

Resource Extraction and the Post-Coup Armed Conflict: A Case Study of Gold Mining in Indawgyi, Kachin State, Myanmar

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Abstract

The study examines how shifting territorial authority in post-coup Myanmar restructures access to, control over, and benefits from gold mining in Indawgyi, Kachin State. In post-coup Myanmar, the collapse of centralized governance and the expansion of territorial control by both state and non-state armed actors have intensified competition over resource-rich landscapes and the rapid expansion of unregulated mining activities. As a highly valuable and lootable resource, gold has become source of revenue for various actors, shaping patterns of conflict, governance, and economic accumulation.

Drawing on political ecology and the concept of armed capitalism while engaging with debates on the resource curse, this research explores how resource extraction becomes intertwined with conflict, coercion, and territorial control, and how economic accumulation is shaped through competing governance arrangements. Rather than treating resource extraction as a consequence of state collapse, this study demonstrates how competing systems of territorial authority actively reshape resource governance, and environmental outcomes in conflict-affected areas. Moreover, it examines the impacts of these processes on local communities, particularly land dispossession, environmental harm, and resistance strategies.

Drawing on qualitative methods, including ethnographic interviews, and life histories with affected community members, local leaders, activists, and relevant stakeholders, the study investigates lived experiences of resource extraction and conflict. The primary data will be complemented by secondary sources, including academic literature, reports, and relevant documentation. Data will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns related to resource governance, armed actor involvement, environmental change, and community experiences.

This thesis argues that armed conflict and ecological precarity in Kachin are not simply consequences of 2021 military coup, but from enduring struggles over territory, resources, and authority.

By examining the interaction of territorial authority, resource governance, and armed capitalism, the study contributes to broader debates on conflict resources, environmental governance, and political ecology in conflict-affected settings.