

Climate Governance Beyond the State: Environmental Authority and Revolutionary Governance in Post-Coup Myanmar

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Abstract

Dominant climate adaptation and environmental governance frameworks are largely state-centric, assuming coherent territorial authority and stable institutions capable of managing climate risk. Post-coup Myanmar challenges these assumptions. The 2021 military coup thrust Myanmar into a profound crisis, characterized by a political stalemate, multiple armed conflicts, and fragmented governance. A landscape of plural climate governance emerged, in which Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (EROs), People's Defence Forces (PDFs), Local Defence Forces (LDFs), civil society organizations, and the National Unity Government (NUG) increasingly exercise environmental and administrative authority across liberated territories.

This paper examines how climate-related risks are governed in ERO and NUG-administered territories, where conflict, displacement, environmental degradation, and rising temperatures converge. The paper pays attention to how resistance governance structures respond to escalating climate threats, including heatwaves, floods, cyclones, droughts, and environmental degradation, amid ongoing armed conflict and displacement. Heat will be treated as one site through which fragmented climate governance becomes legible as it has emerged as a particularly lethal yet understudied hazard. Three questions will be explored: (1) What are the specific climate change risks prioritized by resistance actors? (2) How are resistance governance actors responding to climate threats, such as extreme heat, flooding, and drought? (3) What does Myanmar reveal about the limitations of state-centric climate governance frameworks in conflict-affected settings? Drawing on documentary analysis and qualitative interviews with resistance authorities and community leaders, this paper will attempt to illuminate strategies of adaptation and social protection in areas beyond junta control.

In some regions, namely Karen, Kachin, Karenni, and Mon States, EROs have begun integrating environmental protection, land governance, and natural resource management into their institutional frameworks. The paper will expand Elinor Ostrom's conceptualization of polycentric climate adaptation to fragile, conflict-affected contexts. Building decentralized climate governance frameworks provides a vision for a more inclusive and climate-resilient federal Myanmar.