

The background of the entire page is a piece of black fabric with intricate, colorful geometric patterns. These patterns consist of repeating rows of small, multi-colored shapes (diamonds, squares, and crosses) in shades of pink, blue, green, and yellow. At the bottom of the fabric, there are several horizontal fringes made of black threads. The text is centered on a white rectangular box with a blue border.

Peace and Prospects of Federalism for the Chin Community in Myanmar

June, 2023

A collaborative study between McMaster University and the Institute of Chin Affairs Inc. (ICA)

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List of acronyms

AA	- Arakan Army
CBCUSA	- Chin Baptist Churches USA
CCCA	- Chin Christian Council in Australia
CDF	- Chinland Defense Force
CDM	- Civil Disobedient Movement
CHRO	- Chin Human Rights Organization
CJDC	- Chin Joint Defense Committee
CNDF	- Chin National Defense Force
CNF	- Chin National Front
CRCM	- Chin Relief Committee in Mizoram
CRPH	- Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw
CRS	- Catholic Relief Service
CSO	- Civil Society Organization
EAO	- Ethnic Armed Organization
FDC	- Federal Democracy Charter
GCHRC	- Global Chin Humanitarian and Relief Committee
GSCC	- General Strike Collaboration Committee
ICA	- Institute of Chin Affairs
ICNCC	- Interim Chin National Consultative Council
IDP	- Internally Displaced People
IDRC	- International Development Research Centre
KPICT	- Kachin Political Interim Coordination Team
KSCC	- Karenni State Consultative Council
MSICC	- Mon State Interim Coordination Committee
MSU	- Mizoram Student Union
NLD	- National League for Democracy
NUCC	- National Unity Consultative Council
NUG	- National Unity Government
SSNUG	- Southern Shan National Unity Government
TPCC	- Ta'ang Political Consultative Committee
USDP	- Union Solidarity and Development Party
YMA	- Young Mizo Association
ZAR	- Zomi Revolutionary Army

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Introduction

The revolutionary forces, including armed groups, activists, and politicians, as well as Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), have frequently advocated for the establishment of a federal democratic union during Myanmar's post-coup period in 2021 (Raynaud 2021; Su Mon Thazin Aung 2022; Htet Min Lwin 2022). There are two reasons for the revival of the federal union dream in Myanmar after the military coup. First, after witnessing the military's brutality and oppression during the uprisings, the Bamar¹, the majority ethnicity of the country, have become more aware of injustices against ethnic minorities and the need for power decentralization (King 2022). Second, anti-dictatorship forces recognized the need of unity of resistance groups in their struggle against more than 60 years of military rule (Ong 2021; Me Me Khat 2022).

In this regard, all political actors still need to gain a consensus on identifying power distribution, territory division, and common languages of each ethnicity and redefining ethnic groups to offset the inconsistencies caused by categorizing 135 races. At the same time, the post-coup political dialogues among different ethnic revolutionary forces have been expected to foster trust between ethnic majority and minority groups. In the past, the military rulers gave the false hope of creating a federal union, which harmed relations with ethnic minorities and fuelled the vicious cycle of armed conflicts. The military framed the ethnic minorities' demands for 'self-determination' and 'self-administration' under 'federalism' as the 'disintegration of the union' (Raynaud 2021). However, the military group exploited the term 'federalism' and ethnic matters to ease tensions. Consequently, the ethnic minorities were cautious about the words 'non-disintegration of the Union,' 'non-disintegration of the national solidarity,' and 'perpetuation of national sovereignty' as the former peace treaties favoured the increase of military supremacy and Bamar dominance, instead of bringing equal rights and justice among all nationalities (International Crisis Group 2020; Taylor 2017).

After the seizure of power by the military on February 1, 2021, the National Unity Government (NUG), which is the parallel government of the military regime, strengthened its alliance with ethnic political organizations and armed groups to overthrow the dictatorship. The Federal Democracy Charter (FDC), announced by anti-coup forces on March 31, 2021, is particularly significant in this regard. The National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC),² the wing of

¹ According to the 2014 census, Myanmar has 135 races under the major eight ethnic groups, which include Kachin (1.5%), Kayah (Karenni) (1.83%), Karen (7%), Chin (2.5%), Mon (2%), Bamar (68%), Rakhine (4%) and Shan (9%). However, the list is controversial and inconsistent, due to miscalculation, duplication and exclusion of certain groups (International Crisis Group 2020)

² The elected parliamentarians of the National League for Democracy (NLD) founded the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) in protest two days after the military coup. On April 16, 2021, the CRPH constituted the National Unity Government (NUG), which included some NLD members and representatives from other political parties and civil society organizations. The National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC), made up of elected legislators, representatives from armed groups and ethnic parties, and leaders of the Civil Disobedient Movement, was then established to support the creation of more inclusive political dialogue platforms to establish federalism.

NUG, called the first People's Assembly from January 27 to 29, 2022, and ratified the charter;³ then, released a revised version in March 2022. The "Pledge to Build the Federal Democratic Union" in Chapter 12 of the Charter ratifies "federal vision, values, aims, and objectives" (South 2022).

In the political dialogues initiated one month after the coup, the majority groups showed their stance on cultural, religious, and administrative autonomy and committed to ensuring equal rights and justice for ethnic minorities to establish a federal union (Htet Min Lwin 2022). This applies not only to relations between the Bamar and other ethnic groups but also between the dominant race and underrepresented tribes within each ethnic state. The NUG and other political actors advanced both the negotiations to create a Federal Constitution and the armed struggles from a defensive war to a historic armed revolution within one year of the military takeover (Ye Myo Hein 2022). Accordingly, each ethnic group must take into account how they practice intra-state federalism, notably power-sharing with the minority groups when the federal democratic union is founded in the future (Bisarya 2020; South 2021).

Case selection: The establishment of federal democracy is one of the biggest dreams of the political actors, but the approaches and interpretations of federalism may differ among the groups based on their needs, gaps, existing resources, and diverse background within their ethnic regions. Chin is the most diverse ethnic group in Myanmar as it has 53 subtribes, according to the 2014 census. Thus, it is the most appropriate group to be investigated to understand the existing political and ideological leadership of their respective leaders and the Interim Chin National Consultative Council (ICNCC) in building a federal union. The Chin people might encounter challenges during the post-armed revolution and rehabilitation and resettlement phase since their region is the least developed in the nation. On the other hand, there has been an increase in the number of refugees going to India and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) as a result of fierce armed conflicts. The diverse subtribes in Chin State, mirroring the broader ethnic composition of Myanmar, have engaged in negotiations and solidarity dialogues with different groups to foster consensus for nation-building. A study about their encountered challenges and employed coping mechanisms in the nation-building process provides valuable insights into the wider contextual understanding of Myanmar as a whole.

Objective of the study: This study aims to explore how the Chin leaders and CSOs have supported Chin diasporas, investigate the progress of political dialogues among different Chin tribes, and advocate political representation for Chin under the federalism framework. The study mainly investigates 'How have the political and community leaders effectively accommodated the Chin community during the civil resistance, in terms of addressing the emergency needs, and leading in the establishment of a federal union with meaningful participation of the Chin community?'

³ The first draft of the Federal Democratic Charter (FDC) highlights common ideals and principles for creating a peaceful and prosperous Federal Union, supporting ethnic communities' claims to self-determination, and establishing the interim government (NUG) and coordinating body (NUCC). The amended version of FDC strongly endorses the function of NUCC as the primary organization for assembling and carrying out decisions of a People's Assembly, specifically to establish "Interim Constitutional Arrangements" and to develop and endorse a Federal Democratic Constitution.

Research method: For this report, we used a qualitative research method to collect, document and analyze data on the Chin community and refugees displaced by the coup. The study began with a desk review and an archival historical analysis on the Chin community's political participation in Myanmar since the country's independence. Further, the lead researcher, Aye Lei Tun, conducted 13 elite interviews with key Chin political leaders, activists, community leaders and NGO workers based in Mizoram, with approximately 30% of women and youths. In term of ethnic composition, the participants came from different subgroups of Chin including Falam, Paletwa, Mindat, Hakha and Mizo tribes. (See Annex 1 for the demographics of the participants and Annex 2 for interview questions.)

We initiated the study since June 2022; however, started field data collection through interviews from December 13 to 20 in Aizawl, Mizoram State, India. This is a collaboration project between McMaster University and the Institute of Chin Affairs Inc. (ICA). This study is also supported by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) through ICA Inc.⁴ As part of the project, the lead researcher conducted a 2.5-day training for five young fellows of ICA Inc., providing instruction in basic research methods. This training covered topics such as the nature of social science research, interviewing, listening and observation techniques, as well as research ethical guidelines. The McMaster University Research Ethics Board reviewed the study for ethics clearance.

Organization of the report: This report comprises three sections: literature review, findings, and conclusion. The first section of the literature review discusses the federalism debates in Myanmar in a broader sense, while the second section focuses specifically on the political struggles of the Chin people and their participation in the post-coup armed resistance. In the finding session, we analyzed the responses from elite interviews. The concluding section engages the ongoing processes and discussions for establishing the federal union of Myanmar.

⁴ The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of IDRC or its Board of Governors.

1. Literature review

1.1. Federalism as a tool for peace and democracy in Myanmar

The fundamental idea of federalism emphasizes the interconnections both inside and between the states as well as those between the federal government and them (Gamper 2005). In a broader sense, federalism is the idea that each ethnic community will be able to exercise autonomy in its own area or administration when political and administrative power is transferred from the federal government to ethnic minority organizations at the state or regional level (Alber and Breen 2020). More clearly, the basic concept of federalism is that it permits different divisions to operate independently while collaborating as a whole.

Typically, there are two alternative approaches to describing federal states (Gamper 2005). The first approach focuses on hierarchical composition, statehood, and sovereignty. In this approach, federalism requires to distinguish between the statehood of federal states and constituent units to avoid confederalism. Constituent units exercise state power within constitutional limits, lacking full external sovereignty. Limited external powers align with federalism. Internal sovereignty distinguishes the self-determination of a constituent unit and state power delegated by the federal constitution (Gamper 2005, 1301-1302).

The second approach examines the institutional components within federal states. Key elements inherent in every federal state include the distribution of powers, participation of constituent units in central legislation, constitutional autonomy, fiscal equalization, and intergovernmental instruments. Upon closer examination, the distribution of powers and participation of constituent units in central legislation emerges as the essential elements. Constitutional autonomy and autonomous taxation rights are part of the distribution of powers, which also involves intergovernmental cooperation and coordination to address competence conflicts. (Gamper 2005, 1306). Thus, the core tenant of federalism is power-sharing between the central government and another political unit, such as a state or province, while a written constitution, bicameralism, equal or disproportionately strong representation of the smaller component units in the federal chamber, decentralized government, and the right of the component units to be involved in the process of amending the federal constitution but to change their own constitutions unilaterally are regarded essential elements (Lijphart 1979, 502).

According to federalism debates in Myanmar, the political stakeholders consider 'federalism' as a mean to ease ethnic tensions and a tool for nation-building to concentrate power in the hands of the dominant group and the unequal treatment of marginalized communities throughout history (Breen and He 2019; Silverstein 2002; Lian H. Sakhong 2005; Crouch 2020; South 2021). In retrospect, General Aung San convinced the ethnic groups, including Chin, to sign the Panglong Agreement to establish a union and recognized the treaty by the 1947 constitutional arrangement during the independence struggle. The Panglong Agreement granted the political rights of all ethnicities, particularly the rights to self-determination, as it was founded on mutual recognition, respect, equal rights and voluntary association. Along with the right to voluntary association, Chapter (8) of the Panglong Agreement also acknowledged

the right to secede from the Union if the ethnic groups no longer desired to be absorbed into it; yet, this right may not be exercised within ten years of the effective date of this constitution.

The essence of the Panglong agreement was abandoned following General Aung San's assassination, leaving ethnic minorities in a subordinate position rather than as equal partners and denying them the right to self-determination (Kipgen 2018). In 1962, General Ne Win seized control on the grounds that federalism, the right to self-determination, and the right to secession endangered the union's integration and sovereignty. As a result of losing the Panglong spirit, the country was thrown into sixty years of armed strife between the military and the ethnic insurgencies. In this regard, the political dilemma of Myanmar comprises both a constitutional concern and an ideological struggle between military dictatorship and democracy (Sakhong 2003; Williams and Sakhong 2005; Bawi 2015).

Consequently, the political actors debated on the central question, 'What type of federalism would be ideal for Myanmar?' Most obviously, the scholars mainly debated whether Myanmar should be based on symmetric or asymmetric federalism, dual or cooperative federalism, and territorial-based or non-territorial federalism (Kipgen 2018; Breen and He 2019; Raynaud 2021). According to definitions of different scholars, symmetric federalism grants all of the federation's members equal power, whereas an asymmetrical system enables each member state of the union to have different powers depending on their own needs. In dual federalism, it gives the federal government more power than individual states, but both have well-defined domains of authority that do not interfere with one another. In contrast, the cooperative system provides the federal and state governments with equal power distribution and allows them to work together on specific concerns. Furthermore, territorial federalism refers to the division of authority among territorial entities when a state or federation is composed of territorial sub-units; however, non-territorial federalism is considered when different ethnic groups are dispersed throughout various geographical areas (Rosenthal and Hoefler 1989; Watts 1998; Gamper 2005; Keating 2014).

Based on ethnic demands for 'reserved territories' or 'autonomous regions' in the previous peace conferences (2010-2020), the scholars advocated asymmetric territorial arrangements as an ideal approach for ethnic issues in Myanmar (Raynaud 2021; South 2021). However, ethnic essentialism, which relies on the controversial list of 135 races and the naming of territories after ethnicities (excluding the dominant Bamar group), has led to a crisis in the federalism debate in Myanmar, as it overlooks mixed-ethnicity issue and intra-group dynamics (South 2021).

1.2. Background

1.2.1. The Chinland before and after the independence

In the pre-colonial era, the Chin people who lived northwest of Myanmar and on the border with Bangladesh and India controlled their territory as sovereign chiefdoms. In 1896, The British adopted the Chinland/ Chinram Constitution, commonly referred to as the "Chin Hills Regulation," which encompassed the current Chin State in Myanmar as well as parts of the

Indian states of Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland (Sakhong 2003). The Chin land, a previously autonomous region, became the part of the union of Burma (Myanmar) after the independence due to the Panglong Agreement (Williams and Sakhong 2005).

In 1988, under the military regime, the Chin National Front (CNF) was founded in Mizoram, India, and fought in low-intensity combat with the Myanmar military; then, they signed a bilateral truce for a ceasefire with the military in 2012 (Fishbein 2023). During the political transition period (2010-2020), Chin political leaders established political parties bearing their ethnic name, including Chin National League for Democracy Party, Chin National Democratic Party, Chin National Party, Chin Progressive Party, Asho Chin National Party, Zomi Congress for Democracy and Mro Party⁵ to represent the interest of Chin people. In the elections of 2010, 2015 and 2020, the candidates from the Chin-based parties had to run against other Chin candidates from major political parties, such as the National League for Democracy (NLD) and Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). Unlike the Chin-based parties, which are rooted in a single ethnic identity, the NLD and USDP comprise candidates from various ethnic backgrounds. The NLD candidates for Chin representatives won by a wide margin in the Chin constituencies in the elections of 2015 and 2020, as opposed to candidates for Chin-based parties (TNI 2020).

Chin State is one of Myanmar's least-developed regions as the central government has continuously barred it from socio-economic development and resource distribution (Bawi 2015). In addition to the poor living conditions, the armed-conflict between the military and the Arakan Army (AA) resulted in the displacement of 58,000 people along the Chin-Rakhine State border until 2020 (Khai 2022). Further, the Chin people frequently had border disputes with the neighboring state, Rakhine.

1.2.2. Chin State in the post-coup

Following the coup d'etat on 1 Feb 2021, the Chin people peacefully protested in the streets against the military dictatorship. Despite their dire socioeconomic circumstances and mounting pressure from the senior staff, more than 70% of government employees from Chin State joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) (Khai 2022). Within seven months of the coup, nearly 30,000 Chin people sought refuge in the neighboring Mizoram State of India, while an estimated 20,000 Chin were internally displaced in their region. The Myanmar military purposefully stopped all humanitarian aid from reaching internally displaced people (IDPs) in Chin State (Chin Human Rights Organization 2021). In 2021, there have reportedly been over 184 armed clashes between the military and the Chin defense forces (The Irrawaddy 2022). The Myanmar military has destroyed 7,973 civilian dwellings in 222 different sites as of March 31, 2022. Chin ranked the third-highest number of homes burned in the country, as more than 1,130 homes were destroyed (Chin Human Rights Organization 2021). As of April 9, 2022, the continued military atrocities against civilians and the destruction of civilian property since the

⁵ Asho, Zomi and Mro are the subgroups of Chin, according to the 2014 Census.

coup forced over 20 % of Chin, or 67,932 people including 30 ousted state and federal lawmakers, to displace near the border, particularly in India's Mizoram State (Khai 2022).

Although the number of Chin refugees increased in India, the government kept silent on the fleeing refugees and refused to take them in. Instead, due to India's non-ratification of the 1951 National Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) issued two letters of advisory in March 2021 to four states bordering Myanmar, including Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, and Manipur, instructing them to identify and deport Myanmar refugees (Purayil and Purayil 2022). Though the state government of Manipur attempted to deport refugees, the Mizoram government accepted and allocated them to nine major camps in Zawng Ling, Lawng Tlai, Lunglei, Nei Aw Tla, Lung Hli Tum, Aizawl, Hna Thial, Chapi and Phai Rawng (Chinai 2022). The community and religious-based organizations such as the Young Mizo Association and the Mizo Baptist Church provided some educational support to schooling refugees (Cing 2022). The NUG and the Chin organizations urged the Indian government and international NGOs to provide more humanitarian aid to the refugees from Myanmar (Bhattacharjee 2022; Gerin 2022).

Furthermore, the Chin National Front (CNF), which broke the ceasefire agreement and later allied themselves with the country's more significant pro-democracy movement, supported their collaborator, the Chinland Defense Force (CDF). The CDF was the collective force of Chin armed groups which were formed in April 2021 based in townships. Since then, the factions have been involved in fierce combat with junta forces and have seized a substantial part of the countryside (Ghoshal and Chanchinmawia 2021; Fishbein 2023). Afterward, the CDF and the CNF established the Chin Joint Defense Committee (CJDC) to coordinate all Chin-armed groups.

The Chin have also mobilized on the political front, creating an Interim Chin National Consultative Committee (ICNCC) to prepare state-level policies and represent the Chin political goals at the union level. At the township level, the Chin also set up "public administrations" in some areas that the military government could no longer control (Fishbein 2023). The ICNCC was formed with four groups in Chin state: the CNF, which represented the armed groups; the representatives from the political parties; the elected MPs; and the community-based groups, including the CSOs (women group, youth groups) and Civil Disobedient Movement (CDM) supporting teams (Benezer 2021). The ICNCC allied with the NUG and the NUCC to develop a federal constitution, while the CJDC allied with the NUG's Ministry of Defense (MoD).

Alongside the Chin resistance, the Chin people have discussed to create an independent "Chinland" and to continue drafting the Chinland Constitution.⁶ Despite sharing this objective, the Chin people have struggled to unite due to internal diversity, harsh geography, and

⁶ The Chin Forum, organized in 2008, developed the fifth initial draft of the Chinland Constitution. The draft Constitution had room for flexibility, but it also had to support freedom and democracy across the many dialectal and geographic traditional jurisdictions of Chin culture.

convoluted history. Along with historically high levels of collaboration, there have also been growing pains in the integration of allied Chin forces, tense disagreements, and violent episodes involving some armed factions outside the main Chin alliance (Thang 2022; Fishbein 2023). Chin politics is actively seeking to establish a collective Chin national identity that safeguards its rich cultural traditions, language, and beliefs. However, this quest is complicated because Chin politics simultaneously promotes and defends a national identity based on specific tribal affiliations (Bawi 2015). The presence of 53 subtribes within Chin State further complicates efforts to pinpoint a distinct cultural character and language for this identity.⁷

2. Findings

2.1. The role of Chin CSOs after the coup

The findings indicated that the CSOs in the Myanmar Spring Revolution performed two crucial roles: first, in providing humanitarian aid to the people affected by the armed conflicts through trustworthy local groups, and second, in facilitating the process of drafting the federal charter and interim constitution.

However, the military's ruthless crackdown after the coup has made it difficult for humanitarian based CSOs to deliver essential services to those in need, while political persecution and a financing crisis have posed an imminent threat. Moreover, political or apolitical CSOs were under pressure from more onerous laws, surveillance, and self-censorship (Mercado 2022). The Frontier Myanmar's post-coup report, which highlights an unpublished national survey of 68 CSOs conducted in May 2021, states that 69% of those organizations had their operations negatively impacted, with 32% having to work in a reduced capacity, 21% having closed, and 16% having suspended their operations (Liu 2021). CSOs have struggled with deciding whether to keep registering under the junta administration or cease. They do not want to endorse the junta's rule, but they also do not want to interfere with their ongoing community development initiatives. Worse, since the coup, CSO activists have been targeted for arrest and repression since the State Administration Council (SAC) of the military government does not trust them. This is because CSO members helped spark the civil insurrection in the early days of the coup.

“After hearing of the coup, everyone was unsure what to do, so they let things unfold. On the third day of the coup, Dr.Tayzar San, from a Mandalay-based CSO, initiated the

⁷ The list of the 53 Chin subtribes: Meithei, Kathe, Saline, Ka-Lin-Kaw, Khumi, Mro-Khimi, Khawno, Kaungso, Kaung Saing Chin, Kwelshin (Khualsim), Kwangli (Sim), Gunte people (Lyente; Falam), Gwete (Guite), Ngorn (Chin, Ngawn), Siyin (Sizzang), Sentang, Saing Zan, Za-How (Zahau), Zotung, Zo-Pe, Zo, Zanniat (Zanniet), Tapong, Tiddim (Hai-Dim), Tay-Zan, Taishon, Thado, Torr, Dim, Dai, Naga, Tangkhul, Malin, Panun, Magun, Matu, Miram, Mi-er, Mgan, Lushei, Dim, Dai, Naga, Tangkhul, Malin, Panun, Magun, Matu, Miram, Mi-er, Mgan, Lushei (a clan of the Mizos), Laymyo, Lyente, Lautu, Lai (Hakha Chin), Laizao, Mro (Wakim), Hualngo, Anu, Anun, Oo-Pu, Lhinbu, Asho, Rongtu (Gamani 2012). However, the list is controversial and inconsistent.

first protest. Following that, the labor union and the student activists organized a mass civilian protest in Yangon. Though the coup has been almost two years, the strikes still occur across the country, even in our Chin State. The local groups lead these strikes in their areas by engaging with the General Strike Collaboration Committee (GSCC), comprised of unions, community groups, CSOs, and political activists.” (C01, a female CSO leader)

As a result of repression, political leaders and activists, journalists, and the government staff who joined the Civil Disobedient Movement (CDM) and several CSOs leaders fled to the Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) or to the Thailand and India borders to seek refuge. The CSO leaders have continued their networking, advocacy, and coordinating efforts from exile with reference to reestablishing democracy and justice in the nation, creating a federal union, and gaining international support for humanitarian aids.

2.1.1. Chin CSOs for humanitarian assistance

During the post-coup, Chin CSOs have led the provision of basic food items, shelter, and health care to the IDPs traversing the India-Myanmar border or to the refugees in Mizoram through collaboration with the religious or social-based CSOs in Mizoram, India. The interviewed CSOs leaders highlighted that Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees still requires receiving mental health care assistance. Further, the refugees in India also encounter job competition with the locals, which caused them challenges in securing regular income.

As detailed challenges, when war has been intensified, the number of refugees and IDPs have been growing. As shown in Figure 1, armed violence continued in Chin State, recording the highest number of incidents, over 150 times in February 2022. The military frequently carried out airstrikes, infrastructure destruction and remote explosives. However, after a year of the "People's Defense War," it was apparent that the dictatorship was losing control over most of the country. According to a report by the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M), the junta only effectively governed 17 percent of the nation; the NUG and its allies held 52 percent of the territory, and the rest 23% was highly contested (BNI 2022). The report also added that only 72 out of 330 townships were under the junta's "stable" rule. Accordingly, power vacuums and destabilization have become more of a problem in non-military territories. In light of this, the NUG, other anti-junta forces, and CSOs made an effort to provide greater humanitarian aid to the afflicted people and quickly set up "an administration mechanism" in their control areas.

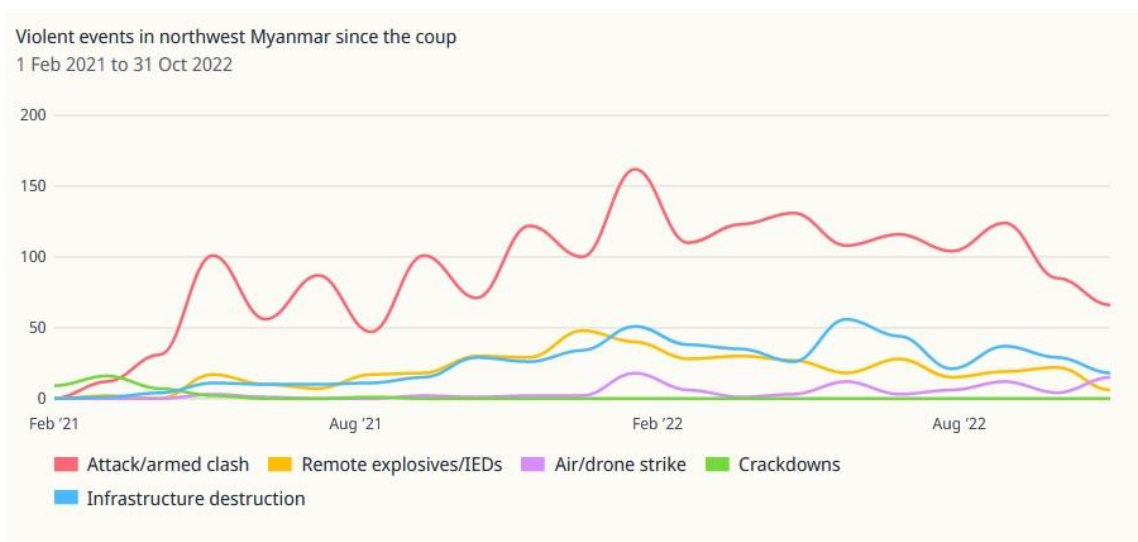


Figure 1. The rate of violent incidents in northwest Myanmar since the coup (1 February 2021 to 31 October 2022) (Loong 2022)

However, the regime authorities continued to impose restrictions on humanitarian aid and shut off supplies and transportation, particularly in Chin State and the Sagaing Region. They typically prevented the aids from going to the affected areas by delaying or rejecting travel approvals, imposing administrative constraints, and erecting new roadblocks and checkpoints. Further, the military authorities made it a point to prevent aid from going to groups they believed were linked to the opposition (Human Rights Watch 2021; Whong 2021).

In the elite interviews, three of the research participants (P05, a male MP, and C04 and C05, youth CSO leaders) indicated that cutting off the road access created more challenges for the IDPs because Chin State, as the hilly and underdeveloped region, always has to rely on importing products from India and the lowlands of Myanmar. When emergency supplies like food and medicine were imported from India, it costed more to support the IDPs. Although the emergencies needs are varied for the refugees in India and IDPs in Chin State, the participants prioritized food, shelters and medicines, based on the data they collected from the community. They also highlighted the need to support education for children living in the IDP camps, as schools were unable to operate regularly after 70% of teachers joined the CDM and there are ongoing security concerns due to potential conflicts. According to a participant (C03, a male youth leader), the communities have been trying to establish community schools in their localities by paying teachers modest salaries.

The refugees in Mizoram State, India, currently have more access to humanitarian assistance than the IDPs in Chin State, Myanmar. The Young Mizo Association (YMA), the Mizoram Student Union (MSU), and the Catholic Relief Service (CRS) are active organizations that provide aid to the Chin refugees. In addition, one participant (C06, a male humanitarian worker) mentioned that a few NGOs, including Action Aid, have been delivering basic food items (two bags of rice for a household each month), non-food items like hygiene kits, and medicines. Further, both the Chin refugees and the IDPs received Covid vaccinations with the assistance of the Indian Government. However, the affected communities, inside and outside

the country, did not receive any organizations' support for mental health, which is also a vital issue.

Furthermore, the interview with C03 brought up a concern for the Chin refugees regarding disputes with Mizoram residents over the labor market competition. The refugees working on a lower wage have threatened the job security of the local communities. The participants demanded the UNHCR's intervention to deliver aid to those in need urgently and effectively, as their operations have been less visible in Mizoram and Chin State camps.

A participant (P01, a male political leader) underlined as

"The UNHCR's assistances are mostly going to the military control areas with the approval of the military authorities, while less reaching the communities under the Ethnic Armed Organizations' territories."

For the IDPs in Chin State, the international Chin community groups, the church-based organizations, and the individual donations collected by the CSOs and NUG are the primary funding sources to support some basic needs, including food and shelter. In this context, the CSOs are taking the lobbying role with the NUG, Mizoram-based organizations, and other international organizations in order to ensure secure funding for help. They are also taking on the role of monitoring the aid distribution process and human rights abuses in the conflict areas.

2.1.2. Chin CSOs for political leadership

When it comes to the Chin CSOs' involvement in the Interim Chin National Consultative Council (ICNCC),⁸ they mainly focused on working to terminate the junta's rule in Chin State, which is to be substituted by a Chin people's administration and to prepare the Chin charter. The ICNCC is organized proportionally with 18 representatives from all the nine townships for each following group: Chin National Front (CNF), the political parties' group, the elected MPs group, and the Chin CSOs. Moreover, the ICNCC established two committees, the Covid-19 Response Coordination Committee and the Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Committee, based on emergency needs.⁹ Consequently, the CSOs participate in the ICNCC's Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Committee in addition to their individual humanitarian operations.

The role of ICNCC is similar to that of the NUCC, because both are taking the coordination role among the revolutionary forces. The NUCC is leading drafting the Federal Democracy Charter at the country level, while ICNCC aims to develop a Chin charter to revive their Chinland dream with self-administration, to develop an Interim Constitution during the revolution, to set up their own government and administration mechanism within their ethnic armed groups' control areas, and to collaborate with the NUG and the NUCC in the process of

⁸ Under the CSOs category, the ICNCC includes members from organizations such as Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO), Chin Baptist Churches USA (CBCUSA), Chin Christian Council in Australia (CCCA), Chin Relief Committee in Mizoram (CRCM), Global Chin Humanitarian and Relief Committee (GCHRC), Chin women and youth organizations and other civil society organizations (CSOs) that serve as representatives for townships like Mindat, Hakha, and Falam.

⁹ Interim Chin National Consultative Council formed: <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/interim-chin-national-consultative-council-formed>

drafting a federal charter. The CSOs are not only an integral part of the NUCC and the ICNCC, but also the majority of NUG ministers and deputy ministers, as well as elected MPs, have a background in CSOs. This trend eloquently illustrates how CSOs either directly or indirectly influenced the development of political roadmaps of Myanmar during the armed-revolution.

A research participant (P05, a male MP) noted:

"There are some CSO staff members joining the local armed forces, but they are young people. The remainders are involved in creating a charter and provide guidelines for establishing a people's administration."

A young female participant (C02, a female CSO leader) added:

"We, as CSOs, are assisting the ICNCC to develop a Chinland's charter based on federal and democratic values. At the local level, we have provided technical advice on forming local administration in non-military areas to fill the power vacuum. We have also given some awareness on federal democracy concepts to the local leaders."

However, the participation of women in the ICNCC is underrepresented, even in the CSOs' group.

"Among four groups of ICNCC, neither the CNF nor the group of elected MPs has a female representation. There are just three or four women in the groups for political organizations and CSOs. Not to mention 30 percent of female participation, the rate is lower than 10 percent across the board for the ICNCC." (C03, a male youth leader)

The political and community leaders involved in the interviews remarked that the Chin women had not received parental support for their education since they were young. They were hesitant to get involved in political and communal activities due to their lack of leadership experience and low levels of education. Women's voices have therefore had less of an influence on the formulation of the political objectives for the future of Chinland. Although the representation rate of young people and marginalized tribes in the ICNCC has been slightly higher than that of women, it has still been lopsided, according to the participants 'C02' and 'C03', because seasoned politicians are dominating the ICNCC.

2.2. The Chin leaders' interpretation of federalism

The military coup in 2021 was a significant turning point for the Myanmar people and the revolutionary forces. Their objectives have extended beyond reclaiming power from the military as they have attempted to establish a federal union characterized by equality, justice, and reduced dominance of ethnic majorities (Clapp and Arkar Hein 2023). Consequently, while the armed forces engage in defensive warfare against the military, political actors and CSOs' leaders have assumed political leadership roles. They have collaborated to formulate the union's federal charter, while individual ethnic groups have developed their own interim constitutions and charters for their respective states and regions. Consequently, Chin leaders go beyond providing humanitarian assistance; they play a critical role in formulating strategies to establish

federalism within their territory (Fishbein 2023). This is important to sustain peace and development for Chin State in the aftermath of the armed revolution. However, Chin State exhibits significant tribal diversity, and the leaders therein possess varied experiences stemming from their participation in prior peace and federalism conferences. Their perspectives on future federalism, both in relation to the ethnic majority and within their respective subtribes, may diverge.

This section provides a detailed discussion on the interpretation of the Chin leaders towards federalism, along with their ideas for power sharing among the union government and the state government, as well as a subdivision of power among the subtribes.

First, all political and community leaders involved in the study concurred that the federal democracy issue has received more attention since the Spring revolution because the Bamar, the ethnic majority, has developed a greater interest in the issues of ethnic minorities. In particular, the political activists the need to end "Bamarnization" and launch a "National Apology" movement for national reconciliation for their decades-long ignorance of the sufferings of the oppressed ethnic groups.

“The Bamar dictators propagandized ‘federalism’ as means of disintegration of the union. We, the Chin people, lived in our own territory under own administration before the British occupation. We are not demanding secession from the union, just our rights for self-determination and self-administration. I suppose the Bamar people from the lower land somewhat understand our desire now.” (C01, a female CSO leader)

In the Myanmar Spring Revolution, the Chin National Front (CNF), one of the military-affiliated ceasefire armed groups, became the first ethnic armed organization to coordinate with the NUG. The CNF provided military training not only to local Chin youths but also to Bamar people from the country's central area, producing 10,000 new civilian combatants in the first year following the coup (Ye Myo Hein 2022). Although the local Chin defense forces did not have adequate advanced weapons, by using their traditional hunting rifles, they resisted the military's penetration of their areas during the earlier days of armed resistance and took their territories back from the military control. Further, the NUG appointed Dr.Lian Hmung Sakhong, the vice chair of the CNF, in the position of Federal Union Affairs Minister to lead in the formulation of a Federal Constitution process.

However, some Chin leaders preferred to build their ‘Chin Nation Land’ if the Bamarnization continued even after the military break down and the dream of the establishment of a federal democratic union was just a false hope which was used as a tool to gain the support of ethnic people during the revolution.

“If we want to maintain the union spirit, we must ensure ‘equity’ and ‘justice’ in our practice. Equity cannot be achieved by giving everything to everyone equally. Chin is the least developed region and has around 500,000 population in total in the state. In some circumstances, the union government may need to provide us with extra assistance.” (P02, a female political leader)

Trust building needs to be reinforced both during the negotiations for power sharing among the ethnic areas and drafting of a federal constitution.

“I agree that the central government of the union controls foreign policy, the central bank, and monetary policy. However, we, the Chin people, must have the power to develop our own education policy and cultural affairs, and we must have the right to appoint the ministers for our state instead of direct appointment by the central government.” (C05, a young female CSO leader)

The participant (P06, a male political leader) added,

"State jurisdiction will exist under the union's federal jurisdiction. Our state-level courts must have the authority to address certain criminal offenses, for example, local issues, without the intervention of federal jurisdiction. Furthermore, while some of the earnings may go to the federal government, we must retain the freedom to manage our natural resources and income. Finally, the central government must delegate its budgeting, fiscal power, and responsibilities to the sub-national levels."

Further, P01 (a male political leader) considered decentralizing the state's administrative powers to districts and, subsequently, township levels. However, the problems are how to include the representativeness of all Chin subtribes in Chin State's executive, legislative and judicial branches and how to negotiate with different tribes whose villages were founded based on tribalism under the leadership of the heads of the tribes.

The participant (P04, a male political leader) pointed out,

“The Chin population has around 500,000 (within the state). And as the former dictators categorized the list into subtribes, it has to be reinvestigated. If the Chin prefers to rely on tribalism, it is exceedingly challenging to distribute power among all of the subtribes.”

In this case, the research participants – P03, P04, and P06 – referred to the strength of Indian democracy, which, in accordance with its constitution, safeguards the rights of minorities from a multicultural perspective and acknowledges territorial autonomy. Therefore, these participants argued that enshrining democracy in the process of creating a nation-state is more critical since it will guarantee the rights of minorities.

This remark may lead the political stakeholders to revisit the debate over whether democracy or federalism should come first in Myanmar. When the ethnic minorities demanded a "federal government" during the NLD's rule, the NLD leaders emphasized the significance of democratization before beginning the process of creating a federal Myanmar (Nyi Nyi Kyaw 2019).

When discussing "democratic federalism" versus "federal democracy," the former emphasizes "democracy," which indicates that the political power distribution is based on majority rule. In other words, majoritarian democracy and democratic federalism are compatible. The latter, however, emphasizes the value of federalism, a system that encourages the division of power between a central authority and a group of constituent units within a state; this system is also

known as consensual democracy (Lijphart 2012). Following the military coup, the majority group (Bamar) had previously emphasized 'democratic federalism' while the minority groups had focused on 'federal democracy.' Later, both groups largely agreed to discuss 'federal democracy' (Aung Kaung Myat, David, and Holliday 2022).

In the interviews of this study, most of the Chin leaders highlighted 'federal democracy' while a few leaders discussed 'democratic federalism.' Federal democracy, in the opinion of those who oppose it, is impractical for two reasons. First, some subtribes do not wish to live as a single ethnic group because they want to preserve their identity. Second, the division of power among ethnic groups based on their territory is not always effective because certain tribes are dispersing across the regions and some locations have mixed ethnicities. Therefore, "federal democracy" may work if simply considering the major ethnic groups in the country, but it is rather challenging to implement at the subnational level due to the variety of subtribes. This issue creates a political dilemma for the prospect of federalism for the Chin leaders.

2.3. The Chin leaders' challenges in nation-building

Within the two years following the coup, the Chin political and CSOs leaders discussed the constitutional and legal issues, the leadership and alliance issues, and concerns for Chin integration, national reconciliation and rehabilitation after the regime breakdown.

2.3.1. Constitutional and legal challenges

Regarding the constitutional issue, it has been difficult to construct a state-level legislative body that represents all tribes due to the diversity of the tribes and dialects and the absence of a common language.¹⁰ In 2020, the Ministry of Education approved the teaching of five Chin languages, including Laizo, Lai, Zo, Cho, and Khumi, in schools across Hakha, Thangtlang, Falam, Tedim, Tongzan, and Paletwa townships. Despite this approval, the Chin people have asserted their demand for the recognition of their rights to self-determination in language and education policies. Consequently, the Chin community needs to decide whether to continue using these five languages as their common languages or not. Further, they found it challenging to create a shared identity among such various groups when discussing how to develop the Chin charter. A few research participants noted that the most marginalized tribes did not accept the proposals for a one-Chin policy, and those preferred the major four or five languages as the Chinland's primary languages. Additionally, it is problematic to influence each tribe's justice system, which is founded on its unique customary law.

¹⁰ At the 1924 Chin Education Conference in Maymyo, the "Laizo (Falam)" dialect was selected as the medium of education for the Chin Hills District and Pakuku Hill Tracts. Beginning in the academic year 1925, the teaching of Burmese in government schools came to an end, and instruction in the "Laizo" dialect took its place. During General Ne Win's era (1962-1988), minority languages were marginalized, while the majority ethnic group 'Bamar' was prioritized.

“Despite having a lower population than the other states and regions of Myanmar, Chin boasts a greater variety of tribes and different systems, clothing, and languages. To find common ground, we must engage in several negotiations with various groups.” (C01, a female CSO leader)

These issues demonstrate how the Chin nationalism has grown after the coup to rebuild their homeland, yet there are also confrontations and discussions over how to forge a shared identity.

"At the Chin Forum a decade ago, Chin nationalists discussed the Chinland Constitution. In contrast, we now refer to the document as the ‘Chinland Charter’ rather than the ‘Constitution’ since the Constitution would be more difficult to amend if a subsequent disagreement arose. The ‘Charter’ might be more flexible. Even though it has taken over two years, we still need to finish drafting the Interim Constitution and the Chinland charter, a more comprehensive one for the future nation building. The debates and negotiations are still ongoing. (P04, a male political leader)

2.3.2. Practical challenges in forming alliances

When Chin State take into account resource extraction and income sharing, as well as the integration of the armed groups under one command, the negotiation processes have grown increasingly complicated.

In particular, after the coup, many local armed groups emerged in most Chin State townships to combat the military. Young students, CSO members, and activists came together to form new forces, such as the Chinland Defense Force (CDF) and the Chin National Defense Force (CNDF).¹¹ There are 17 armed groups under the CDF;¹² some of which stood for their own tribes (for instance: CDF Daai and CDF Mara) and others for their respective villages or townships (for instance: CDF Mindat, CDF Hakha and CDF Matupi). The CDF allied with the Chin National Front (CNF). Through the Chin Joint Defense Committee (CJDC), the CNF and CDF coordinated their defense strategies, while the CNDF, a U.S. armed forces veteran trained, served as the armed wing of the well-known political party, the Chin National Organization (CNO). Further, the Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZAR), an armed tribe-based organization with its headquarters in Manipur state, India, has been operating in Chin State since 1993 to defend the interests of the Zo ethnic groups, which are present in Myanmar, India, and Bangladesh. Given its close ties to the Myanmar military, the ZAR has stayed out of anti-junta movements. However, in 2021, the ZAR launched three attacks against the CDF's camps (Burma News International 2021).

¹¹ The Chinland Defense Force (CDF) was founded on April 1, 2021, and the Chin National Defense Force (CNDF) was founded on April 13, 2021. “Under the Hornbill Flag: Chin State Resistance Continues,” Project Maje, accessed June 11, 2023, https://www.projectmaje.org/chin_report_2023.htm

¹² The list of 17 armed groups in the CDF: CDF Kanpetlet, CDF Mindat, CDF Hakha, CDF Matupi, CDF Paletwa, CDF Thantlang, CDF Mara, CDF Zotung, CDF Zophei, CDF Lautu, CDF Tonzang, PDF Zoland, CDF Hualngoram, CDF (CDM) Siyin, CDF KKG, CDF Daai, CNO/ CNDF (Falam)

According to the research participants, though the anti-junta armed forces have created an alliance among themselves, they have not operated under a single control. Those armed groups have sought funding through their own network to ensure their existence and the supply of essential weaponry. The participants (P04 and P06) reported that the armed groups had been unwilling to accept managing their separately collected funding for the benefit of the entire group as well as assembling a unified force under one command.

2.3.3. Challenges for Chin integration, national reconciliation, and rehabilitation

Besides the challenges to building the chain of command among the forces, those who were organized based on tribes eager to prioritize the needs, concerns, and benefits of their tribes led to some confrontations at the ICNCC's meetings. Furthermore, when there was a power vacuum in non-military areas, armed organizations attempted to take over interim administration there instead of the elected MPs and other persons with administrative experience. The community leaders who took part in the interviews emphasized that such an attempt to interfere in administrative matters by those who possess armed power is inappropriate because it is generally believed that such practice favors the military administration in some ways.

“The effectiveness of collective leadership is now being questioned. Even though it is a time of upheaval, decisions have been delayed significantly. Because of this, we still need to complete the interim constitution for the administration in Chin's non-military territories. Furthermore, exercising group leadership entails sharing responsibilities. Therefore, a collective force must accompany the actions; it is not enough to list the needs and concerns of each group.” (P04, a male political leader)

Most research participants acknowledged that the ICNCC served as a political platform for exchanging ideas and engaging in talks among different groups, even though it took a while to reach a consensus.

On the other side, the existence of several armed groups under no single authority raises specific questions on initiating disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) and security sector reform (SSR), even after overthrowing the military rule. The participants clarified that ongoing discussions not only need to concentrate on the existing issues about the revolution but also formulate plans for creating a developed, peaceful, and cohesive society in Chin State in the rehabilitation phase.

In this regard, the participants (P04 and C03) pointed out the significance of fostering social cohesiveness and building peace with the neighboring communities, besides integration among the Chin tribes. More importantly, these participants highlighted the potential for conflict in Paletwa township, located in the Southern Chin State and bordered by Rakhine (Arakan) State. Paletwa is the strategic region for a Kaladan Road project, a collaboration between Myanmar and India with a US\$484 million investment. This road project will connect the eastern Indian seaport of Kolkata in India with the Sittwe seaport in Rakhine State, Myanmar, through Paletwa

township in Chin State.¹³ Further, The Kaladan project will establish a road connection between Paletwa and Mizoram state in Northeast India.

“Since Paletwa is a Chin township, 80% of the residents are Chin, and the other 20% are Rakhine (Arakan) people. However, the Arakan Army (AA) set up its headquarters in Paletwa. That's why Paletwa is a strategic area for Rakhine in terms of its military and economy. For the Chin, Paletwa is also a critical location since we may travel down the Kaladan River to Rakhine State and the Bay of Bengal for trade and transportation. By contrast, importing goods from central Myanmar over steep roads incurs extremely high transportation costs. Therefore, we are concerned that either the military junta or the parallel government, NUG, would agree with AA to grant them Paletwa in exchange for the support of Rakhine people.” (C03, a male youth leader)

These cases indicated the need for many steps to be taken to achieve peace, reconciliation, and rehabilitation, during the post-revolutionary period. As a least developed region in Myanmar, the recent armed conflicts have left Chin State more depleted. Infrastructure, including hospitals, rural clinics, schools, and roads, was burned down or completely destroyed during the armed clashes. The political unrest also caused delays in children's education.

2.4. Policy recommendations by the Chin leaders

The interviewed Chin leaders provided valuable recommendations on bolstering international support for humanitarian aid, fostering consensus among Chin tribes in constitutional development, enhancing Chin integration, and highlighting critical needs in the rehabilitation phase.

2.4.1. Recommendations for the humanitarian assistance

The research participants proposed recommendations based on their needs for both emergency responses during the crisis and long-term sustainability for peace and prosperity. More importantly, it is necessary to offer the IDPs in Chin State and the refugees in India adequate food, shelter, support for their educational goals, and access to medical care and mental health services. Therefore, they requested the NUG and other international organizations to lobby the Indian government to support effective aid delivery to refugees in Mizoram and Manipur and offer humanitarian assistance to the Chin IDPs in Myanmar via the Indian border.

The participant (C07, a male community leader, and a university professor) brought up the fact that the political crisis has been going on for about two years and that if armed conflicts intensify, there will undoubtedly be an increase in the number of refugees. It is problematic for

¹³ “Indian firm appointed for road building under the Kaladan project in Myanmar,” Mizzima, February 22, 2022: <https://mizzima.com/article/indian-firm-appointed-road-building-under-kaladan-project-myanmar>.

the host country to accept the refugees for a more extended time as long as the case of the refugee's returning home is difficult. In light of this, CSOs, political activists, and human rights defenders need to lobby the UNHCR and humanitarian agencies in India for their interventions in giving relief to refugees.

2.4.2. Recommendations for future Chin constitution

Regarding the 'collective identity' of Chin, the participants agreed that a reassessment of 53 subtribes is necessary to determine which groups should be classified as Chin. However, since this need to be investigated from the historical and anthropological perspectives, as well as to examine external and internal social construction, such as how others perceive that group and how that group identifies themselves, the process will be complex, and discussions will be contentious. On the other hand, it also requires acknowledging the demands of marginalized tribes who wish to preserve their identity while opposing the supremacy of the big groups if they fall under the category of "Chin."

For the future Chin State legislature, the participants (C01 and C05) imagine occurring the parliament with reserved seats for underrepresented tribes. The participant C05 emphasized the establishment of dual federalism in Chin State while engaging with those minorities since it is essential to recognize their inclusiveness and political power in building the Chinland. In addition, P02 (a female political leader) asserts that all tribes' representatives should participate in the future Chin state parliament; nevertheless, she does not believe that the government should be structured around tribes but rather around experienced leaders. The Chin government should, however, have a Tribe Affairs Ministry, and members of each tribe should be appointed to the ministry's advisory committee.

In this instance, some participants brought out the challenges of providing reserved seats for tribe minorities, especially for states like Chin with diverse communities. It is essential to think about how to strike a balance in the state parliament between the legislature's size and the number of reserved seats for each tribe. Further, all Chin groups need to identify their common language(s). Thus, P02 called for further comprehensive studies to ensure the active participation of all subtribes in Chin in the political decision-making process.

Additionally, the interviewed female participants emphasized the promotion of women's participation and roles in the ICNCC, advocating for their voices to be included in drafting the Chin charter.

2.4.3. Recommendations for Chin integration

In terms of armed groups, all participants support the idea that all forces should be united into a single large group, while having many factions may make it harder to maintain control. The participant C02 proposed that instead of tribe-based armed groups, a collective defense force that can represent all Chin groups should be formed in each township to safeguard the security of their own territories. There will then be nine defense groups for nine townships in Chin state under the control of the Chin government. When the Federal Army of the union government is organized, some members of the existing armed forces will be able to join it. In contrast, others

will be involved in disarmament during the post-revolutionary period. The ICNCC seeks the technical advice of external experts on federalism and tribalism concerns in the case of redefining the Chin identity and common language, drafting the charter, determining the composition of a collective Chin defense force for local security, as well as the plans for disarmament.

In addition, participant P04 opined that the ICNCC's political leadership might have been more powerful and proactive rather than merely reacting to the ad hoc issues. Otherwise, consensus and thorough results have yet to be achieved despite spending more time and requiring more talks and meetings. Another essential point concerns the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Chin state. In addition to internal discussions, P04 added that the Chin leaders must talk and negotiate with the external actors, including the leaders of the surrounding community and the de jure government. However, in the view of P04, the NUG and the ICNCC have not yet coordinated strategically in the two years following the coup; instead, these two parties have engaged in 'dialogues' to reconcile their differences.

2.4.4. Recommendations for the rehabilitation and reconciliation phase

The participants suggested that the relevant stakeholders must prioritize education and infrastructure needs throughout the rehabilitation phase. Additionally, they emphasized the value of human resources since when the Chin build their state government in the future; qualified resource persons will be needed to fill administrative and governance positions. The participants also stressed the significance of community dialogues as a crucial means to enhance understanding and build stronger relationships with both the ethnic majority and neighboring ethnicities. Otherwise, the poverty, the devastating effects of war, the radical tribalism, and territorial disputes with the neighboring community will threaten the peace, security, and development of Chin State in the post-revolution period.

3. Conclusion

The current post-coup upheaval in Myanmar has prompted concerns about state-building among political actors, armed organizations, and various ethnic groups. The absence of "federalism" in the constitution, according to leaders of ethnic minorities, is what has led to the country's protracted civil war. Following the coup, the emergence of nationalism among each ethnic group and their unique needs and concerns have provided suggestions on how the future federal union of Myanmar could be constructed based on the principles of representative democracy. The question of how to uphold the core value of federalism extends beyond the conflict between majority and minority groups and even within ethnic minorities when dealing with the most disadvantaged group.

In the fragile political condition, the Chin leaders have been cautious about taking each step in developing strategies for nation-building. In addition to achieving a sustainable and concrete solution that will bring peace and prosperity to all communities in Chin State, those leaders

intend to build social harmony with the neighboring community and the other groups in the country. In this regard, the current strategies and actions of the Chin leaders determine the state's future. However, the space for dialogues that is not able to be accessed by all parties and emergency issues amid political upheaval and armed conflicts have delayed the progress of drafting the charter. While making decisions, the leaders want to avoid using coercive measures in order to minimize the potential risks that may occur in the aftermath of the revolution.

The Chin leaders want to act quickly to address emergencies for the affected community during the conflict with the help of the NUG and international organizations while taking more time to hold inclusive discussions with all relevant parties to establish their future Chinland. They believe that humanitarian assistance including educational support and health care can improve the resilience of the community affected by armed conflicts. Additionally, having a practical strategy that can be put into place throughout the rehabilitation phase may give the community a sense of security about the future. Moreover, the Chin community and leaders have sought the external experts' support to identify the collective Chin identity. They realize that it is important to develop the Chin identity on a collective agreement of all parties. This consensus is necessary to come up with a bottom-up approach that includes the voices of the underprivileged groups instead of negotiating among the leaders on the table.

Further, this study recognizes the significant role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in shaping the Chin charter and interim constitution and their influence among various actors. The CSO members have participated in the revolution by acting as state actors and leading the armed struggles. In this case, the study suggests a comprehensive investigation of CSOs' involvement in anti-coup movements and the armed uprising to gain deeper insights into their resistance and resilience strategies in Myanmar.

The case study about the struggles of the Chin people for their Chin State's nation-building reflect the challenges Myanmar has been experiencing in its state-building process. The vast range of subtribes, the rise of nationalism among each ethnicity, the lack of common leadership, and the proliferation of armed groups have created a political conundrum in searching for the appropriate federalism for Chin State and the country as a whole. In this regard, we advocate that a similar study should also be carried out in other ethnic areas, such as Kachin, Shan, Rakhine, and Kayin states, to gain a thorough understanding of their problems, experiences, coping mechanisms and suggestions for the creation of the federal union. In this way, the stakeholders will have a much clearer picture to see the different settings of each group. Consequently, they will have a more comprehensive solution when debating whether the future federal union of Myanmar should be based on democratic federalism or federal democracy.

Appendix 1: Demographics of the participants

The study conducted interviews in Mizoram from December 13 to 20, 2022. Due to security concerns, the CSOs' leaders participated in the interviews anonymously. The study documented their interview responses using unique codes to protect their identities.

P – Political leaders including MPs, former ministers, the members of political organizations or the members of the Interim Chin National Consultative Council

C – Community leaders or CSO's leaders including the leaders of women groups, youth groups and tribes.

Six participants with political backgrounds and seven from the community groups or the CSOs were involved in this study.

Table 1. Gender composition

Gender	Number of participants (%)
Female	31%
Male	69%

Table 2. Age composition

Age group	Number of participants (%)
25 - 40	38%
41 - 55	31%
56 - 70	31%

Table 3. Subtribe groups' representation

Subtribe groups	Number of participants (%)
Falam Chin	46%
Hakha Chin	8%
Kalay Chin	8%
Mindat Chin	15%
Mizo	15%
Paletwa Chin	8%

Appendix 2: Questionnaires

Interview Questions

The role of the political organizations and the community organizations in the current crisis

- 1) What are the most challenging issues the Chin community experienced during the post-coup?
- 2) How did your organization/group respond to those issues?
- 3) During the civil resistance, how did your organization/group support/lead community mobilization and facilitate developing a strategy for coordination and alliance with different groups?
- 4) What is the ultimate goal of the Chin community that they want to achieve through the current civil resistance? What initial steps have your organization/ group taken to achieve the expected outcome?

The role of the political organizations and the CSO/ community organizations in the establishment of a federal union

Could you please share your/ your organization's experience in involving in the discussions/ dialogues/ talks about federalism, peace and social cohesion? (Probe: In which role did he/ she/ their organization participate?)

- 1) How did the political reforms over the past ten years (2010- 2020) benefit or hurt your ethnic community? (Clarification: "Your ethnic community" means even in the Chin group, there are many other marginalized tribes such as Zomi, Asho and Kuki. The participant might be from one of those groups. Probe: Please emphasize whether or not the political representation of the group increased as well as the economic and social condition, education, peace, infrastructure, etc.)
- 2) Do you think there are any disparities in understanding federalism between your community and those of other majority ethnic groups?
- 3) Do you believe that, in comparison to the past, the recent political alliances among various political factions, armed groups, local CSOs and ethnic groupings as a result of the coup have given us more opportunities to form a federal union? If yes, have you seen any progress? If no, what are the challenges?
- 4) What are your concerns about the road to a federal union and peace? Those might be related to the issues that remain to be tackled between the Chin community and the majority ethnicities, within your own community, or between your community and neighboring ethnic communities.
- 5) Do you have any recommendations for the future federal union of Myanmar on the division of the legislative, judicial, and executive powers between the national parliament and state/regional parliaments?
- 6) For a subdivision of power within the state as 53 tribes are included under the category of 'Chin' ethnic group, do you have any recommendations on how to share power in

policymaking and administration in the future Chin federal state for an multi-ethnicity inclusiveness?

- 7) Do you think the marginalized groups based on ethnicity, religion, or gender in Chin State can adequately represent their voices in the discussion and dialogues of peace and federalism? (If yes, any progress? If not, what are your suggestions to improve the voices of subordinate groups?)
- 8) What are the primary, urgent issues that Chin State must address during the rehabilitation phase following the current political crisis?

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