



The Dynamics and Implications of the Myanmar Civil War: A Conceptual Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Myanmar has been struggling with political instability, ethnic tensions, and military rule since its independence in 1948, which culminated in a multidimensional civil war exacerbated by the 2021 coup and public uprisings such as the Spring Revolution. The paper addresses the ethnic tensions, militarisation and mobilisation as the forces behind the conflict and its regional effects. The conceptual framework of Michael E. Brown has been adopted in the paper to analyse the structural, political, economic, and cultural aspects of the discussion using the literature-oriented qualitative technique. The results indicate that the civil war in Myanmar is caused by longstanding ethnic exclusion and concentrated military power, which in turn are compounded by failed democratisation and weak international responses; while suggesting that the functioning of this conflict can hardly be solved without integrative federal reforms, the observance of minority rights and harmonisation of the governing of the regions. This study also explores the spillover impact on the neighbouring states such as Bangladesh, India, China, and Thailand, and explores possible grounds to foster peaceful solutions. By dissecting the conflict in multidimensional terms, the paper

aims to contribute to the wider debates of the concept of internal war, ethnic politics, and regional security.

KEYWORDS: Ethnic conflict, insurgency, military coup, pro-democracy movement, *tatmadaw*, spring revolution

INTRODUCTION

The civil war in Myanmar has its roots in the post-colonial history of the nation, where the suppression of ethnic diversity and the centralisation of power by the Bamar-dominated government have been key drivers of conflict (Bigagli, 2019). The first agreement between the Burman leaders and ethnic groups to bring Myanmar together following its independence from colonial rule was the Panglong Agreement of 1947 (Callahan, 2003; Kipgen, 2021). However, the agreement became a failure because of the killing of its initiator, General Aung San, in 1948, creating a huge dissatisfaction among ethnic minorities. As a result, the dissatisfaction among these groups had created several ethnic armed organisations, such as the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). However, Myanmar adopted a parliamentary democracy, which was operative till 1962. In 1962, the highest-ranking military officer, General Ne Win, seized power and ruled the country through a one-party state until 1988 (Di Miceli, 2016). In 1988, the longstanding civil discontent with military rule turned into a people's uprising, which resulted in mass massacres of more than 3,000 peaceful protesters (Yamahata & Anderson, 2022). This ruthless suppression not only demonstrated that the regime was intolerant of democratic expressions but also proved to be a turning point in the political history of Myanmar, as it prompted both internal and external pressures for democratic reforms.

The 88-uprising had toppled the regime of General Ne Win, but the military rule continued. Despite Aung San Suu Kyi's (ASSK) leadership of the National League for Democracy (NLD) in the national election in 1990, the junta refused to hand over power. In 2007, the civil resistance was triggered once again in response to the economic situation and again showcased people's discontent with military rule (Rogers, 2008). The military administration of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), which had ruled since 1997, adopted a new constitution in 2008 and held the first national elections in more than 20 years (Kramer, 2015). Several political reforms were initiated between 2008 to 2011. In the general election of 2015, the NLD won a landslide victory like in 1990, securing approximately 80 per cent of the seats (Kipgen, 2021). Though there was severe criticism of the Rohingya crisis, NLD won yet another landslide victory in 2020 by securing 83 per cent of the seats (Liow, 2022). The result indicates that the domestic support for the NLD, despite international criticism, is a complicated political atmosphere where national identity and democratic ideals, rather than actions against human rights violations, are more influential.

The military staged a coup d'état on February 1, 2021, which marked an abrupt end to a decade of democratisation and hybrid rule (Kipgen, 2021; Liow, 2022). The coup was met with nonviolent resistance from the public in the form of the Spring Revolution, an anti-coup and pro-democracy civil resistance movement challenging the military's legitimacy and power claim (Frontier Myanmar, 2021b). This wave had been a sign of massive disapproval of authoritarianism by the population and an expression of renewed dedication to democracy at the collective level, regardless of what violent suppression might follow.

The crisis has already generated a great regional spillover. The crisis of the Rohingyas and the enhanced cross-border tension continue to put pressure on Bangladesh. The Refugee inflow and ethnic connections in India have daunted the northeast. China, which prides itself on its economic interests, has courted not only the junta but also the rebel groups cautiously. Thailand, in the meantime, has experienced a new flow of refugees and an increase in the drug trade. Overall, the instability in Myanmar is increasingly becoming a threat to the security and cooperation in the region.

The study explores the root causes of the Myanmar civil war by assessing the chronological events of ethnic conflict and the governance system, particularly focusing on autocratic military rule, which has created civil resistance as well. One of the main objectives of this study is to put emphasis on the 2021 military coup, also known as the Spring Revolution, to address the dissatisfaction of the Burmese citizens with the military rule. It also seeks to analyse how this conflict affects Myanmar's national security, and how it will affect the area, especially for nearby states. To achieve the objectives, the study seeks to find out some core questions:

- What are the primary drivers of the Myanmar civil war, with a focus on ethnic conflict and political power dynamics?
- How has the conflict affected Myanmar's political stability and governance?
- Why does the conflict evolve in civil resistance after the military coup of 2021?
- What are the regional and international implications of the Myanmar civil war?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The long-running conflict in Myanmar has been characterised as ethnic insurgency, military authoritarianism, and weak state legitimacy among other things. Central to this discussion can be the work of Smith (1999), who discusses the historical origins of ethnic armed groups and the long-term consequences of unfulfilled pacts, including Panglong and Burmanization policies. Such forces have institutionalised exclusion and rebellion.

Callahan (2003) extends this further by stating that the Myanmar military purposely maintained its declared existence against internal conflict, leading towards state-building entrenchment in government. In the same exposition, Steinberg (2013) explicates how long the military dominance has been and how structural forces have always thwarted democratic change.

The aspect of religion as to resistance is also examined by Rogers (2008), who chronicles the Saffron Revolution and the part played by Buddhist monks in organising a protest against the military rule and gives insight into the tradition of civil disobedience. Kramer (2015) is also economic in his approach, giving attention to land expropriation and exploitation of resources in ethnic land, which has further enhanced marginalisation and intensified the conflict.

South (2018) presents the concept of hybrid governance, which involves the interpenetration of state power and ethnic armed groups that reveal the faulty nature of governance and the invalidity of centralised peace. Bigagli (2019) supplements it with the investigation of the impact of the education system in Myanmar, which has fostered a limited idea of nationhood, which has led to cultural exclusion and ethnic dissatisfaction.

There are recent works on post-coup dynamics. Liow (2022) provides a general political background to Southeast Asia and highlights the main leaders there and crises in Myanmar that are important to understand historical and current events. Chambers and Cheesman (2024) discuss the Spring Revolution and the development of cross-ethnic unity against the junta.

Such studies provide useful information, but the majority look at the conflict in one-dimensional light either ethnically, in authoritarian or in protest. This paper aims to consolidate such strands by conceptualising the causes of civil war in Myanmar using a multidimensional conceptual approach with regional implications.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study was conducted through a qualitative approach, based on a case study and text analysis method. The qualitative research design and case study approach are useful for analysing intricate problems and mechanisms that explain empirical results or trends. It is frequently used to study political issues and offers the significant benefit of closely examining a particular instance (Geddes, 2003). In this research, several prominent books, academic articles, newspaper articles, existing literature, and credible governmental and non-governmental reports have been used as secondary data sources to collect insights. This study also reviews the secondary data to acquire more comprehensive information about the crisis as well as find research gaps. It allows taking a holistic insight into the causes of the conflict and its development. To provide analytical rigour, sources were chosen by their relevance, credibility, and the date they were published, giving special attention to the events after 2021. The regional effect of the conflict is also assessed by cross-comparisons of facts and evidence on the occurrence of security and political responses by border states as they are retrieved. As this crisis is still ongoing, this study must deal with up-to-date information from reliable newspaper articles and published reports.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Many scholars have identified ancient hatred as the main reason for internal conflict, while others have rejected the very simple cause behind the conflict. This study focuses on the underlying causes of this longstanding conflict through the lens of the conceptual writing of Michael E. Brown (Brown, 1996). In his conceptual framework, as seen in the edited collection *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict* (1997) and other publications, he delineates four primary categories of causes for internal conflict: structural, political, economic/social, and cultural/perceptual. To analyse the complex internal conflicts, such as the current Myanmar crisis, these categories provide a comprehensive framework.

Structural Factors

The three main structural factors are a fragile governmental structure, intra-state security challenges, and a hostile ethnic geography. Myanmar's situation accumulates all three dimensions; being a developing country, Myanmar has been facing a lot of intra-state security issues because of its vast ethnic diversity and problematic relations since its independence in 1947. Myanmar's structural weakness, characterised by authoritarian rule, a fragile democratic transition, and the 2021 military coup, has left institutions incapable of managing diversity or mediating disputes.

Political Factors

Myanmar's political landscape is marked by decades of military dominance and the marginalisation of ethnic minorities. This section assembles four key elements that also fit in the Myanmar context, including discriminatory political structure, exclusionary national ideologies, inter-group politics, and elite politics. Since 1947, Myanmar has experienced by autocratic military regimes four times, excluding other political parties and especially denying the political rights of non-Burmese citizens.

Economic/Social Factors

Economic difficulties, unjust economic systems, limited economic development and hardships of modernisation have been identified as the social and economic factors

of internal conflict, portraying the situation in Myanmar. Furthermore, the military and its allies frequently profit from the exploitation of natural resources in ethnic communities, such as Kachin jade and Karen timber, which exacerbates local concerns. With a weak economy, Myanmar is still struggling to ensure economic equality for all citizens, resulting in discontent and limited or no development in its area.

Cultural Factors

One of the main reasons behind the Myanmar civil war is cultural factors, including cultural discrimination against minorities and problematic group histories. Myanmar is home to 135 ethnic groups, but most of them have faced discrimination and oppression, which created historical grievances among these minorities. Ethnic minorities have long been portrayed as threats to national unity in narratives that have fostered official persecution and social discrimination.

Limitations

This study has several limitations due to the lack of or restricted access to primary sources and potential bias in secondary data sources. Due to the ongoing conflict and political instability in Myanmar, resulting in safety concerns and communication barriers, it is quite hard to get access to the main conflictual area and collect primary data, such as interviews with key stakeholders and affected communities. After that, there are always some potential biases in assembling secondary data, as these are completely dependent on available reports and media coverage, which can impact the objectivity of the findings. Additionally, regional implications may make everything more complicated because of differing geopolitical interests of external factors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

State Formation and Ethnic Unrest (1948-1962)

Myanmar has always been in a troubled situation since before its independence because of its ethnic diversity. The notion of ethnicity is complex in Myanmar; according to the last colonial census of 1931, the number of distinct ethnic groups was 135, mostly based on language (Ferguson, 2015). The British conquered Burma by overthrowing King Thibaw in 1886, and they seized territorial control through a mix of direct and indirect regulations, deploying Indian officials and local Burmese leaders. As a result, Myanmar has officially been divided into Ministerial Burma (the central area, controlled from Rangoon) and the Frontier Areas (primarily inhabited by the ethnic minority groups); the British also started to keep ethnic Burmans out of the military (Walton, 2008). The word “Burman” or “Bamar” denotes the predominant group in Myanmar, whereas “Burmese” or “Myanma” refers to all citizens of the nation (Enriquez, 1933). Approximately 60% of the population is Burman (Bamar), and they have occupied the most important positions in politics, education, economics, and other spheres; whereas the ethnic minorities of the country were marginalised and excluded from the mainstream by receiving differential discriminatory treatment (Chaturvedi, 2012). In response to the longstanding demand of the Burman nationalist movement under the leadership of Aung San, the British began to negotiate in 1945, and they demanded collaboration between the Burmese politicians and the Frontiers areas; as a result, the Panglong Agreement was signed hastily in February 1947. Though the Panglong Agreement allowed the secession option from the union 10 years after independence to the Shan and Karenni peoples; the Karen, Mon, Rakhine, and several other ethnic minority groups were unrepresented and well as being critically overlooked

by both the British and Burma's first government Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) (Smith et al., 1994). However, the dream of autonomy and self-determination of Shan and Karenni remained unfulfilled due to the assassination of Aung San in July 1947.

After the independence in 1948, dissatisfaction grew among the ethnic minorities (who were absent at Panglong or in the constituent assembly elections) against the newly elected Prime Minister U Nu, disregarding their demands for autonomy and self-determination (Ekeh, 2007). The Communist Party of Burma (CPB) and certain Arakanese groups rebelled shortly after independence, against the government; later, the Karen National Union (KNU) was also involved in the armed insurgency in 1949 (Nilsen, 2013). Though the government was able to seize control of the urban area, numerous ethnic groups, including the Karenni, Mon, Pao, Rakhine, and Muslim Mujahids, began to exert influence in the countryside throughout the late 1940s and 50s (Smith et al., 1994). Such a disintegration of authority emphasised the extent to which the state had little jurisdiction beyond the cities and the deep-seated ethnic animosities that would form the basis upon which decades of ongoing armed conflict would be founded.

Without following the pluralism and federalism of Aung San, U Nu prioritised religious and cultural values in the nation-building process. In 1961, he declared Buddhism as the state religion of Burma, creating discontent among minority groups and fostering insurgencies (Zaw, 2018). In response, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) revolted against the central government in 1961, and later, Chin also rebelled under the leadership of HrangNawl in 1964 against the government's announcement about the state religion (Zaw, 2018). Some other powerful and large insurgent ethnic groups also revolted over time, including the Kachin Independent Organisation (KIO), Karen National Union (KNU), Shan State Army (SSA), New Mon State Party (NMSP), Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), Arakan Liberation Party (ALP) and Chin Democracy Party (Sakhong, 2012). The emergence of these groups represented a steadfast defiance of centralised power and the state's inability to create a cohesive national identity that took into account ethnic demands for equality and autonomy.

The marginalisation or restricted access to political processes, limited social and economic development in the frontier area, and the violent insurrection were sparked by ethnic minority complaints, mostly stemming from the government's Burmanization strategy (Kramer, 2015). In 1961, the Shan State government's proposal for a federal system was accepted during a conference in Taunggyi that included officials from Kachin, Shan, Chin, Kayin, Kayah, Mon, and Rakhine; but before passing the proposal in parliament, General Ne Win initiated a military coup in 1962, overthrew U Nu, and justified the coup "to save the country from disintegration" and suspended the 1947 Constitution (Frontier Myanmar, 2016). It was a crucial turning point in the political history of Myanmar, with the expectations of a negotiated federal union dashed, and ethnic suspicions towards the centre enshrined and ethnic grievances militarised in the decades ahead.

This fundamental crisis of state formation in post-independence Myanmar is further accentuated by the political events that occurred during the aborted federal proposal and the military coup of 1962. The collapse in federal negotiations not only resulted in further entrenching mistrust against the central government and the ethnic minority populations but also formalised military governance as a forefront strategy of state control. This historical divide had a substantial influence on the course of the civil

war in Myanmar as ethnic insurgencies hardened into a long-running conflict against an increasingly centralised and authoritarian state machine.

The Longstanding Military Regime (1962-2010)

Myanmar has a troubled history of several military coups since its independence. U Nu's first term had ended in 1958, and then the military formally engaged in Burmese politics with the self-proclamation of General Ne Win as prime minister and the formation of a caretaker government in 1958 (Yamahata & Anderson, 2022). In the national election of 1960, U Nu was elected as prime minister for the second time, but General Ne Win seized power in 1962 through a military coup. Following the coup, General Ne Win formed the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) to run the government and established the Revolutionary Council, following the socialist ideas known as the "Burmese Way to Socialism" (Schein, 2013). In subsequent years, political parties were banned, censorship enforced, student protests suppressed, the judicial system dismantled, foreigners expelled, bureaucracy purges began, and industries nationalised (Steinberg, 2021). The military government launched the Printers and Publishers Registration Law (1962) and Censor Law (1965) to resist the publication of ethnic languages, especially in the education system and secular curriculum, as a means of terminating ethnic rights (Sakhong, 2012). The council focused on limiting the rights of ethnic minorities, and they eliminated their ethnic status from the constitution by substituting the term *ethnicity* with "regional development and cultural diversity" (Taylor, 2009). They used to suppress ethnic minorities and severely violate human rights, as well as strictly control their religious and cultural practice. As a result, insurgencies became widespread, especially in rural areas. In response, Ne Win adopted the "Four cuts Policy" of the military offensive, which denotes cutting off the ethnic armies' access to food, money, news, and recruitment in the conflict areas in the 1970s (Beehner, 2018). The Revolutionary Council enacted the country's second constitution, dividing it into seven states and seven divisions in 1974.

A controversial and discriminatory system with separate eligibility, rights, and application procedures for *jus sanguinis* (by descent) and *jus soli* (by birth) routes was established by a new citizenship statute in 1982, which severely limited *jus soli* citizenship (Rhoads, 2023). This law extremely excluded the ethnic group from natural citizenship and classified them as potential foreigners. Myanmar suffered both political and economic challenges in the 1970s-80s, which caused public disturbance and left it among the world's poorest nations. Moreover, in March 1988, riot police forcibly put an end to an apolitical student discord, creating huge grievances among the public, which became a people's revolution (Steinberg, 2021). Anti-government demonstrations in Myanmar cities caused the BSPP rule to fall in August 1988, and the Tatmadaw violently put an end to the rebellion by seizing control once again as the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) (Jones, 2014). In 1989, General Saw Maung, leader of the SLORC, announced the nation's name would be changed from Burma to Myanmar (Sakhong, 2012). However, the political repression did not stop, and thousands of ethnic civilians and democracy activists were arrested (Smith et al., 1994). SLORC also abolished the 1974 constitution and carried out the national election in 1990, and the NLD under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi, General Aung San's daughter, won 392 seats out of 485 seats (Zaw, 2018). But before the election was held, the military junta had imprisoned several NLD's senior leaders, including Aung San Suu Kyi and other political parties' leaders in 1989. The government faced huge criticism as well as international concerns; while under residential confinement in 1991, Suu Kyi was

awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (Smith et al., 1994). SLORC held a national convention in 1993, which lasted for 14 years, till 3rd September 2007; later, SLORC changed its name once again to “State Peace and Development Council (SPDC)”. The military administration organised a National Referendum to adopt the constitution in May 2008 (Zaw, 2018). The constitution was designed to ensure the supreme power of the military as an independent wing of government and to dominate all branches of political power. Thein Sein’s Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) emerged victorious in the 2010 national election and ruled till 2016 (David et al., 2022). Though the election was highly criticised due to a lack of transparency and inclusiveness, it heralded a nominal transition into civilian rule, which saw the introduction of minor political and economic reforms operating under the same military influence.

From 1962 to 2011, the military regime of General Ne Win imposed “Burmanization” of society by abandoning foreign cultures and repressing other ethnic groups (Bigagli, 2019). Thus, Myanmar’s regime transition from military rule to limited democracy in 2010 was not a sudden incident that could be explained shortly; rather, it was the result of a lengthy struggle (Jones, 2014). The dynamics of this process were determined by years of internal contestations, gradual compromises of the military leadership, and growing international pressure, which ended up leading to a conditional and controlled form of democratisation.

The Rise and Fall of Democratic Aspiration (2010-2021)

Since Thein Sein took power in 2011, the political scenario of Myanmar began to change by expanding more space for the civil and political society, and people started dreaming of a democratic country. Amnesty for political prisoners, easing media restrictions, and enacting economic policies to attract international investment were among the reforms led by President Thein Sein (Maizland, 2022). These actions indicated a clear endeavour to legitimise the government both at home and abroad, and to balance the interests of reformist impulses with the ongoing role of the military in the political and economic life.

In February 2012, 13 ethnic armed opposition groups reached peace agreements with the government, focusing on cease-fire, troop movement information, liaison offices, and future talks (Kramer, 2015). In the same year, Thein Sein welcomed the opposing leader Suu Kyi and approved the registration of the NLD for national elections in 2013. The NLD was victorious in the 2012 parliamentary by-elections, and Aung San Suu Kyi was elected to the House of Representatives (Bünthe et al., 2019). However, democracy did not resolve all the prevailing problems in Myanmar; rather, it triggered new conflicts, including political competition because of the inclusion of several parties. In June and October 2012, Buddhist Rakhine were involved in a severe communal riot with Muslim Rohingya in Rakhine State, resulting deaths of more than 160 people and displacing 100,000 people, where most victims were Rohingya (International Crisis Group, 2012). This trend also continued in 2013, resulting in a series of attacks against the Muslim community.

Though Aung San Suu Kyi won the national election of 2015, she could not be the president according to constitutional rule because she has children who are foreign nationals (BBC, 2021). However, the NLD eliminated its 20,000 Rohingya members and dozens of Muslim candidates from the 2015 election list to comply with legal criteria. Suu Kyi’s position and policies against Muslims became clear (Ibrahim, 2018). That’s why in 2016 a new government was formed led by Htin Kyaw as president, and a new office was created called *State Counsellor* (a status above the President), recognising

Aung San Suu Kyi as Myanmar's de facto leader. New hope of genuine democracy in Myanmar spread inside and outside of the country; Suu Kyi initiated a peace talk with the help of military reformists to solve the ethnic crisis. Even though the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) was signed by eight ethnic armed factions in October 2015, peace remained elusive as some of the most powerful groups didn't sign the NCA (Büntel et al., 2019). This partial endorsement compromised the legitimacy and effectiveness of the agreement and continued to foster mistrust among the stakeholders and making it difficult to achieve a comprehensive and sustainable process of peace.

The new hope of peaceful and democratic Myanmar under the leadership of Suu Kyi didn't last long. Unrest reemerged in Rakhine state as millions of Rohingya were deprived of human rights and experienced state-sponsored discrimination under the NLD regime. The Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) attacked a police post in October 2016, while the army launched a clearance operation against the Rohingya minorities (Zahed & Jenkins, 2022). The greatest calamity broke out in 2017 towards the Rohingya when the Rakhine Buddhist mobs aided the national army's deadly campaign of violence and isolation, which destroyed communities and forced hundreds of thousands of people into Bangladesh (Human Rights Council, 2018). The NLD government faced severe international criticism for restricting access to UN investigators, journalists, and human rights workers in early 2018 in Rakhine state, and an allegation of genocide was raised by scholars. However, refugees' statements, satellite images, and independent investigation reports ensured that the Tatmadaw and Arakanese militia have committed extrajudicial killing, sexual assault, and torture, while the UN declared this event a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing" (Cumming-Bruce, 2017). But the NLD government and Aung San Suu Kyi repeatedly denied the accusation of genocide, labelled ARSA as a terrorist organisation, and disregarded the Rohingya's legitimate citizenship of Myanmar (Cheesman, 2017). Gambia lodged a case before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) against Myanmar, with the allegation of genocide in November 2019. In response, Suu Kyi appeared in the ICJ in December 2019 and refuted the imputation of genocide against the Rohingya, rather than regarded this incident as potential war crimes and crimes against humanity (Lee, 2021). However, the vulnerable condition of the Rohingya people has not changed much; they are still deprived of their rightful citizenship in Myanmar, and millions of them are leading miserable refugee lives in Bangladesh and some other countries.

In the November 2020 election, the NLD won once again with 396 seats out of 476 in the upper and lower house legislatures (Zahed & Jenkins, 2022). The opposition party, USDP, which won just 33 seats, claimed this election result was unfair. The NLD denied this blame; however, another military coup was initiated by General Min Aung Hlaing on 1 February 2021, he seized the power while declaring a "one-year state of emergency" to establish a "disciplined democracy" as well as organise another "free and fair" election (Thawngmung & Noah, 2021). Such a move virtually rolled back the fragile democratic gains of the past decade, causing resistance at the domestic level and international criticism that continued to weaken the political environment in the country.

The 2021 Military Coup and Spring Revolution (2021- Present)

After the national election of 2020, with the victory of the NLD, the military junta initiated a coup on 1 February 2021 by claiming the election was rigged. President Win Myint, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, and several Parliament members were arrested (Beech, 2021). But this time the new military government faced public outrage and by the end of the month, mass protests spread in Yangon, Mandalay, and provincial

areas of the country, demanding the release of national leaders and exclusion of Tatmadaw from politics, while others also claimed recognition and rights of the historically oppressed groups. The youth generation, who have previously witnessed both the atrocity of the Tatmadaw and the democratic transition of Myanmar, participated more solely against the new military government, called the State Administration Council (SAC), and they have utilised social media to create public opinion as well as seek global concern. In February 2021, Myanmar's spring revolutionaries began articulating and making claims for new horizons and possibilities of politics in the hope of building a peaceful and just society without ethnic or religious discrimination (Chambers & Dhu Da, 2024). On 3rd February, health workers announced a nationwide strike, which became known as the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), joined by other public service employees; whereas other services, apart from public service, were disrupted by creative collective actions aimed at "keeping the streets" (Thazin, 2021). In Myanmar's divided society, the coup sparked a wave of solidarity that led to the creation of an inclusive movement with NLD supporters and civil society that was Burman-majority and ethnic minority (Vrieze, 2023). This mass protest became popularised by the term Spring Revolution; like the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan and the Yasmine Revolution in Tunisia, the name is based on comparable revolutionary upheavals (Beck et al., 2022). On February 4th, 2021, 378 MPs-elect (76%) established the Committee Representing the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) in their compound to fulfil their lawmakers' in-waiting responsibilities (Thame, 2024). The Armed Forces Day on 27 March 2021 marked a significant turning point for the emergence of armed resistance, as the military and police lethally engaged over 100 civilians in a single day (Frontier Myanmar, 2021a). However, the Tatmadaw launched a brutal crackdown against the protesters, including mass killing, arbitrary arrests, torture, sexual violence, and demolishing thousands of houses, all of which indicate these actions as crimes against humanity. The National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) and National Unity Government (NUG), as the shadow government, were established in April under the surveillance of CRPH; later, the NUG declared the formation of the Peoples Defence Force (PDF) with assistance from allied ethnic armed groups, including the KNU and KIO, to mobilize nation-wide protest and armed struggles against the military junta. Finally, in September 2021, the NUG declared a "people's defensive war", uniting the PDF and ordinary citizens to join the war (David et al., 2022). In 2022, the NUG claimed to have effective control over half of the country after a year of people's defensive war against the military regime (The Irrawaddy, 2022). The civil war escalated further with several attacks and counterattacks, resulting deaths of thousands of people, including military personnel, revolutionists, and civilians. On 27 October 2023, the Three Brotherhood Alliance (3BTA) including the Arakan Army (AA), Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) launched an offensive in Shan State attack against the military junta, which became known as Operation 1027, this attack led to significant territorial gains of 3BTA near the Chinese border area, posing severe pressure to the military government (Sun, 2024). On 26 September 2024, the military invited PDFs to disarm and run as a political party in the proposed election of 2025 (Democratic Voice of Myanmar, 2024). Opposition leaders and the NUG rejected the military's cease-fire appeal and the junta's invitation, vowing to continue the Spring Revolution and establish a federal democratic union.

Since the 2021 coup, the military dictatorship in Myanmar has killed more than 6,000 individuals, imprisoned more than 20,000, resulting in the internal displacement of

nearly 3.5 million people (Amnesty International, 2025). Myanmar has been facing this unrest for 4 years, without showing any sign of ending; the country's socio-political condition and economy have harshly deteriorated due to this longstanding conflict, as well as creating global concern.

Myanmar's Internal Strife and Its Spillover on Regional Stability

The ongoing conflict in Myanmar has a far-reaching impact on its neighbouring states of the South Asian and Southeast Asian region; it shares a border with Bangladesh, India, China, Thailand, and Laos, and all these countries have faced security threats due to the internal strife of Myanmar. The breakout of civil war in Myanmar has resulted in the largest refugee crisis in the 21st century, as well as rejuvenating the route for increased weapon smuggling, illicit drug trade, and guerrilla warfare support

Bangladesh is the most affected neighbouring country in this crisis. Since 2017, more than a million Rohingya refugees have been sheltered in Bangladesh, resulting huge socio-economic crisis. Bangladesh is still struggling with this refugee crisis, whereas Myanmar always remains reluctant to solve this issue, resulting slow repatriation process. Currently, Cox's Bazar, a southeastern district of Bangladesh, is the world's largest refugee camp. The refugee camps become a hub of illegal activities because of the deteriorated security conditions of the border area; mafia syndicates and smugglers use the Rohingya refugees for smuggling drugs and illicit arms from Myanmar. After the 2021 military coup, the situation became more complex for both countries. Though the AA seized full control of Rakhine state, including the border area with Bangladesh, from the military junta in November 2023, the AA's stance on the Rohingya issue is still ambiguous. The Rohingyas are also sceptical about the actions of the predominantly Buddhist Arakan Army, as they also don't regard the Rohingya as Myanmar's rightful citizens. Moreover, a recent report reveals that the SAC has recruited Rohingyas from Bangladesh and shifted them to the border area to fight on behalf of the Tatmadaw by promising them Myanmar's citizenship documents (Frontier Myanmar, 2024). As police and local Muslims connected to the Tatmadaw were trying to flee to Bangladesh by boat, the Arakan Army issued an order to limit access to transit across the Naf River in December 2024 (CNN, 2024). The AA's control over border areas becomes a security concern for Bangladesh, as it is predicted that the Arakan Army (AA) and Chin National Army (CNA) have built alliances with insurgent and separatist groups including Kuki Chin National Front (KNF), in Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts which is imposing severe threat to Bangladesh's national integration. In early 2024, several clashes took place between the Joint Forces of Bangladesh and the ethno-nationalist KNF, and this insurgent group also engaged in criminal activities more frequently, including assaults on police stations and vicious thefts in Bandarban (Rejwan, 2024). The increasing influence of the AA in the border area and its potential connection with insurgency groups in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHTs) has become alarming for Bangladesh's security and stability.

Myanmar and India have historically been connected, sharing economic and strategic interests. India's four states - Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram share a border with Myanmar's Sagaing region, Chin and Kachin States. Since Myanmar offers India a crucial land bridge to integrate its economy with the rest of Southeast Asia, it is regarded as a key component of India's Act East Policy; one of the mega projects in this region is the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway, connecting Kolkata and Bangkok. India's top strategic goal is to establish alternate trade routes to the Siliguri Corridor via Kolkata and Myanmar, and a road connection to

Mizoram through the Kaladan Multimodal Transport Project (Yumlembam, 2024). Myanmar's prolonged conflict has created serious security and strategic threats to India, resulting in refugee influx several times, most significantly the Rohingya refugee influx of 2017 and another influx after the 2021 military coup, as well as these have been linked to violent ethnic clashes, drug trafficking, and smuggling. An estimated 40,000 Rohingya people live in India, most fled Myanmar in 2017; while only 20,000 of them registered with the UNHCR (Bhat, 2024). Moreover, an estimated 56,800 refugees from Myanmar have entered India after the military coup of February 2021, according to the State Governments and Community-based organisations and UNHCR registration. The civil war in Myanmar also created security implications by instigating ethnic violence and the illicit drug trade in Manipur. Following a large influx of refugees since 2021, many of them are Chin who share ethnic ties with the Kuki tribe in Manipur; this incident created some sort of insecurity in the Meitei community, as they have a prolonged ethnic rivalry with the Kukis. About 260 people have died and over 60,000 people have been displaced in Manipur since May 2023, due to the increased ethnic violence between the Meitis and the Kukis (Patel, 2024). This escalation suggests the continuing instability of interethnic relations in the area and dictates the necessity to introduce proper conflict resolution instruments in the area to avoid any new disasters in the future.

China follows a dual strategy to maintain balanced relations in Myanmar; no matter who prevails in power, it seeks to ensure its own economic and strategic interests in this region. While publicly backing the military government to safeguard its interests in Myanmar, China covertly backs ethnic rebel groups to secure the safety of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects, especially access to the Indian Ocean (Krishna, 2025). The China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) also developed road and rail networks from China's Yunnan Province through several Myanmar cities to the deep-sea port in Kyaukpyu, Rakhine State. China also established the China-Myanmar oil and gas pipelines in 2013-14 by using the CMEC. China has been affected by the conflict, as it poses a significant threat to its mega-infrastructure projects. China's high-tech economy highly depends on the rare earth mining sector of Myanmar, and the ongoing conflict between the Tatmadaw and EAOs hinders Chinese strategic interests. In 2024, though Beijing brokered a ceasefire, it only lasted for five months. China has supported the Tatmadaw in the rare earth-containing areas near the Chinese border, but the KIA captured the Kanpiketi, a town rich with rare earth mines, on November 20, 2024. In January, the junta announced a new ceasefire between the military and one of the ethnic armed organisations, with China acting as a mediator once again, and the junta also promised to hold a national election in 2025 (Babst, 2025). The trends reflect the ongoing work towards stabilising the internal conflict situation and re-establishing a formal political process; however, their results are not definitive due to further tensions and doubts of significant stakeholders.

Another calamity of Myanmar's civil war is imminent in Thailand, resulting in a flood of refugees, security tension, and illicit drug trade amidst the civil war. Currently, Thailand has hosted 90,000 Myanmar refugees in temporary shelters since the 1980s, and following Myanmar's coup in 2021, 45,000 more fled (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Thailand faces a surge in illegal drug trafficking and seizures due to civil war (Thepgumpanat & Wongcha-um, 2024). This increase corresponds to the greater regional security consequences of the ongoing conflict in Myanmar, with porous borders and weakened state control over conflict areas enabling transnational criminal activity.

The international and regional response to resolve this civil war has mostly been a failure till now. ASEAN's response to the civil war in Myanmar has been based on

negotiation and diplomacy, but it has not brought any fruitful results; non-interference in the internal affairs of member states is the organisation's guiding philosophy is creating obstacles to taking any harsh policy towards Myanmar. After the military coup in February 2021 and subsequent violence, ASEAN leaders met in Jakarta and agreed on a Five-Point Consensus to resolve the problem; however, these initiatives also failed due to the lack of cooperation from Myanmar's military junta. In December 2024, an informal regional meeting held on December 19–20 in Bangkok, was attended by high-level representatives from Myanmar, Laos, China, India, Bangladesh, and Thailand, addressing the issues of border security, transnational crime, and the implementation of the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus, a roadmap designed to restore peace and stability in Myanmar; without resulting any successful initiatives yet. Several sanctions have been placed by the US and EU on individuals and companies connected to Myanmar's military, but they haven't had much of an effect (The Guardian, 2025). The Myanmar issue was discussed in the 58th UN Human Rights Council session (24 February - 4 April 2025) (Amnesty International, 2025). The 2025 report by Thomas H. Andrews, Special Rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar, highlights the country's worsening crisis due to escalating violence and repression by a weakening military junta and withdrawal of international support.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The Myanmar Civil War traces back to 1948 and especially gained momentum after the 2021 military coup, representing a critical scenario of ethnic conflict, the transition of political power, including the pro-democracy movement, with profound implications for both domestic and regional arenas. This study emphasises how deeply ingrained ethnic divisions are related to historical grievances, fueled by prolonged military rule, how they created public outrages, and how they continue to generate displacement and violence. This article examines the regional implications of the civil war by analysing the economic disruptions, cross-border conflicts, and refugee problems of the affected neighbours. A unified national identity is hard to achieve due to systemic injustice, political exclusion, and ethnic marginalisation; even the notion of lasting peace becomes vague as the continuous power struggle between the military junta, pro-democracy forces, and many ethnic armed groups is likely to continue without any significant improvement.

These findings imply that inclusive federal reforms, protection of minority rights, as well as authentic power-sharing, are necessary to ensure sustainable peace in Myanmar. At a regional level, there is a need to have a coordinated approach amongst neighbouring states regarding the influx of refugees, security along the border, and an insurgency. To the international community, there should be greater collective action in assisting democratic players, and the culprits should be held accountable. The research works with the issue of the multidimensional perception of the topic of internal conflict. The long-term stability of Myanmar will require a shift in the relations between the state and society and the establishment of a mutually cooperative engagement at the regional and global levels. Ultimately, ending the civil conflict in Myanmar necessitates a fundamental shift in the state's relationship with its many ethnic groups, in addition to political reform. Coordinated international and regional responses, along with the goodwill of the domestic stakeholders, are required to reach a sustainable solution to this longstanding conflict in Myanmar.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION

Regarding this article publication, the author states that there is no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

I solemnly declare that this manuscript is my original work.

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