

Political Constraints and Youth Participation in Civil Society Organizations after Myanmar's 2021 Military Coup: A Case Study of Mon State.

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Abstract

The 2021 military coup marked Myanmar's most significant political rupture since 2010, transforming its civic and political landscape. Youths emerged at the forefront of protests and resistance, while simultaneously becoming the primary targets of repression. Alongside this, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) mobilized to deliver essential services, ranging from education and healthcare to disaster relief and humanitarian aid despite mounting restrictions. Being that the participation of youths in CSOs have been challenged by authoritarian regime due to political repression towards those specific groups. This study investigates the centrality of youth participation in CSOs and its implications for community development in Mon State. Employing a qualitative approach, in-depth interviews with seven participants reveal that bureaucratic barriers, the enforcement of military conscription, and widespread curtailment of freedoms have severely undermined youth engagement. Consequently, CSOs faced declining public trust, reduced effectiveness in awareness campaigns, weakened program implementation, and in some cases, forced relocation. The findings demonstrate that post-coup political constraints have not only narrowed the space for youth activism but also impaired CSO capacity to sustain community-oriented initiatives. The study concludes by advancing recommendations aimed at strengthening youth involvement and reinforcing the resilience of CSOs under authoritarian conditions.