

Sub-National Governance of Ah Nyar: What Does It Mean for Burma?

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Abstract

Since the 2021 military coup, central Burma — locally known as Ah Nyar, comprising Sagaing, Mandalay and Magway — has evolved from a resistance stronghold into an emerging site of sub-national governance experimentation. While much scholarly and policy attention has focused on armed resistance and elite-level political negotiations, less attention has been paid to the institutional developments in the region. The recent formation of federal unit governments in these regions signals a significant shift from resistance mobilisation to governance construction under conflict conditions. This paper examines the meaning and implications of sub-national governance in Ah Nyar for Burma's wider political landscape. It asks three core questions: What constitutes sub-national governance in a revolutionary context? To what extent do these emerging authorities reflect bottom-up federal aspirations? And how might they reshape the balance between central revolutionary actors, ethnic armed organisations, and local political networks? Based on field-based insights, political analysis, and institutional mapping, the paper argues that sub-national governance in Ah Nyar represents both an opportunity and a risk. On the one hand, it signals a practical move towards decentralised federalism, potentially strengthening local legitimacy, service delivery, and civilian protection mechanisms. On the other hand, fragmented authority structures, unclear mandates, and limited coordination with national-level actors may generate new tensions within the resistance landscape. Ultimately, the landscape of Ah Nyar's governance experiment may shape not only the structure of the Spring Revolution but also the architecture of a future federal union. Understanding these developments is therefore essential for policymakers, civil society actors, and international partners seeking to engage constructively with Burma's evolving political order.