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CONTESTED POLITICAL AUTHORITY IN POST-COUP MYANMAR

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The attempted coup of February 2021 by the State Administration Council (SAC) has catalysed dramatic shifts in Myanmar's political and security landscapes. As the SAC has failed to assert its political authority, new governance systems have emerged under the National Unity Government (NUG) and a range of local level revolutionary coalitions. Meanwhile, ethnic resistance organisations (EROs) both aligned and non-aligned to the NUG, have been able to expand their areas of control.[1]

This chapter examines the ways that political authority is established by competing actors in the context of Myanmar's post-2021 civil war and explores the implications of emerging governance dynamics for the country's future. I draw on a range of concepts from the international literature to highlight the importance of political authority and governance for the resistance movement's immediate struggle to take down the military junta and for its long-term agenda of establishing a lasting, peaceful, federal democratic union of Myanmar.

The governance systems of Myanmar's many resistance organisations have not gained significant academic attention until recent years, despite

large areas of the country having been governed by them for many decades. The political authority and governance systems of resistance organisations are only mentioned in passing in the most influential studies on armed conflict and ethnic politics in Myanmar (Yawnghwhe 1987; Gravers 1999; Lintner 1999; Smith 1999; Thawnghmung 2007; Callahan 2007; South 2008; Sakhong 2010; Woods 2011; Sadan 2013). But recent years have seen increased interest in these themes, with Brenner (2017; 2019) exploring the politics and governance of so-called "rebels", South (2017) discussing "hybrid governance" and Kyed et al. (2020) providing a seminal contribution on informal justice systems in both ERO and government-controlled areas (see also Decobert 2016; Paul 2018; Loong 2019; Ong 2020; and Kim 2021, among others). These recent works have demonstrated how large populations of the country have been subject to overlapping forms of localised authority completely independent from the central state. They have also demonstrated how the governance systems of EROs often demonstrate considerable legitimacy, especially in relation to the violent and invasive Myanmar Armed Forces, due to bottom-up collaboration between EROs and community-based actors.

In this chapter, I will examine three main groups of governance actors that are filling the void left by the steady collapse of the SAC's public administration system. The first are around fifteen EROs, which have governed their own territories and "mix-controlled areas" since before the coup and in many cases since the 40s, 50s or 60s (Jolliffe 2015). The second are the NUG and the various bodies operating underneath them at the township level, such as people's defence forces (PDFs) and people's administration bodies — *pyithu aochoteye a'pweh* (Pa-Ah-Pa). The third set of actors are new local level coalitions in Karenni and Chin States, including state-level bodies called the Interim Chin National Consultative Council (ICNCC) and the Karenni State Consultative Council (KSCC), as well as township-level bodies.[2]

This chapter provides a descriptive overview of these governance systems and draws on a range of theoretical approaches to explore the implications they could have both for the ongoing struggle to topple the military junta and for the prospects of forming a lasting and peaceful federal union in the future. I draw on literature about insurgency and counterinsurgency, including works by revolutionary writers themselves, to emphasise the practical importance of public administration to strengthening and sustaining armed revolutionary movements. I also

look at South's (2022) notion of "emergent federalism" and the concept of infrastructural power (Mann 1984; 1986; Ziblatt 2004; Breen 2018) to look at the potential for resistance governance systems to provide a foundation for federated states in the future.

Most of the information in this article is based on my personal observations and experiences volunteering with and advising a wide range of political, social and humanitarian organisations in Myanmar since 2021. It is supplemented by knowledge gained through earlier research projects on the governance systems of resistance organisations in Myanmar (Jolliffe 2011, 2014, 2015, 2017a, 2017b, 2018).

The next section provides contextual background to the current situation, including an overview of the main political and governance actors. I then go on to introduce a range of key terms theoretical concepts, highlighting the importance of resistance governance systems to the goal of taking down a target regime and for long-term goal of forming federal democratic union. The section after is mostly descriptive, providing an overview of the various forms of resistance governance that are taking hold in the wake of the attempted coup. The conclusion section focuses on the implications that these systems of political authority could have for the ongoing revolution and the potential for building a lasting federal union.

BACKGROUND

In this section, I will introduce the major political actors and key events that have shaped the dramatic expansion of resistance political authority since the attempted coup. The most advanced public administration systems among resistance organisations in Myanmar are the decades-old structures of some EROs. There are around 15–20 EROs holding territory in Myanmar, depending on how they are classified and categorised. Many have held and governed territories for decades, in some cases since independence. These territories are mostly in areas that were under varied levels of indirect rule under British rule, and which have never been under centralised authority (Smith 1999).

The most well-known revolutionary actor in post-2021 Myanmar is the NUG, which was formed in April 2022 by elected politicians of the NLD and a wide range of political allies, including a number of EROs. The NUG provides political and legal representation for the country's federal democratic forces but is just one of many actors in a much wider coalition

taking part in what is referred to as the “Spring Revolution”.

This coalition is represented by the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC), that was formed in March 2021 and appointed the cabinet of the NUG. The NUCC membership includes elected members of parliament, an estimated seven EROs, multiple ethnic and pro-democracy political parties, strike committees and civil society organisations. The four best known EROs in the NUCC are the Chin National Front (CNF), the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) and the Karen National Union (KNU).

The NUCC has drafted a Federal Democracy Charter (FDC) that provides a political roadmap and vision for the movement, committing to the complete removal of the military from national politics and the formation of a federal constitution that provides ethnic states with significant local autonomy. The FDC also establishes a wide range of protections of human rights, women’s rights and indigenous rights in line with the demands of the NUCC’s diverse membership. The FDC was first released in April 2021, but it has been through numerous re-negotiations and edits since.

Since the attempted coup, a range of transformational changes on the ground have greatly weakened the junta’s governance capacity and created space for resistance organisations to establish their authority across much of the country. The most immediate shift came as a result of the civil-disobedience movement (CDM), which saw hundreds of thousands of civil servants join protests nationwide, including a few thousand police and military personnel. The CDM movement, alongside mass boycotts of taxes or utility bills, soon led to a year-on-year loss in state revenues amounting to around 35 per cent, without accounting for extensive inflation (World Bank 2022, 11). The CDM movement effectively denied the junta control of state infrastructure and decimated its hopes of stabilising control. Village Tract and Ward Administrators (VTWAs) were among the most significant CDM participants, as they made it difficult for the junta to assert control in areas without a strong direct security presence.

Violent crackdowns soon followed, leading the UN to declare that the “illegal military junta has waged a relentless war against the people of Myanmar and their fundamental rights” (UNOHCHR 2022). The junta’s violence had two major impacts that propelled the anti-coup movement to a next level, catalysing the launch of full-fledged revolutionary movement. The first impact was that thousands of politicians and democracy activists

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fled to areas controlled by EROs who housed them in displaced persons camps. This shift greatly improved the popularity of EROs among democracy activists and the wider public. At the same time, many people who had never experienced human rights abuses first-hand, began to empathise with ethnic nationality communities who had faced such abuse for decades, greatly increasing inter-ethnic solidarity among the general public (Crisis Group 2022).

The second impact of junta brutality was that it led large numbers of defiant citizens to the conclusion that armed resistance was the only route to democracy, catalysing the formation of hundreds of armed 'defence forces'. While politicised youth provided much of the energy and determination driving this turn to armed resistance, the new forces gained recruits and funding from people of all ages and backgrounds, and were seen by many rural communities as necessary for self-defence against an increasingly unhinged military (Ye Myo Hein 2022).

The armed conflict escalated dramatically after the NUG's September declaration of 'defensive war' against the SAC. Between September 2021 and at least March 2022, the number of armed conflict incidents increased month-on-month to levels that had not been seen for many decades (SAC-M 2022; Ye Myo Hein 2022). By this time, there were hundreds of defence forces across the country, including 'People's Defence Forces' (PDFs) officially associated with the NUG, as well as local defence forces (LDFs) that acted more autonomously or under the authority of EROs.

In September 2022, a report launched by a panel of former UN diplomats called the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M 2022), claimed that the junta had stable control over just 72 of the country's townships (23%), while resistance organisations held increasingly secure territories in 127 townships (38%), spread across the majority of states and regions. It is in these latter areas, that resistance organisations have been strengthening their political authority and systems of governance.

Part Two of the FDC is intended to provide a legal framework for governance during the revolutionary (or 'interim') period. At the time of writing, some of the stakeholders in the NUCC are still not satisfied with the text and consider it a working draft, meaning that it has not been fully employed in practice. This document or another text developed for the same purpose 'could prove to be very important for resistance organisations to gain external legal recognition of their authority, potentially allowing them to be recognised as the bearer of duties and obligations of the Myanmar state.

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CONCEPTS AND THEORY

In this section, I will define some key terms and introduce some theoretical concepts that help to understand the significance of resistance political authority and governance. It is separated into four sub-sections. The first sub-section defines political authority, public administration and governance and explains their relevance to this discussion. The second sub-section defines civil wars as spaces of contested political authority. The third sub-section looks at the importance that insurgent and counter-insurgent theorists have owed to public administration, emphasising its functional importance to winning asymmetrical civil wars in particular. The fourth sub-section draws on the concepts of 'emergent federalism' and 'infrastructural capacity' to provide a framework for speculating on the ways that revolutionary governance systems could provide a foundation for a future federal system of government.

Governance, political authority, and public administration

In the past decade, there have been a number of influential studies on the governance systems of so-called 'rebels' (Weinstein 2007; Mampilly 2011; Arjona et al. 2015; Arjona 2017) or 'violent non-state actors' (Risse 2011; Börzel and Risse 2021). Brenner (2019) has looked at "rebel politics" in Myanmar and usefully departs from the rationalist models used in those other works. He views "rebellion" as a figuration, or a collection of social relations, that shape the behaviours of those who take part. Specifically, he explores how rebel elites and non-elites are bound together in a kind of social contract that satisfies their social expectations.

I do not use the term 'rebel' and opt instead for resistance and revolutionary, in tune with the Burmese term တော်လှန်ရေး, which is typically translated as 'revolution' but sometimes as 'resistance'.[3] This is how the main organisations and movements discussed in this article define themselves, as the Burmese for 'rebel' (သူပုန်) is used as pejorative slander by the Myanmar Armed Forces and state media, along with 'terrorist' (အကြမ်းဖက်). While the term 'rebel' emphasises pushback against an existing order, 'resistance' implies the protection of an existing, desired order against a malevolent intrusion. Revolution indicates the complete removal of a problematic system of power and is essentially constructive as well as destructive. These are both apt in the context of Myanmar's

EROs and NUG.

Furthermore, I use the concepts of political authority and public administration as they are more specific than governance per se and speak more closely to the particular relationships that armed resistance organisations have with the communities in areas they control. Börzel and Risse (2021, 3) define governance as "the provision of collective goods and services, such as security, human rights, and the rule of law, democracy, health, education, food security, and others", opening up the concept to a vast range of actors other than those explicitly considered governments, including corporations and non-profit organisations. I still regularly use the term 'governance' in this way, but use additional terms to make the nature of this form of governance more specific.

'Political authority' relates to the capacity of a political entity to make and enforce rules for society. More specifically, it requires that the political entity also claims a right to do so, and is recognised as having that right by a meaningful portion of society (Kletzer & Renzo 2020, 195–196; Christiano 2020). As Mampilly (2011, 1529) notes in his landmark study on 'rebel rulers', "Authority requires a degree of consent even if this is partially derived from the coercive capacity of the political regime". In my usage of political authority, I see both of these elements as crucial. There must be both coercive capacity on behalf of the authority and a degree of consent among the society that is governed. What matters is that the people subject to authority are not responding to pure coercion in the way that they would to a gang of criminals issuing threats. Rather, where political authority exists, it suggests that social norms have arisen where a certain actor has a widely recognised role in making and enforcing rules for society.

Political authority, therefore, highlights how governance by resistance organisations is much more analogous to that of modern-day states than it is to governmental organisations and private companies. This is not to say that resistance organisations are embryonic states or on some kind of linear path to statehood — rather, they exist in direct relation to modern states and compete in the same field (Mampilly 2011, 936). Like states, resistance organisations in Myanmar regularly engage in public administration, which further separates them from kinds of non-state governance actors. Rumki Basu (2019, 2) lists a range of activities that all public administrators carry out regardless of regime type or ideology: tax collection, maintenance of law and order, and provision of public goods and utilities. These activities all require a degree of political authority and generally rely on a system

of laws as well as a claim to the legitimate use of force.

In Myanmar, administration (အုပ်ချုပ်ရေး) is the main term for political decision-making and for governance of civilians within the Myanmar state system and in most armed organisation governance systems. The same word is used for the 'executive' branch of government, and it literally translates to both executive decisions and to control of a particular area or system. Under successive regimes the most powerful civilian-facing department of the government has been the General Administration Department (GAD) (Chit Saw and Arnold 2014). Rather than citizens each having independent relationships with each ministry or relevant office, much of their interaction with the state is funnelled through their ward or village-tract administrators. At township and district levels, the central administrators coordinate all other departments. At the local level, every village, village tract and ward has a central administrator who is seen as the community's political leader and representative of the state (Chit Saw & Arnold 2014).

ERO governance systems are typically based explicitly on features from political party structures or military command structures. But, in practice, they also often use a similar graded hierarchical administration system, with central administrators or chairpersons at each level being the fulcrum of all civilian activities and village or village-tract leaders being the central interface between the public and their key departments (Jolliffe 2015). As we will see, these modes of "administration" are central to the way that new resistance governance systems are taking shape.

Contested political authority and the nature of Myanmar's civil war

Civil wars represent contexts where two or more parties that were previously under a common political authority are engaged in armed combat (Kalyvas 2006, 17). For both Trotsky and Lenin, a defining feature of revolutionary wars is the existence of "dual sovereignty" (Tilly 1978, 190–191) or "dual power" (Lenin 1975), whereby multiple blocs compete for political authority. Tilly (1978, 192) builds on this, emphasising that a revolution can be identified by the existence of a contestant to an existing authority, to whom members of the public begin paying taxes, providing military recruits, honouring symbols and so on, "despite the prohibitions of a still- existing government they formerly obeyed". As such, contest

over political authority and governance should be understood as a central feature of civil and revolutionary wars, not a by-product or idiosyncrasy.

Myanmar's current civil war largely fits the definitions above, but there remain large areas controlled by EROs that have never been under a common authority and where incursions from Naypyitaw are experienced as something akin to foreign invasion. This makes the nature of contestation similar to processes of early state formation, that have been studied in Southeast Asia (Tambiah 1976; Wolters 1982; Young 2007; Scott 2009), in Western Europe (Tilly 1976; Tilly 1990), Central Asia (Tapper 1990), and elsewhere. These processes all involved combinations of sustained war (see Giustuzzi 2011, 6-12) and diplomacy (see Wolters 1982), leading larger central political authorities to secure dominion over smaller or less powerful political entities. Scott (2009) has shown how, for much of history, consolidation of political authority in Southeast Asia's mountainous areas has not been on a linear scale of progress, with states incrementally asserting increased authority over smaller orders. In many ways, Myanmar still remains in the throes of this cycle.

Political authority and governance as means to win revolutionary wars

Governance has long been considered a crucial element of armed resistance, by insurgent and counterinsurgent theorists alike. Writing in the 1930s, Mao (1989) famously noted that guerrilla warfare requires you to operate behind enemy lines, meaning that armed revolutionaries have to mix in with the population like fish in water. Ernesto 'Che' Guevara (2006, Chapter 3) emphasised how winning and sustaining support from the people requires guerrillas to defend "their interests and punishing anyone who attempts to take advantage of the instability in which they live". For this reason, he wrote, a judicial system, laws for penal and civil cases as well as agrarian reform projects are "vital to help the peasant to normalize and institutionalize his life within the rebel zone".

Eqbal Ahmad (1982, 241–242) from the National Liberation Front in Algeria wrote how victory depends "on out-administering, *not* on outfighting the enemy" in order to "morally isolate" the regime. He argued that revolution is "a constructive and not simply a destructive undertaking", meaning that the building of new institutions was not something that comes after the old ones have been destroyed (Ahmad

1982, 246). This, he explained, requires "an administrative structure to collect taxes, to provide some education and social welfare, and to maintain a modicum of economic activity," without which the guerrilla "would degenerate into banditry" (Ahmad 1982, 249). Similarly, Kwame Nkrumah's revolutionary strategy in Ghana focused on winning popular support through economic change. This strategy targeted peasants because they were "the overwhelming majority" and "because the revolutionary units live in their midst and depend on their assistance to survive" (Nkrumah 1969, 76). He emphasised how armed revolutionaries must establish "civilian organisations" responsible for taxation, supply, propaganda, and the formulation of laws (Nkrumah 1969, 121).

Counterinsurgent theorists going back to the 1960s — such as Fall (1965), Galula (1964), Trinquier (1964), Kilcullen (2010) and others — all made similar observations and emphasised to military commanders how important winning the battle for civilian administration was to outlasting guerrilla movements. More recently, the modern US counterinsurgency manual, authored by retired army general and former Central Intelligence Agency director David Petraeus (2006, 1), was based largely on the goal of winning popular support through governance, justice provision and social support. It claims that "political power is the central issue in insurgencies and counterinsurgencies; each side aims to get the people to accept its governance or authority as legitimate" (Ibid.).

This means that claiming and defending territory is not merely a military task, which then lays the foundation for governance to come later. Particularly for armed actors that are much weaker militarily than their opponents, establishing political leadership and governance systems is a necessary part of the bid to claim and hold territory from the beginning. Ibrahim et al. (2022) propose a new model for understanding armed group control based on three spheres: economic, political and social. Control is claimed in each of these spheres using a range of practices, of which 'violence' is only one among others including "dispute resolution", "taxation", and so on. In addition to "coercive capacities", armed organisations are required to maintain organisational and financial capacities in order to hold territory.

Given the clear utility of governance systems to armed organisations, the majority of works on the topic are notably rationalist, viewing "rebels" or "violent non-state actors" as cohesive organisations with well-defined interests, which then purposefully develop governance systems as a means

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to achieve those interests (Olson 1993; Weinstein 2007; Mampilly 2011, 5598–5530; Chojnacki and Branovic 2011; Kasfir 2015, 1; Arjona 2017, 9; Arjona et al. 2015, 2; Staniland 2014, 2; and Börzel and Risse 2021, 134). In these works, rebels and civilians are seen as separate categories of actors that bargain with each other to achieve their interests. Brenner (2019, 170) rightly cautions us against excessively functionalist interpretations of this dynamic, arguing that "rebel" soldiers and taxpayers alike are socialised into their roles and perform them out of "preflexive, routinised, practice flowing from the rebel habitus rather than as the result of conscious deliberations over material payoffs".

Nonetheless, it remains evident that success in revolutionary war hinges on a capacity to establish political authority and publicly administer the population. The public administration systems of resistance organisations in Myanmar are, therefore, of crucial importance to their bid for control of the country and the defeat of the military junta. Despite gains by PDFs, NUG and other revolutionary organisations, the Myanmar Armed Forces is likely to maintain superior firepower across the country for some time. The goal for NUG and its allies will be to gain effective leadership over civilians so that their policies can be implemented, their social services can be delivered, their rules are followed, and their taxes are paid.

Bottom-up (emergent) federalism?

A federal solution that provides Myanmar's ethnic states with much greater autonomy has long been seen as the most appropriate mechanism for peacefully managing the country's ethnic divides, not least by ethnic politicians and revolutionary leaders (Silverstein 1959; Yawnghwe 1987; Smith 1999; Yawnghwe and Sakhong 2003; South 2008; Sai Aung Tun 2009; Sakhong 2010; Yawnghwe 2013). This goal was explicitly denied by the military, which tended toward a relentless centralisation of power, but in the process fuelled the decades-old resistance movements that have kept large areas outside of centralised control and outside of the official constitutional order (Smith 1999; Jolliffe 2015).

Reflecting on this decades-old discourse, Ashley South (2022: 451) notes that federalism in Myanmar has long been "discussed in terms of constitutions, roadmaps and other 'top-down' aspects". He argues, instead, that the focus (the analytical focus for scholars and the practical focus for EROs themselves) should be on the de facto federated arrangement

emerging from "the many federal-like structures and practices of local autonomy already present in the country" (South 2022, 451). This approach encourages us to look past the specific legal arrangements that exist on paper and focus more on how political authority and governmental capacity is actually distributed.

This is of particular importance in Myanmar's post-2021 environment, where an illegal junta has effectively overridden the already questionable 2008 Constitution (Crouch 2021) and where resistance organisations and their plural governance and legal systems have far greater legitimacy than the military-controlled 'state' centred in Naypyitaw. For the duration of this civil war, Myanmar will remain in a state of constitutional ambiguity, meaning that the actual systems of authority on the ground will be of far more significance to the country's population than anything on paper.

These de facto arrangements will then take on further salience if the junta is defeated. While the federal democracy charter lays out a roadmap for a negotiated transition through multiple constitutional documents to a new permanent order — and even South (2022, 453) concedes that "Myanmar no doubt needs a blueprint for a federal political settlement at the elite level" — the realities on the ground will undoubtedly influence what emerges out of that process.

For now, the age-old challenge of uniting "the various indigenous ethnic groups so that each could enjoy a reasonable degree of cultural and political autonomy, retain its ethnic identity and at the same time share a common allegiance and national feeling with the other groups in the new state" (Silverstein 1959, 97) falls largely on the practical statebuilding activities underway and the actual power dynamics in play.

Specifically, the chances of a federal arrangement emerging and being successful could hinge on the level of "infrastructural power" that is present in each of those devolved states (Ziblatt 2004; Breen 2018). Infrastructural power is distinguished from despotic power as it relates to the existence of more consistent and impersonalised rules and procedures that enhance the capacity of the state to become routinised in everyday life and practices (Mann 1984, 189; Mann 1986). Ziblatt (2004) argues that such capacity — and the way it shapes "vertical state-society relations within the subunits of a potential federation" — is ultimately more important than the horizontal relations between the subunits themselves. In other words, local capacity for governance *within each sub-state* will be a major determinant of a federal political system's success.

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Importantly, we should not assume that infrastructural capacity is only inherent in western-style formalised governance structures and systems. Indigenous, traditional or other customary governance practices are widespread in Myanmar and are often far more resilient and deeply embedded in local ways of life, compared to the more top-down and contrived systems of the central state. Resistance governance systems typically exhibit a wide range of cultural influences and backgrounds (Jolliffe 2016; Paul 2018; South 2022). Infrastructural power may indeed be strongest where stable systems of authority are built on the foundations of existing norms and customary practices.

Systems of political authority in the Myanmar resistance

This section provides a descriptive overview of the main systems of political authority and governance taking shape in territories controlled by Myanmar's resistance in 2022. It is separated into three sections, focused on EROs, the NUG and then local level coalitions in Chin and Karenni States, respectively. The information in this chapter is based on my observations while working with political and social organisations in Myanmar, and is supplemented by past research on governance systems in ethnic armed conflict areas.

It should be noted that all governance systems in Myanmar are heavily undergirded by a uniquely high degree of community-level organisation and self-governance. None of the systems discussed in this section were developed centrally by their respective organisations and then introduced and implemented across the territories. They all rely heavily on the existing political authority established at the village, village tract or ward level and depend on high levels of social capital in those local communities.

In both state and non-state areas, before and after the coup, most people have interacted with governance authorities through their village or ward leaders rather than directly with each government department. The majority of justice cases are handled at this level (Kyed 2020) and most people depend on local administrators for claiming property rights and for handling local disputes, amongst other essential actions (Chit Saw and Arnold 2014). Furthermore, large portions of funding and labour for schools, local roads and other key services are organised at the local level by public volunteer committees or by local *parahita* and other welfare organisations (Speers-Mears and Jolliffe 2016; Griffith 2019).

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Therefore, resistance organisations (and the Myanmar government or junta) govern by establishing superstructures that are recognised by village, village-tract and ward leaders as well as by elders, local businesspeople, and other influential figures in those communities. All governance projects, rules and orders depend on strong coordination with recognised leaders at this local level. The challenge for aspirant political authorities is, arguably, to establish institutional superstructures that connect these units under a common overarching framework. These superstructures involve rules (sometimes officiated as laws) for society, and rules about rules (i.e. powers and limitations for administrators, soldiers and others within their system of authority).

Throughout its history, the Myanmar military has been extremely weak in establishing popular support or harnessing local networks and knowledge. As such, the superstructures it has sought to create in rural areas where it is competing with local customary authorities or EROs have been focused on cutting off recruits, intelligence and resources to its enemies. Even where civilian and service-oriented agencies of the state have reached these areas — as they did increasingly during the 2010s, owing to partial democratisation of the government and increased investments in social welfare — they have often been top-down in nature, failing to integrate local languages and cultures, thus often being experienced as an intruder (South 2010; South 2017; Paul 2018; Kim 2018; Kyed 2020).

Most visibly, the military-dominated state has typically sought to establish its authority in areas where resistance is strong by using extreme violence against all civilians it believes to be supportive of resistance forces. This is evident across the country today, where the military has responded to the presence of resistance actors by burning villages, livestock, rice stores and even people to sow fear and clear out entire populations. This emphasis on civilian governance as a means to control the public is also why the state's primary administrative body, the GAD, has been long kept under military command and is used to enforce curfews and other security measures (Kyit Saw and Arnold 2014; Crouch 2016).

When reading the following descriptions, therefore, it should be noted that practices of governance in Myanmar remain highly localised and that the governance systems of resistance organisations are at best an overarching superstructure atop much more deeply embedded customary practices (see also Decobert 2016; Jolliffe and Speers-Mears 2016; Kyed 2020).

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Ethnic resistance organisations

ERO territories have grown enormously since the attempted coup of 2021, having been slowly eroded and degraded over successive decades since the late 1980s. In 2020, most EROs had been pushed further and further into remote mountainous areas and away from major roads that connect Myanmar's commercial and administrative hubs to border crossings and international borders. This was achieved through successive barbaric offensives aimed at physically removing people from ERO territories (Smith 1999, 259; Maung Aung Myoe 1999, 135-136; KHRG 2020), ceasefire capitalism initiatives that persuaded EROs to focus on extractive private projects (Woods 2011; Brenner 2015), and the expansion of the state into ceasefire areas via social services and international aid initiatives (Smith 1994; Jolliffe 2016; Kim 2019; Paul 2018). However, EROs are now increasingly able to operate in territories they had control of in previous decades due to the relative collapse of the SAC's public administration system and the swell of popular support for revolution, both locally and from communities in other parts of the country.

All EROs have some form of public administration system[4] but these vary greatly in their form, their institutional influences, their capacity and their overall effectiveness. Most have both civilian and military wings, with the former adopting a political party-like structure, holding congresses at regular intervals and electing committees to lead in the interim periods. These committees then oversee line departments for specific sectors, such as finance, natural resource management, justice, health and education.

Most EROs have written constitutions that stipulate rules for elections and the organisation of their departments and some also have written laws. The KNU's laws, for example, are based on the English Common Law system, adopted from the colonial government in addition to Karen customary concepts. Meanwhile, the United Wa State Party and some others adopted their constitutional structure from the Communist Party of Burma and have laws influenced by the those of the Chinese Communist Party. Many EROs have their own mapping systems that layout the boundaries of administrative units like village tracts, townships and districts. In some cases, these correlate to the operational areas of their military units; in others, they are based on traditional or colonial-era maps.

Many of the EROs have designated administration departments, similar to the General Administration Department of the Myanmar state, that

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oversee central administrators at various levels (e.g., village, township, district, or other local equivalents). These central figures act as executive decision-makers for their designated area and have to coordinate with all other departments. In some cases, they have ultimate control over the budget and ration distribution to all personnel in their areas. Some EROs — notably the KNU, KNPP and New Mon State Party — hold elections at each administrative level to select these central administrators, who stand as party chairpersons for their village tract, township or district. In these organisations, the civilian leaders are more senior to their military counterparts at each level. For example, in the KNU, district chairpersons are direct superiors to corresponding brigade commanders, and the Central Chairperson (sometimes called President) is superior to the Chief of Staff of the army. However, senior commanders at each administrative level enjoy automatic representation.

Most other EROs have closed election systems, participated in by existing members of the organisation, so communities do not elect them directly. Some are notably autocratic, with charismatic individual leaders or dynastic wealthy families at the helm. Others cooperate closely with local civil society, religious actors and political parties and have to generate support bases and consensus throughout the general public. Arguably, the KNU is the most legalistic in nature, displaying a strong reliance on well-established laws, rules and norms, while the Restoration Council of Shan State stands out as one of the most reliant on the charismatic aura of their principal leader, Yawd Serk.

EROs and other affiliated local organisations provide crucial social services to millions of people, in areas under their direct control and even in contested areas where the Myanmar state has a strong presence (Jolliffe 2014; Davis and Jolliffe 2016; Jolliffe and Speers-Mears 2016). EROs along the Thailand–Myanmar border have particularly advanced social assistance programmes, benefiting from vibrant networks of community-based organisations and indirect funding from foreign donors and NGOs. EROs in the north of the country have received private and state support from China. EROs along both borders have, for example, delivered hundreds of thousands of COVID-19 vaccines in recent years and were pivotal to maintaining safe border migration and quarantine regimes during the height of the pandemic.

For decades, the Myanmar military has used ceasefires and economic concessions for EROs as a strategy to distract them from their political

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goals and tie them into an extractive centralised economy (Woods 2011; Brenner 2015). This has added considerably to inequality, land confiscation and environmental degradation (Woods 2011; Paul 2018). In the north of the country, multiple EROs have benefited from proximity to China's booming economy and have developed their areas economically, bringing in considerable organisational revenue (in addition to significant profits for leaders). In the southeast of the country, "ceasefire capitalism" has only benefited a handful of individual leaders, splinter groups and factions (Brenner 2017; Jolliffe 2016; Kim 2018; KHRG 2020). Meanwhile, community-based indigenous and environmental organisations have collaborated with EROs in some areas to actively protect forests and establish locally-owned conservation areas. The most notable of these is the Salween Peace Park in northern Karen State, which is a community-led initiative managed by indigenous Karen communities in collaboration with the KNU (Jolliffe 2016; Paul 2018).

Since the attempted coup, the administration systems of the KNU, KIO and KNPP among others have been pivotal in the protection and shelter of persecuted politicians, civil servants and democracy activists. Collectively they received thousands of people, sheltering them in their territories or assisting them to reach other countries for their safety. These operations required comprehensive processes of COVID-19 screening and quarantine, as well as the provision of shelter, washing facilities, mosquito nets, food and other basic necessities. They and other EROs have also seen rapid increases in demand for social services, with school enrolment rates soaring and caseloads at clinics up considerably due to the collapse of the Myanmar state. In some cases, they have also been able to improve the quality of services by recruiting CDM health workers, teachers and other professionals.

EROs are also regularly called upon to adjudicate or enforce punishments in justice cases by local people. Justice is regularly one of the most rudimentary areas of governmental responsibility assumed by non-state armed organisations (Kilcullen 2010; Mampilly 2011; Arjona 2017). Some EROs have law books, formalised justice procedures and even independent judiciaries, while others form more *ad hoc* dispute resolution committees or act as guarantors for decisions made by local leaders or customary authorities (McCartan & Jolliffe 2016). In all areas, ERO justice systems draw heavily on traditional and customary systems and tend to be much more integrated with village and village tract-level justice practices

than the Myanmar state system is (Kyed 2020).

Since the attempted coup, ERO justice systems have experienced much higher caseloads, and some have been investing considerably in hiring more judges or preparing their existing networks. EROs have also had to take greatly increased numbers of live enemy combatants during this period and detain them in accordance with international law. This has required significant institutional capacity and commitment and many of these systems are facing resource constraints.

The National Unity Government

In the months following its declaration of a "People's Defensive War" in September 2022, the NUG began coordinating its ministries and local networks to establish a public administration system for the growing territories coming under PDF control. An inter-ministerial committee was established at the central level and the Ministry of Home Affairs was tasked with overseeing and organising township level Pa-Ah-Pa units. Hundreds of Pa-Ah-Pa had been formed in March 2021, following an initial announcement by Committee Representing the People's Hluttaw, led by elected NLD members. The Pa-Ah-Pa sit alongside Pyithu Kakwe a'Pweh (Pa Ka Pa) units for defence, which report to the Ministry of Defence and are tasked with coordinating the multitudinous PDF and LDF forces under each township.

A decision was made early in 2022 to not establish NUG-affiliated public administration structures in any ERO areas or areas where local coalition councils claimed this responsibility. As a result, the NUG has focused primarily on establishing its administration system in central predominantly Bamar areas of Sagaing and Magway regions and to a lesser extent, Bago and Mandalay. The NUG has delivered nationwide and region-specific trainings and distributed funds to the priority townships and districts and has conducted pilot projects in key townships. PDFs and LDFs in these regions have steadily increased their hold on territories, taking over large rural areas in 2022, despite constant violent backlash from the SAC (SAC-M 2022).

In these rural areas, the Pa-Ah-Pa have been primarily occupied with the facilitation of humanitarian assistance. As zones of control have become more stable, NUG-affiliated bodies have been able to reopen schools and resume other fixed-point services, such as clinics and childcare centres. All

of these services rely heavily on bottom-up efforts from the communities where they operate, while the NUG bodies generally play a coordination, facilitation or policy guidance role, in addition to the sporadic distribution of funds. The NUG Education and Healthcare Ministries have both been highly active in collaboration with existing community-based and ethnic social service networks to bring in external funding, provide training guidelines, assessment frameworks and other education and health systems infrastructures. This has included support for service delivery on-the-ground and online.

But Pa-Ah-Pa are also active in areas with limited territorial control, such as major cities, where they mobilise the public to boycott SAC taxes and utility bills, to join the CDM movement and to take part in rallies and strikes. They also facilitate legal aid and cash or food assistance to political prisoners and their families. Some Pa-Ah-Pa have been active in organising recruits and collecting donations for the PDFs. Over time, we may see the Pa-Ah-Pa take on a more explicit township-level leadership role by coordinating the activities and budgets of other departments or taking on other local level executive functions. It is also possible that more executive responsibility will be handed to district or regional level bodies that oversee Pa-Ah-Pa in the future.

The NUG Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration and Ministry of Justice have also been developing a justice system, which includes remote and online elements and on-the-ground bodies for territories coming under their control. These include township-level justice committees formed by Ministry of Justice as well as union-level and more localised police forces tasked with local law enforcement and war crimes investigations. The justice system includes independent judges and committees, state prosecutors and detention facilities. This builds in some cases on local justice efforts initiated much earlier by community leaders, LDFs or other actors. The NUG justice system is very much still a work in progress and remains constrained by the security situation as well as capacity and resources constraints.

Local coalitions in Chin and Karenni States

In Chin and Karenni[5] States, dynamic coalitions of diverse revolutionary actors have emerged and are undertaking public administration activities. These include politicians elected to local constituencies, EROs, local political

parties, student activists, and CDM workers from varied sectors and civil society organisations. Both states have long-standing EROs that struggled to hold large territories before the attempted coup but have grown in stature since 2021, through intensive collaboration with their new coalitions. The KSCC and ICNCC were both established in the week prior to the formation of the union-level NUG, announcing that they would take the lead in political and governance affairs for their states. This effectively marked the formation of two autonomous states within an interim federal union that could co-exist with the NUG under a common framework.

In Karenni State, there has been significant coalition building at the state level through the KSCC, which includes multiple local parties, NLD politicians, multiple EROs, youth leaders, women's organisations and CDM representatives, among others. The most prominent ERO, which currently chairs the KSCC, is the KNPP. The KNPP formed a Karenni Government in the 1950s, which remains in place and operates in coordination with the KSCC.

The KSCC was established on 9 April 2021 (one week before NUG), with an announcement stating ambitions to form a "genuine federal state" and to practice self-determination. The statement also emphasised the goal of achieving national unity within the state, highlighting the KSCC's efforts to bring together a diverse set of political and armed factions, from the Kayah, Kayan and other local ethnic groups. Remarkably, the coalition includes numerous border guard forces and militia groups that had splintered away from resistance forces in earlier decades to support the Myanmar military.

On 18 April 2021, the KSCC welcomed the formation of the NUG and vowed to work together with the NUCC and NUG from the interim period until a federal democratic state could be achieved. Importantly however, the KSCC stated that it would lead the administration, legislative affairs, judiciary affairs for Karenni State during the interim period in partnership with NUCC and NUG. This set an important precedent for an ethnic state claiming local rights to political autonomy during the revolutionary period, under a legal framework compatible with that of the NUG.

At the time of writing, the KSCC is developing a framework for a Karenni State interim governing authority that will assume the state's responsibilities for the period while the war against the junta is ongoing. This has taken some time due to the multiplicity of actors and existing territorial arrangements in place. In the meantime, the council has been

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able to undertake a wide range of governance activities through a range of sub-committees.

Through its security and defence committee, the KSCC oversees the Karenni Nationalities Defence Force, a coalition of LDFs with 21 battalions under a single command. In February 2022, the KNDF announced that together with the KNPP, they control 90 per cent of Karenni State, having limited the junta troops to precarious garrison positions in the towns, dependent on airlifted supplies.

The security and defence committee also oversees the Karenni State Police, a newly formed service with around 300 personnel. Most members are former Myanmar police force officers, who joined the CDM. The KSP's founding documents and mission were developed in consultation with local civil society human rights organisations and it is envisaged as a service rather than a force. It has been receiving cases since mid-2021 and implemented a mechanism for processing and questioning all suspected informants apprehended by defence forces, to reduce arbitrary violence and killings. The KSP has also played an active role in investigating war crimes, identifying victims and facilitating the return of bodies among other important tasks.[6]

The KSCC also oversees state-level committees for education, healthcare, humanitarian assistance, defence and security, and alliance affairs. It has helped communities to reopen hundreds of schools across the state in addition to facilitating emergency assistance and other support. The Karenni Mobile Healthcare Committee has been active for many years as a coalition of ERO health wings from various organisations in the state. They have been able to deliver thousands of COVID-19 vaccines and, since the coup, provide critical primary healthcare services to IDPs and rural communities.

In Chin State, the most active coalitions focused on public administration are People's Administration bodies formed at the township level. These are essentially Pa-Ah-Pa but have been organised under local authority rather than the NUG, citing the 1948 Chin Act, which provides official recognition to customary Chin law and has never been repealed. Nonetheless, they have coordinated and cooperated closely with the NUG and some have received funding from the NUG budget.

The most active of these bodies have been in Mindat, Thantlang, Kanpetlet, among others. There are also strong Chin community initiatives in Kalay Township of Magwe Region. They have re-opened thousands of

schools across the township and have established police forces, agricultural departments and units for other key sectors. They tend to work in parallel with corresponding township level Chinland Defence Forces (CDFs) or other defence units.

At the state level, the ICNCC was formed on 13 April 2021 by elected MPs (all from the NLD), Chin political parties, the Chin National Front and civil society organisations (including youth and student activists). Each of these four blocs provides eighteen representatives and two co-chairs. In its founding statement, the ICNCC announced that it would establish an Interim Chin State Government to take care of administrative (executive), legislative and judicial affairs for the interim period. At the time of writing, this process is still ongoing as the ICNCC has received various proposals and is balancing the needs and perspectives of many groups, tribes and geographical differences within the state. In the meantime, the township administrations have begun increasingly coordinating and some state level boards and departments have been formed for certain areas of governance.

In October 2021, the Chinland Joint Defence Committee (CJDC) was formed to coordinate the defence forces in the region, including the Chin National Front's armed wing, the CDFs and the Chinland National Defence Force. The CJDF's headquarters is in the territory of the CNF and that group plays a leadership role. These forces collectively control the majority of territory in Chin State with certain townships around 80–90 per cent under the control of the resistance and the junta restricted to remote use of air strikes, artillery and the occasional dispatch of well defended armoured convoys.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE OUTCOME OF THE CIVIL WAR

In these final two sections, I will examine the implications of resistance political authority and governance for the objectives of the federal democracy movement. In line with the theoretical concepts introduced earlier, I will firstly discuss the importance of these governance systems for the ongoing struggle to defeat the military junta. In the following section, I will then discuss their potential to provide a foundation for a lasting federal democratic union that addresses the root causes of Myanmar's protracted conflicts and human rights crises.

So far, the NUG and LDFs have relied heavily on widespread popular support and huge sacrifices made by ordinary people and communities that refuse to go under military rule. This popular support will likely continue to be their primary strength. But, as observed by insurgent theorists such as Mao, Che, Nkrumah and Ahmad, as well as counterinsurgent theorists such as Fall, Petraeus and Kilcullen, long-term success will likely depend on this popular support being institutionalised in governance structures that cement a kind of two-way relationship between the revolutionaries and the general public. As Brenner (2019) notes, it is simplistic to view 'rebels' and 'civilians' as distinct rational actors in a kind of negotiation for mutual benefits. Nonetheless, governance systems and political authority clearly have huge practical value for armed resistance efforts, as proven by Myanmar's largely undefeatable EROs.

According to the FDC, this stage of the movement is the "interim" phase, with a focus on collaborating to defeat the junta. This will be followed by the implementation of a transitional constitution, while the final version of a permanent federal democratic constitution is negotiated. Interim governance arrangements are covered in the FDC, which establishes a basis for the NUG in addition to state governments and 'federal units', as well as autonomous state-level courts. The document also recognises customary law in ethnic areas and the existing justice and governance systems of EROs. However, the text is vague and most of these provisions are open to interpretation. In practice, numerous NUCC stakeholders remain unsure about the text and consider it to be a working document.

In the meantime, the NUG has de facto authority to lead local governance in Sagaing, Magwe and other areas considered majority Bamar, while ERO areas remain autonomous and the Chin and Karenni States are under the authority of their consultative councils. This has created a de facto arrangement that is similar to the 1947 constitution, whereby 'Myanmar proper' is governed by the central government (in this case, the NUG) while certain areas are official devolved to local governments. This coincidentally resembles the division of powers that exists in the United Kingdom, but is not really a federal structure. During the interim period, this may remain the most practical option for ensuring all resistance territories are under a common constitutional framework while allowing certain territories and communities to exercise self-determination.

Governance during the interim phase could be very important simply because this phase could be very long. Despite the focus on ending

dictatorship, there are urgent humanitarian, social and other crises that require a governance response and cannot wait. The primary task of these governance institutions will be to increase humanitarian aid to the hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people, in partnership with local humanitarian organisations. Over time, it is likely that provision of justice, local taxation and regulation of natural resources will also emerge as core functions of these actors, as has been the case for EROs for decades.

Each of these sectors provides opportunities for service-oriented approaches that will sustain the popularity of the resistance. But they also present risks that resistance organisations will abuse their power and get distracted by parochial or private interests at the expense of the public. These governance institutions will be shaped as much by the local communities and spontaneous organisations that have driven the revolution so far than the top-down leadership of the NUG or locally led coalitions. Sustained investment from the many revolutionary actors, from the general public and from the community of international Myanmar networks will be needed to ensure that governance institutions emerge that are beholden to the public interest.

The security situation will also have a major impact on the success of resistance governance systems. Without local administrators in place and lacking any trust or goodwill from the public, the junta has resorted to forcibly displacing entire populations from areas where the resistance is strong. This is extremely resource- and time-consuming for the SAC and is only possible in a few specific locations at a time, meaning that flexible and mobile local governance initiatives have huge space to provide services. However, the most immediate challenge for new resistance administration systems is the non-stop violent campaigns being meted out by the Myanmar military against women, men and children wherever the defence forces gain an upper hand. The SAC cannot re-establish control of these territories so it simply uses brute force to send them into disarray.

Another tool the junta will try to use to its advantage is the political economy. Its primary collaborators in conflict-affected regions across the country have long been those who can make money, whether that be through legitimate businesses that require stability or illegal entities that pay bribes for protection, like drug producers and traffickers or local gambling dens. It also includes legitimate business owners who depend on junta permissions for things like travelling across the country

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through checkpoints. Businesses and employees who rely on this kind of infrastructure appear to be among the few who do not outright reject SAC authority and provide it with taxes, fees and information. But their calculations are likely starting to change as PDFs exert increase control over roads and riverways.

The goal for resistance organisations will be to establish sufficient security so that people can return to their farms or jobs and schools can reopen. This will depend in large part on how much control the resistance can gain over major arteries, such as rivers like the Ayeryawaddy, Chindwin, Salween (Thanlwin) and Kaladan as well as strategic roadways like Kale-Gangaw-Taze, Loikaw-Taunggyi-Taungoo Hpapun-Hpa-an- Bilin and Monhyin-Myitkyina. Territorial control and security will likely not be a zero-sum outcome for a long time, with communities sporadically being displaced for days at a time and, in some cases, young and elderly relocating to more stable areas (deeper in resistance areas, into government-controlled towns) or across borders, while others stay to retain access to land and livelihoods. Eventually, we may see urban areas falling under the control of the resistance, opening up a whole new set of challenges and possibilities for these emerging governance systems.

Another important factor will be the evolution of civilian-military relations at various levels of the resistance movement. Stronger and more capable civilian governance bodies will be in a much better position ensure checks, balances and oversight to the PDFs. As seen in Karenni State and some EROs, military wings are likely more willing to come under unified command and civilian leadership in areas where there are capable and active civilian leaders providing a wide range of auxiliary functions for the benefit of local people and for the revolution writ large. Similarly, successful governance will require security bodies in the resistance to maintain distance from affairs that are not their direct responsibility.

International action or inaction will also be highly influential. CDM staff and other first responders at the local level are calling repeatedly for increase assistance that bypasses SAC and gets straight to the people who actually work with and lead in their communities. EROs and the NUG have also made proposals for an internationally mandated aid forum that can deliver aid via their institutions and pressure the SAC to allow humanitarian access. On the other hand, the SAC will likely become increasingly dependent on foreign military and development assistance

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in order to survive.

CAN RESISTANCE GOVERNANCE PROVIDE A FOUNDATION FOR FEDERAL DEMOCRACY?

What potential is there for resistance governance systems to support the creation of a lasting federal democratic union that balances power effectively between the various territories and national communities that inhabit it? It could be argued that Myanmar's endemic struggles with military rule, ingrained kleptocracy, and systematic human rights violations all stem from a central cleavage between the central state and the indigenous societies that surround it and maintain alternative national visions. The Myanmar military has long justified its dominant role in politics by framing itself as a guardian, without whom the country would break apart and descend into chaos (Egreteau 2016). Specifically, it has repeatedly argued that comprehensive constitutional reform can only take place when EROs have disbanded (Min Zin 2018). EROs, meanwhile have insisted that they will not even consider integration or disbandment without constitutional reform towards federalism that provides their people with self-determination.

This has created a vicious cycle of mutually-reinforcing trends. On the one hand is the state's tendency towards militarisation and centralisation. On the other, is the tendency of non-Bamar communities to invest in their own self-determination and their own governance and security institutions, outside of state control. These two trends reinforce each other in perpetuity. Federalism is regularly – and understandably – put forward as the solution to this problem, by ensuring a compromise between the desire for unity and the local demand for autonomy (Yawnghwe 1987; Sai Aung Tun 2009; Yawnghwe and Sakhong 2003; Sakhong 2010).

The NUCC and NUG have thus far focused their political vision on the promise of federal democracy as a means to solve this central problem and finally push the military out of politics at the same time. This will require an immense transformation to undo the legacy of colonialism and decades of military rule, which have constructed a state that is focused on centralised coercion and extraction, and which treats service and inclusion as afterthoughts.

Despite hopes embedded in the FDC that the revolution will come to a neat end and give way to an inclusive process of dialogue, it is also

quite possible that this 'interim' phase will drag on and that the most significant institutional developments will be those that emerge from the existing power dynamics on the ground (see South 2022). Myanmar may never have a single watershed moment when a blueprint constitutional document can be agreed by consensus, and the dilemma of unity versus self-determination can finally be solved so that harmony can finally reign. As has been the case in many ethnic areas since independence, it is quite possible that politics and governance in Myanmar will continue to be defined by contestation for many years. Peace and democracy will likely come, if at all, from the slow and painstaking process of building new institutions that can incrementally replace those of oppression and warfare.

Nonetheless, it could be argued that Myanmar sits at a critical juncture, as so many pre-coup institutions and embedded practices have broken down (see Collier and Collier 1991). It is therefore likely that new institutions and practices that take hold during this period will have lasting impacts on the politics of coming decades. Governance structures that emerge in the throes of revolution, however rudimentary, will be of crucial significance to the way that the country emerges from this period of turmoil (South 2022). For a sustainable federal system of government to emerge, it will be necessary for the constituent states to have significant infrastructural power relative to the centre (Ziblatt 2004; Breen 2018). If a core of proto-states emerge from this revolution with significant governance capacity and authority, and if they manage to develop a legal framework that connects them and maintains unity, the country will be on a firm footing for the negotiation of a permanent federal democratic system of government.

In summary, if the SAC continues to collapse, even if it does not conclusively lose for some time, the strength and nature of civilian interim administration will be a core determinant of the political future of the country. All later negotiations for constitutional reform will be shaped by the realities on the ground. In key parts of the country, the work has already begun of constructing new governments that are entirely separate from the coercive and extractive institutions which evolved through centuries of colonial and military rule. These could be the seeds of Myanmar's peaceful and democratic future.

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Notes

1 EROs refers to all ethnic-based armed resistance movements that are politically opposed to the military regime centred in Naypyitaw, regardless of whether they have ceasefires in place or whether or not they are explicitly aligned with the NUG. Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) was the most common English language term for these groups between 2013–2021, after it was agreed in the negotiations leading up the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. However, even during those negotiations, the ERO delegation stated a preference for including the term တော်လှန်ရေး, (which is usually translated as revolution, or sometimes resistance). This marker separates them from purely armed militant groups and from militia that are aligned with the Myanmar Armed Forces. Since 2021, EROs has become the term agreed among the various revolutionary forces and appears in the Federal Democracy Charter and other core documents. It also appears in position papers of the Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee that represents seven EROs, led by the United Wa State Party. Objectively, EROs is a more apt term than EAOs for armed organisations that engage in multi-dimensional resistance, including politics, governance, international diplomacy, mass mobilisation, and so on.

2 Some of the analysis in this chapter draws on earlier work by the author, which appeared in two unpublished papers, called "Brief 5: Gaining Ground: Local Administration by Resistance Actors in Myanmar", co-authored by Matthew Arnold and Kim Jolliffe in January 2022, and "Self-determination under an interim constitutional framework: Local administration in ethnic areas of Myanmar", co-authored by Naw Show Ei Ei Tun and Kim Jolliffe in June 2022. The author would like to thank Naw Show Ei Ei Tun and Matthew Arnold for the opportunity to collaborate on those earlier papers and for knowledge co-creation that contributed to this chapter.

3 'Revolution' is a more common translation but the FDC uses 'resistance'. I use both interchangeably.

4 This section provides a cursory overview of ERO administration systems. See existing research by this author and others: Jolliffe 2015; Davis and Jolliffe 2016; Jolliffe and McCartan 2016; Jolliffe 2017; South 2017; Saferworld 2019; Brenner 2019; Kyed 2020; Ong 2020; South 2022.

5 Karenni State refers to the territory of the independent Karenni kingdom that existed until Myanmar's independence under a treaty to the United Kingdom. It corresponds to all of Kayah State, plus some adjacent parts of Shan State. It is still recognised by the KNPP and KSCC and forms the basis for their administration systems.

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6 For example, the KSP played a central role in identifying victims and assisting body return and funeral arrangements following the Moso Christmas Eve Massacre of 2021. The KSP is investigating and collecting evidence on the case for future trial. See https://www.mizzima.com/article/karenni-police-confirm-details-christmas-eve-massacre (accessed 10 February 2023).

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