

PANEL

A New Look at Long Wars: The Roles of Security Sector Reforms and (II) Liberal Governance in Myanmar's Conflict Duration

Convener

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Panel Description

Myanmar's status as one of the world's longest-running civil wars makes it an outlier among civil wars. Despite its import in studies of conflict duration and complexity, Myanmar remains marginalized in broader academic debates on civil war dynamics. This relative exclusion of Myanmar and other "forgotten wars" has led scholars to raise concerns about biases in conflict studies and questions about whether dominant theoretical frameworks adequately capture or explain the protracted nature of Myanmar's conflicts. Misdiagnosing the sources of conflict persistence risks undermining prospects for durable peace and conflict resolution.

This panel brings together scholar-practitioners to address gaps and biases in existing approaches to civil war duration by examining alternative perspectives on conflict dynamics in Myanmar. It offers new approaches for considering the persistence of violence by critically engaging with process of governance and security sector reforms.

Rather than contrasting Myanmar's lengthy conflicts with civil wars in other places, this panel zooms in on certain under-represented aspects of Myanmar itself. Departing from conventional state-centric approaches, the panel examines the interactions among communities, security sector reforms (SSR), and good governance initiatives across diverse segments of society in Myanmar. It explores how they can both reshape and obscure local power relations, social dynamics, and everyday experiences of insecurity.

In doing so, the panel takes a critical approach to concepts of security sector reforms, peace building and good governance initiatives. Such initiatives are often viewed as benign and stabilizing. However, this perspective is often guided by the assumption that these reforms take place under the aegis of a liberal political order. This study considers changes under an illiberal regime, and is situated in a moment of seismic, global rupture within the conventional liberal order.

The panel opens with a historical and conceptual analysis of conflict duration in Myanmar, focusing on transformations in the security sector and their implications for community security and conflict resurgence. A second presentation examines the relationship between liberal governance interventions and security sector reform in Myanmar, exploring connections between billions of dollars in "good governance" reforms and the evolving security landscape. A third presentation considers the political and practical challenges for conflict resolution in Central Myanmar, assessing how security sector reform processes interact with local armed actors and conflict economies. By examining the impacts of

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governance and security sector reform, the panel aims to offer new perspectives on why civil war persists in Myanmar and what this means for the future of security sector reform and conflict transformation.