

The Kachin Independence Organization/army's Re-Governance

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Abstract

In the post-coup crisis, Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) have massively expanded their territorial control in Myanmar. But how do they govern populations that have previously lived under the rule of the Myanmar state or its aligned militias? What competing pressures do they face in such situations of “re-governance”? And how do they compare with the governance challenges in territories that they have governed before? We explore these questions through a deep dive into Chipwi Township that the Kachin Independence Organization/Army (KIO/A) seized from a junta-aligned Border Guard Force in 2023. This locality crystallises some urgent EAO re-governance challenges: relations between the KIO/A and ethnically heterogeneous local communities in Chipwe have historically been marked by mistrust, and Chipwe has emerged as a key mining site for strategic rare earth metals, including all its destructive environmental and societal side effects. Based on key informant interviews with local community leaders, we find that despite the KIO/A's attempt to navigate such challenges, the organisation's focus on economic governance of resources at the expense of other governance spheres in Chipwe heightens problems of legitimate authority building in this situation of re-governance. This example suggests that the rapid expansion of EAO governance has created new core-periphery dynamics within EAO territories, which EAOs must address for creating durable political orders.