ significantly. This paper asks how communities in Rakhine State understand, assess and contest the legitimacy of AA/ULA governance in the post-coup period. The paper does not examine legitimacy only through the AA/ULA's claims, institutions or performance. It foregrounds the perspectives of those living under its authority and examines how Rakhine, Rohingya and other minority communities evaluate AA governance through different everyday criteria, including protection, historical grievance, political aspiration, recognition, fairness, accountability, non-discrimination and belonging.

Khaing Min Thant, PhD candidate, UNSW Canberra

Title: *Navigating the nexus of Rebel Natural Resource Governance (RNRG), legitimacy and state building: Pathways for Myanmar contested political orders*

Abstract

The 2021 military coup in Myanmar, followed by an ongoing civil armed resistance to the military regime, brought profound changes in the country's political, social and environmental landscape, significantly impacting natural resource governance (NRG). Ethnic Resistance Organisations (EROs) and revolutionary forces currently govern approximately 60% of the country's territory. NRG is a key area where claims to authority, legitimacy, and proto-state formation are contested and negotiated. Rather than observing EROs' involvement in NRG as mere wartime extraction or survival strategy, this research conceptualises Rebel Natural Resource Governance (RNRG) as a political institution that underpins authority-making, civilian consent, and legitimacy in hybrid and contested orders.

This research investigates how RNRG frameworks is shaped by formal/informal institutions, interaction with customary laws, symbolic ethnic claims and external actors in territories controlled by Kachin Independence Army (KIA), Arakan Army (AA) and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). The research also explores how RNRG is perceived by local communities in terms of EROs' recognition and legitimacy.

Utilising mixed-methods methodology with stakeholder interviews, local surveys, institutional analysis and comparative case studies, this research analyses how RNRG functions as a mechanism of embedded governance and legitimacy. It directly contributes to academic debates on rebel governance, political ecology, informal state-building and offer new theoretical and empirical contributions to how EROs institutionalise authority in stateless contexts. While the focus of the research is on Myanmar, the findings have wider implications for understanding how RNRG contributes to legitimacy and state-building by informal state actors in conflict affected regions globally.

Panel on "Sustaining public services in the midst of civil war"

Nick Cheesman, Associate Professor, Australian National University/ CEVAW Associate Investigator and Ma Hnin Win Aung

Title: *National Unity Government (NUG) use of law and courts*

Abstract

How does the National Unity Government's use of law and courts compare to that of the military-controlled state in Myanmar? To address that question we begin by mapping the basic coordinates of the NUG's arrangements for the making and enforcement of law, and reviewing available data on case loads and personnel. Through case studies we then compare the two in terms of principles, procedures, personnel and practices. Across these dimensions we find many similarities. These we attribute to the NUG's position that it is adopting an interim government role in lieu of the elected National League for Democracy government; to the fact that many personnel working on NUG law and courts are formerly public servants or trained and registered lawyers, and to expediency. In all, the NUG's use of law and courts might be characterised as less revolutionary and more in continuity with the existing state structures. However, it differs in at least two major respects. First, in its expressed concern to address impunity it has set up a system of military justice in parallel with the civilian one to try members of its People's Defence Force; other people's and local defence forces operating under memoranda of understanding with it, and captured enemy troops for crimes that in contrast to the military state's tribunals aims to be accessible and hold perpetrators to account. Second, it has adopted the principle of transitional justice, and has stated that it is committed to ensuring that perpetrators of gross abuses in this period are brought to account. This is noteworthy because it departs not only from

the military state's position but from the NLD's previously held one, that conditions in Myanmar were not yet right to embark on a program of transitional justice.

Tun Aung Shwe, PhD candidate, UNSW Sydney

Title: *Communal disputes and the remaking of local governance in post-coup Myanmar*

Abstract

This paper examines how communal disputes are reshaping local governance in post-coup Myanmar. Drawing on the Empowering Myanmar's Interim Administrators (EMIA) research-to-practice project, it analyses community-level disputes in National Unity Government (NUG)-influenced and contested areas as everyday tests of authority, legitimacy and civilian protection. The study uses a qualitative multi-case design, combining embedded township case studies with broader case-series comparison. It finds that disputes over land, revenue, aid, appointments, service delivery, political allegiance and sensitive harms expose the fragmented authority of Myanmar's post-coup governance landscape. Communities navigate overlapping NUG, Ethnic Resistance Organisation (ERO), customary, religious, civil society and security actors, often without clear referral pathways or safeguards. The paper argues that legitimacy in these areas is built less through formal claims of authority than through everyday procedural behaviour: listening to both sides, explaining decisions, recording outcomes, protecting complainants, allowing review and limiting armed interference. It then traces how the findings were translated into a local dispute-resolution framework, a Training of Trainers programme and cascade training in Magway and Sagaing Regions. The paper contributes to debates on rebel governance, limited statehood and sub-state legitimacy by showing how dispute resolution can become both a public service and a building block of future federal democratic governance.

Maw Maw Tun, Lecturer in Burmese, Australian National University

Title: *The role of ethnic institutions in higher education*

Abstract

After the 2021 military coup d'état in Myanmar, the education landscape has drastically changed, and many students have lost educational access, violating their human rights. This change has led to unprecedented challenges and opportunities for reimagining learning systems, especially in the conflict-affected areas in Myanmar. Scholars have studied how the military coup affects education in Myanmar (Brown, 2024; Proserpio & Fiori, 2022; Rahmat et al., 2025; Saito, 2022; South et al., 2024). For instance, Pyinnyarye Research Collective (2025) investigates the adult education program before and after the military coup. South et al. (2024) also explore the complex and contested education system in Myanmar since the coup. Additionally, Proserpio and Fiori (2022) examine higher education policy in the post-coup era. However, these studies overlook the role of higher education in ethnic armed group areas. In other words, how ethnic institutions promote the rights to higher education for local students despite the challenges posed by the military regime is underexplored. After the coup, ethnic institutions have taken a critical role in providing higher educational access for local students, as well as in transforming an inclusive and equitable education. Using the human rights and equity frameworks, this paper aims to explore how the military coup has affected ethnic institutions and their curriculum, pedagogy, as well as technology use while developing equitable educational access for youth in these areas. The study will employ a case study method, with semi-structured interviews with eight lecturers from different ethnic institutes about their perspectives on curriculum, pedagogy, and technology use to adapt to the challenges posed by conflict situations, the advent of technology use to provide better educational access in the areas. This study will provide implications for equitable policy and practices for educators in promoting education access and developing inclusive education in conflict-affected areas.

Vanessa Johanson and Saw Ku Moo, Peace, conflict, and governance specialists

Title: *Building a decentralised health system*

Abstract

This paper examines policy and practice in Myanmar's evolving federal health system, and health governance in resistance-controlled parts of Myanmar. Drawing on research findings from 46 key informant interviews and field observations conducted in 2025 and 2026 in 10 states and substates, we underscore the challenges of implementing health services amid ongoing conflict and governance crises. Our research finds that in some locations there are mature de facto autonomous practices in place, but no federal health policy articulated locally; while in some locations there is a federal health policy but with limited implementation. Our analysis of health governance generates important insights into the opportunities and limitations of federalism while Myanmar remains mired in war, human rights and humanitarian crises, and a warped governance environment. It also highlights the tensions – as well as synergies – between the 'new' resistance actors and the 'old' resistance actors. These tensions signpost how future federalism may need to be negotiated between majority and minority stakeholders, and between those pushing for greater or lesser federalisation.

Panel on “Beyond survival: Humanitarianism, rights and justice in Myanmar's revolution”

Phyu Phyu Oo, Research Fellow, CEVAW, Griffith University

Title: *Can the non-state armed groups protect? Conflict-related sexual violence in Myanmar*

Abstract

Over the past two decades, growing literature on conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) has substantially advanced our understanding of violence perpetrated by non-state armed groups (NSAGs). Yet, much less is known about how these groups shape protection and response efforts in areas where they function as de facto authorities. At the same time, international efforts to prevent, protect, and respond to CRSV have increasingly taken state-centric approaches across global conflicts. Often, civilians in protracted armed conflicts lived under NSGA-controlled areas for several decades without state protection or experienced direct violence from states due to their identity affiliation. NSAGs, particularly those who perform state-like governance functions, often provide civilian protection in their controlled areas in exchange for various incentives, including legitimacy and civilian support. However, we know little about how women negotiate and navigate their security, including protection from CRSV, under NSGA governance structures. Following the 2021 military coup in Myanmar, the escalation of armed conflict, the expansion of territorial occupation by ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) and recently evolved resistance groups have raised important questions about CRSV protection in non-state-controlled areas. When EAOs are accepted and perceived as legitimate militarised actors by the civilians in areas they govern, what forms of security are provided for women and girls? Drawing on in-depth interviews with women CSOs at the front line and adopting a feminist security lens, this paper examines how and whether NSGAs, specifically, EAOs with established governance structures in Myanmar's conflict, can protect women and girls from CRSV and how women CSOs negotiate and navigate hierarchies and patriarchal power structures of EAOs' militarised institutions to advance CRSV protection and response in non-state-controlled areas.

Amporn Marddent, Associate Professor, Thammasat University, Thailand/ CEVAW Partner Investigator and Zoe Bell, Research Fellow, CEVAW, Australian National University

Title: *Multidirectional oppression in Post-Coup Myanmar: Accounts from Rohingya women in displacement*

Abstract

Since the 2021 Coup, there has been a renewal of violence towards the Rohingya. This time, both sides of the subsequent civil war in Rakhine state are diverting their efforts from the war to the brutalisation of the Rohingya. The Arakan Army (AA) as well as the well-known aggressor, the Military Junta, are committing mass atrocities towards the Rohingya. The AA, motivated by decades of dehumanising anti-Rohingya propaganda, are jeopardising their own resistance efforts by attacking the Rohingya. Accounts from the Rohingya in displacement describe the murder of men and the rape of women, the burning of villages, kidnapping of children for conscription or extortion, and forced exile. These accounts were shared during interviews and focus groups with Rohingya women on the Thai/Myanmar border in October 2025. These conversations were conducted as part of the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (CEVAW) displacement and trafficking project led by ANU and Thammasat University. These women shared stories of gender-based violence, of the long and arduous journey to find safety, of trafficking, of exploitation and of loss. These accounts are an important contribution to the 2026 Myanmar update as they describe a post-coup reality of exacerbated violence for the Rohingya. This targeted violence signals a continuation of violent oppression of the Rohingya regardless of the civil war victors in Rakhine state. For true revolutionary change to be achieved, it needs to include respecting the dignity, rights and humanity of the Rohingya. These accounts are being shared with permission, for those women who cannot share them directly.

Aye Aye Aung, Visiting Fellow, ANU Myanmar Research Centre

Title: *Technology-facilitated violence and resistance experienced by Myanmar women scholars in exile*

Abstract

The study examines how exiled Myanmar women academics experience technology-facilitated violence (TFV) in the aftermath of the 2021 military coup. Grounded in technofeminist scholarship, it addresses the underexplored intersection of gendered exile, academic precarity, and digitally mediated repression. The research adopts a qualitative approach drawing on in-depth semi-structured interviews with 6-10 women scholars in diverse transnational settings. Interviews will be conducted via encrypted online platforms and will explore how digital tools are weaponised for harassment, surveillance, and sexualised defamation, and the effects of these harms on participants' professional engagement, gender and scholarly identity. Data will be analysed through thematic analysis, with close attention to gendered power relations, overlapping identities, and the socio-legal precarity of exile. Ultimately, the study identifies distinct forms of TFV and analyses how these experiences erode scholarly identity and produce professional silencing among exiled women academics from Myanmar.

Panel on “International engagement”

Nicholas Coppel, Honorary Fellow, University of Melbourne

Title: *ASEAN ‘interference’ in Myanmar’s ‘internal’ affairs?*

Abstract

The paper challenges the simple narrative that ASEAN inability to resolve Myanmar’s conflict is pre-ordained by the ‘ASEAN Way’ privileging the principles of non-interference in the internal affairs of a member state and consensus decision making. This narrative is contradicted by ASEAN refusal to allow Myanmar’s putative leaders to participate in high-level ASEAN meetings, cancellation of Myanmar’s rotational chairmanship of the organisation, non-acceptance of Myanmar’s invitation to observe elections, and ongoing expression of views on what should happen to bring an end to Myanmar’s coup-induced conflict. ASEAN’s response goes beyond the performative. On no other issue has ASEAN so clearly and loudly expressed its views on internal developments in a member state.

The paper takes the conversation further asking the question ‘what next?’ Will ASEAN continue to interfere in Myanmar’s internal affairs as it has been or will it seek to interfere more robustly by sanctioning or expelling Myanmar? Or will ASEAN, faced with internal divisions and no significant progress on its Five-Point Consensus, experiment with a policy of greater engagement? The paper considers the options available to ASEAN in a post-election context as it navigates the tensions between upholding the principles enshrined in the ASEAN Charter on the one hand and institutional harmony, maintenance of ASEAN centrality and reputational risks on the other.

Phyu Phyu Thin Zaw, Lecturer, University of Hong Kong

Title: *Behind closed doors: SDG regression, grassroots resistance in Myanmar, and ASEAN’s structural paralysis*

Abstract

As the military junta’s targeted attacks collapse Myanmar’s healthcare infrastructure and force education systems underground, the country’s catastrophic regression on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) poses an existential threat to regional stability. In managing this crisis, ASEAN remains the only viable multilateral architecture in existence — no alternative platform exists. While public diplomatic stagnation suggests a hopelessly fractured body, a deeper, highly complex realpolitik unfolds behind the scenes.

Drawing on my unique experience as the sole Myanmar national and panelist invited via informal channels to the recent ASEAN side event in Cebu, this presentation shares firsthand insights from closed-door diplomatic dialogues and direct engagements with official diplomats, regional CSOs, active youth movements, and academic institutions.

This talk cuts through official rhetoric to share three critical, firsthand observations:

- **The Reality of Inside Unity:** Behind closed doors, ASEAN diplomats are far more united in their strategic anxieties than public paralysis suggests. They broadly agree that the junta has crossed an unpardonable threshold of inhumanity. However, individual willingness to help is trapped within the structural prison of ASEAN’s consensus-driven mandate and non-interference constitution.
- **The Unavoidable China Factor:** Regional diplomatic positioning on Myanmar is heavily dictated by broader geostrategic dependencies. Reflecting recent regional data — such as the ISEAS State of Southeast Asia and FPCI surveys showing a distinct regional tilt toward Beijing over Washington due to economic realities — this talk addresses how China remains the irreplaceable anchor influencing both ASEAN’s collective calculus and the junta’s survival.
- **A Roadmap Driven by the Public:** Because formal ASEAN channels cannot easily bypass their own legal constraints or isolate Beijing’s influence, top-down diplomatic

breakthroughs remain stalled. However, the Southeast Asian public and an incredibly active youth and academic movements are highly united in wanting to support Myanmar.

Ultimately, this session shares how informal, back-channel ecosystems can be leveraged to connect with parallel governance structures, localized CSOs, and underground public service networks — bypassing formal institutional inertia to directly sustain frontline health and education in Myanmar.

Alec Gray, Former manager, UNHCR, North-west Myanmar

Title: *Distributing humanitarian aid under the State Administration Council*

Abstract

Myanmar's humanitarian crisis has evolved into one of the world's clearest examples of a denied-access humanitarian emergency. Since the 2021 military coup, deliberate restrictions on humanitarian access have fundamentally altered how humanitarian assistance can be delivered.

Drawing on operational experience as UNHCR Shelter/NFI/CCCM ¹ Manager North West Myanmar in 2023, this study examines the principal factors constraining the distribution of humanitarian assistance to Myanmar's civilian population during this unique crisis.

In Myanmar's northwest alone conflict has intensified dramatically. The UN estimates that more than 1.25 million people (approximately 12% of that region's population alone) have been internally displaced. Across Myanmar overall the UN estimates that 16.2 million people (approximately 30% of the population) require humanitarian assistance.

Other resources validate that more than 8,100 civilians and pro-democracy activists have been killed by the defacto government (the SAC), its military forces (the Tatmadaw) and allies since the 2021 coup.

This conflict, compounded by recent natural disasters, has generated severe humanitarian needs, exacerbated by major gaps in assistance funding and across some of the country's most difficult terrain. These conditions have led to Myanmar's characterisation as 'The Forgotten Humanitarian Disaster,' a grim echo of Burma's characterisation during the Second World War as 'The Forgotten War.'

The author contends that the crisis should no longer be considered simply a consequence of armed conflict and natural disaster. Instead, it represents an environment in which deliberate restrictions imposed by the defacto government and military have created an operational environment that impedes humanitarian assistance. This environment has rendered traditional models of centrally coordinated aid distribution largely ineffective.

The research draws on the author's direct involvement and scrutiny of UN Cluster based aid distribution mechanisms and collation of operational data. Subsequent research explores comparisons with alternative aid distribution mechanisms, post disaster distribution outcomes in other countries, and disparities in humanitarian funding.

The analysis draws on this research to identify the key challenges in contemporary Myanmar and their implications for future humanitarian strategies, particularly in the event of possible future changes in political authority.

Findings identify the range and complexity of factors that impede the distribution of aid due primarily to deliberate efforts by the defacto government and military to consolidate territorial control, punish communities considered to be aligned with resistance forces, and restrict

¹ Shelter, Non-Food Items, Camp Coordination & Camp Management

international scrutiny: Actions that are targeted and systematic rather than incidental due to lack of will or resources by the international community.

The paper concludes by assessing opportunities and implications for (a) the development of more adaptive interim methods to remobilise humanitarian aid delivery by local community empowerment, (b) improved preparedness for rapid direct operations whenever future opportunities arise, (c) increased lobbying of key stakeholders by Australia, (d) alternative neutral peacekeeping type models for aid distribution and (e) renewed lobbying for the revitalisation of the Panglong accord for a Myanmar Federal Democracy.

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Title: *Localisation under austerity: Rethinking the international aid architecture in Myanmar's revolution*

Abstract

This paper examines how global aid austerity is reshaping the localisation of humanitarian assistance in Myanmar following the 2021 military coup. It develops the concept of austerity-driven localisation: a condition in which responsibility for frontline response devolves to local actors through funding contraction rather than deliberate reform, without a corresponding transfer of resources, recognition, or authority. Drawing on ongoing engagement with civil society organisations, women-led networks, ethnic service providers, community media initiatives, and local humanitarian responders, read alongside secondary scholarship, the analysis traces how the contracting aid architecture passes its losses downward and how local actors respond. They revive parallel service systems, improvise within compliance regimes, sustain protection and documentation work, and build alternative financing channels. These responses reveal that the formal system has long depended on local capacities it neither built nor acknowledged. The paper distinguishes localisation as a deliberate transfer of power from localisation as a by-product of donor retreat, and argues that humanitarian response in contested contexts requires recognising and resourcing the actors who now carry it.