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# Persistent Online Scam Operations in Myanmar Despite Dismantling Efforts: Fragmented Authority, Structural Drivers, and the Limits of Nationwide Enforcement

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**Abstract**

Online scam operations along the Myanmar borderlands have increasingly attracted regional and international attention due to links with cyber fraud, human trafficking, forced labor, and transnational organized crime. Since 2023, multiple actors, including Myanmar military authorities, ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), neighboring governments, and international actors such as China and the United States, have launched crackdowns targeting major scam compounds in areas such as Shwe Kokko, KK Park, and the Myanmar–Thailand borderlands. Despite these efforts, scam operations continue to persist, relocate, and adapt across Myanmar, including in Kayin, Mon, and Shan States, as well as Yangon and Mandalay.

Existing studies on scam operations in Myanmar focus on human trafficking, cyber fraud networks, border criminality, and armed actors in illicit economies. However, limited attention has been given to why repeated enforcement efforts fail to produce long-term disruption. This paper addresses that gap by examining structural conditions that enable scam networks to persist despite crackdowns and international pressure. This paper argues that enforcement-focused efforts fail because they do not address the political, economic, and territorial conditions sustaining scam operations. Rather than disappearing, scam networks adapt through geographic displacement, protection arrangements with armed actors, technological flexibility, and transnational financial systems. Meanwhile, worsening economic insecurity and limited employment opportunities in Myanmar continue to generate a vulnerable labor supply for scam-related work and cross-border recruitment.

Drawing on fragmented sovereignty, conflict political economy, and protection economies, this study examines why repeated crackdowns produce disruption without eradication. The research uses qualitative methods, including analysis of news reports, policy papers, academic literature, and interviews with individuals involved in scam networks and researchers focusing on scam operations. The paper contributes by shifting focus from enforcement outcomes to the structural conditions sustaining scam economies, highlighting the limits of state-centered approaches in contexts of conflict, fragmented governance, and transnational criminal networks.