

Political Participation and Minority Rights within the Current Revolutionary Political Leading Institutions: A Study of Sagaing, Karenni, and Tanintharyi

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Abstract

Political institutions gained power after the Spring Revolution of 2021, which saw a shift in political agendas from Burman-dominant so-called democratization to federal units, and in response to the military.

This research examines three groups at three stages of political institutional development: one well-established (Karenni State), one newly established (Sagaing Federal Unit), and one emerging (Tanintharyi Region). Significantly, all of these regions claim to practice the principles of a federal democracy, defined in this paper as a political system in which governing power originates with the states. These case studies more accurately reflect the current status of minority rights in the regions and minority political participation within political institutions that claim to practice federal democratic principles. The research question is: Can self-governing institutions and their legal documents guarantee the minority rights and political participation of ethnic and religious minority groups within their state or federal unit?

A qualitative approach was used, with semi-structured interviews conducted with nine participants selected through purposive sampling: three political institution representatives from three federal units and three ethnic and three religious minority leaders/activists. The findings reveal gaps between the priorities of minority communities and those of political institutions, particularly regarding representation, inclusion, and decision-making processes. The study also highlights the challenges minority groups face in accessing political spaces and shaping federal arrangements. By providing evidence for policy and constitution-drafting processes in the post-coup period through the lens of minority groups from the three emerging federal units, this research contributes to minority rights and minority political participation in federal contexts.