



Dynamics of ethno-nationalist movement in Myanmar

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Abstract

This research paper examines the ethno-nationalist movement in Myanmar, which promotes the interests of its ethnic minority groups. It provides a historical overview of Myanmar's ethnic diversity and the emergence of ethno-nationalism as a political force in nation building. The paper explores various forms of ethno-nationalism, including armed struggles for greater autonomy and political representation, and political mobilisation in response to the ethnic Barman majority's dominance. It also discusses the impact of ethno nationalism on Myanmar's political and social landscape, including ongoing conflicts and human rights violations. Ethnic armed groups EAO have led to the proliferation of arms and drug trafficking, exacerbating insurgency and militancy in neighbouring states. The paper discusses the displacement of thousands of people seeking refuge in India, straining resources and creating social tensions. It explores India's response to the insurgent movement, including engagement with the Myanmar government and support for the peace process. India has also provided humanitarian assistance and strengthened border security.

The ethno-nationalist movement in Myanmar has shaped the country's history and continues to influence its political and social dynamics. It poses security implications for India, which has been a key player in addressing the issue. India's "Look East" policy aims to promote peace and stability through strengthened ties with Southeast Asian countries. India provides humanitarian aid and development assistance and plays a role in peace negotiations between the government and ethnic armed groups. The movement has significantly impacted India's security, socio-economic development, and foreign policy. India's response has been crucial in maintaining regional stability and protecting its interests. The paper concludes with recommendations for future research and policy interventions to address underlying grievances and tensions. driving the ethno-nationalist movement in Myanmar.

Acronyms: NGO, UN, EAO, CSOs, NUG, NLD, PDF, SAC, LDF, KNU, NMSP, MNTJP, CNF, ULA, AA, KIO

Keywords: Autonomy, Burma/Myanmar, Conflict, Control, Ethno-Nationalism, EAO, Military, Politics, Nation Building, Regional Stability, Stability

Introduction

Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, has a long history of ethnic and cultural diversity, with over 135 officially recognized ethnic groups. The majority of the population is comprised of the Bamar ethnic group, while minority ethnic groups, including the Shan, Karen, Rakhine, and Rohingya, make up the rest of the population. The issue of ethnic nationalism in Myanmar is deeply rooted in its intricate colonial, historical, political, and economic past. Myanmar comprises 135 major ethnic groups and seven ethnic minority states. The seven divisions predominantly inhabited by the Burmese majority are home to over 100 languages. Minority ethnic communities constitute at least one-third of the country's population and occupy half of its land area. The primary ethnic groups in the seven ethnic minority states are the Karen, Shan, Mon, Chin, Kachin, Rakhine, and Karenni. Other notable groups include the Nagas, residing in northern Burma and numbering over 100,000, and the Pa-O, Wa, Kokang, Palaung, Akha, and Lahu. (Gender Concerns International)

The British colonized Myanmar in the 19th century, and during the colonial period, ethnic minority groups were marginalized, and their rights were suppressed. After independence from British rule in 1948, the country was ruled by a military junta, which continued to marginalize ethnic minority groups and suppress their rights. The military junta also implemented policies aimed at assimilating ethnic minority groups into the majority Bamar

culture. Long history of military rule has contributed to a lack of political representation and participation for minority groups. The country has a diverse ethnic makeup, with various groups seeking greater autonomy and recognition of their cultural identity. Myanmar is an ethno cratic state having 135 ethnic groups with their own languages, cultures, and histories. The country's ethno-nationalist/ sub national insurgency is rooted in decades of political and economic marginalisation of ethnic minorities. This has led to widespread poverty and inequality, especially in minority areas, and has prompted demands for greater autonomy and self-determination. Ethnic minority groups have launched armed rebellions against the central government to gain autonomy and control over their territories. Despite peace accords, the conflict continues, with some groups accusing the government of failing to implement them.

There is ongoing religious violence between Rohingyas and Rakhine. Rohingyas, who constitute 80-96% of the population near the border with Bangladesh and coastal areas, have been involved in conflicts with ethnic Rakhine since 2012. Buddhist Rakhine feared becoming a minority in their ancestral state, leading to the destruction of numerous villages and the displacement of entire populations. The Burmese army and police have been accused of large-scale arrests and participation in violence targeting Rohingya Muslims. In July 2012, the Burmese Government further aggravated the situation by not including Rohingya minority groups in the census and

classifying them as stateless Bengali Muslims since 1982. Since 2016, the Rohingya Muslim minority in Myanmar has faced an ongoing military crackdown by the government army and police. The crackdown was a response to attacks on Myanmar border posts in October 2016 by Rohingya insurgents. The Tatmadaw, Myanmar's military, has been accused of widescale human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, gang rapes, arson, and infanticides. Ongoing conflicts and violence against the Rohingya have led to large-scale displacement and migration of people across the border into India and Bangladesh. The minority community has been particularly targeted, with the government denying them citizenship and subjecting them to persecution and violence. This has resulted in a refugee crisis, with many Rohingya fleeing to neighbouring countries.

India has been a key player in efforts to address the issue of ethno-nationalism in Myanmar. The country has sought to promote peace and stability through its "Look East" policy, which involves strengthening ties with Southeast Asian countries. India has also provided humanitarian aid and development assistance to Myanmar and has played a role in peace negotiations between the government and ethnic armed groups. India's response to the current situation in Myanmar has been complicated by its relations with China. China has invested heavily in Myanmar's infrastructure, including ports and railways, and has sought to expand its influence in the region through its Belt and Road Initiative. India has expressed concerns over China's growing presence in Myanmar, particularly in the country's border regions, which are home to several ethnic armed groups. The situation in Myanmar has significant implications for India's national security. The influx of refugees and migrants from Myanmar has led to tensions in India's northeast region, particularly in states with existing ethnic tensions and separatist movements. There are also concerns over the potential for terrorist groups to take advantage of the situation to infiltrate India.

This paper examines the current ethnic tensions in Burma in relation to its nation-building process and seeks to determine whether these tensions are fundamentally rooted in the process that has shaped the Burmese nation. Despite its relevance to understanding the present crisis, the diverse ethnic composition of the state and the nation-building process have not received adequate attention in the nation-building discourse. Burma is a predominantly ethno-cretic state with a British colonial history. The ethno-nationalist movement within Myanmar and its impact on Indo-Myanmar relations necessitate a nuanced understanding of the subject and the factors that have shaped the region. India must collaborate with other countries in the region to promote stability and peace, ensuring the protection of the human rights of all communities. Simultaneously, India must strike a balance between its strategic interests in the region and its commitment to promoting democracy and human rights.

Hypothesis

The present research has been driven by the question of how the nation-building process of Burma has shaped its ethnic crisis.

- a. The ethnic insurgency in Myanmar is primarily driven by historical grievances and a lack of autonomy for ethnic minority groups.

- b. The Myanmar military's role and continued violence in the conflict have led to increased international pressure and condemnation.
- c. The ongoing crisis in Myanmar has had a significant impact on regional politics, particularly in relation to India's relations with Myanmar.
- d. China is an important economic and political partner for Myanmar and has its own strategic interests in the region. The involvement of China in Myanmar's conflict has an impact on the peace process.
- e. Civil society has a key role to play in promoting peace and reconciliation in Myanmar through advocacy, networking, and providing humanitarian assistance.
- f. The issues of self-determination and autonomy for ethnic minority groups are the main drivers behind the ethnic insurgency.
- g. The role of the international community, including the United Nations and regional organisations, will be critical in supporting the peace process.

Literature review

The literature review on the topic of Ethnic insurgency in Myanmar and its impact on India relations would likely include a variety of sources, including academic articles, reports from international organizations, and news articles. Key themes explored include the historical roots of the conflict, the actions of the Myanmar military and government and their impact on the escalation of violence, the human rights situation in the country, the humanitarian crisis and its impact on ethnic minority populations, the regional implications of the conflict and its impact on neighbouring countries such as India, and the role of civil society and international actors in promoting peace and reconciliation.

A comprehensive literature review was conducted, encompassing peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters on Burma's ethnic crisis, Burmese nationalism, its historical development, and articles published in the media. The review prioritised studying the historical formation of the crisis and the evolution of Burma as an independent state. It also explored the geopolitical interests of regional actors, such as India and China, and their influence on the ongoing crisis in Myanmar. Additionally, the review examined the current initiatives and efforts being made by the Myanmar government, ethnic armed groups, and other stakeholders to resolve the crisis and achieve peace. Credible sources of information on the topic include:

- a. International Crisis Group Reports
- b. UN Reports on the human rights situation in Myanmar
- c. Amnesty International reports
- d. The Brookings Institution analysis
- e. The Lowy Institute analysis
- f. The International Commission of Jurists analysis
- g. The Harvard International Review analysis
- h. The Journal of Conflict Resolution
- i. The Journal of Peace Research

These sources provide in-depth analysis of the situation in Myanmar, historical background, causes of the conflict, and the current state of affairs. They also provide data, figures, and statistics to support their findings. The literature on ethnic insurgency in Myanmar is extensive and covers a wide range of topics, including the historical roots of the conflict, the actions and policies of the Myanmar military and government, the impact on ethnic minority populations,

the regional implications, and the prospects for peace and reconciliation. Historical studies have examined the long-standing grievances of ethnic minority groups in Myanmar and how they have contributed to the current conflict. Many scholars argue that the roots of the insurgency can be traced back to the colonial period and the policies of the post-colonial government that have marginalized ethnic minority groups and denied them autonomy and self-determination. Various Studies on the impact of the crisis have conclusively shows that ethnic minority populations have been disproportionately affected by the conflict, with many losing their homes, livelihoods, and loved ones. The number of displaced people and refugees has also risen significantly, putting a strain on regional host communities and neighbouring countries. The regional implications of the crisis have been widely studied, with many scholars highlighting the negative impact on regional stability and security. The ongoing conflict has led to cross-border movement of people, and there is also a risk of destabilization of neighbouring countries. Especially India which shares a long border Finally, there is also a growing body of literature on the current initiatives and efforts being made by the Myanmar government, ethnic armed groups, and other stakeholders to resolve the crisis and achieve peace. These include peace negotiations, ceasefire agreements, and confidence-building measures.

Methodology

This being explanatory research, studies the ongoing ethnic crisis of Burma in the light of its nation-building process. It examines the Burmese nation building process itself based on the widely conceptualized narrative of nation and the parameters of nation-building as put forward by the scholars. Data has been collected using both primary and secondary methods.

Primary sources of data Were in depth interviews of prominent journalist and activists like Saiful Huq Omi, who have worked on Burma's ethnic feuds for more than a decade and a Rohingya activist and scholar Maung Zarni; you tube videos and documentaries on the armed groups, twits by the ethnic armed groups and press releases published by the armed groups in their own websites.

Secondary sources of data My research has extensively relied on Data and statistics in various sources like academic journals, government reports, and non-government organizations (NGO) reports. Some key sources of my information include:

- a. **United Nations reports:** The UN has conducted various studies and assessments on the situation in Myanmar, including on the impact of ethnic conflict on the country and its neighbours.
- b. **International Crisis Group:** This NGO provides in-depth analysis and reporting on conflict and crisis situations around the world, including in Myanmar.
- c. **Myanmar government reports:** The government of Myanmar has released various reports on the situation in the country, including on the ethnic conflict and efforts towards peace and reconciliation.
- d. **Academic journals:** Many academic journals have published articles and research papers on the topic of

ethnic conflict and nationalism in Myanmar, including its impact on the region.

- e. **Indian government reports:** The Indian government has released various reports and assessments on the situation in Myanmar and its impact on India, including in terms of security and regional stability.

In the selection of the major ethnic groups fighting against the military, outlier detection method was used which is among 136 ethnic groups who have on an average more exposed to violence with the military and who have well organized ethnic armed groups have been selected. And these ethnic groups do not completely represent all 136 ethnic groups in Burma rather they are the most dominant and active in fighting among the others which worth studying.

These sources have provided me a wealth of information on the topic, including reports, news articles, statistics, and more. Additionally, I have also used information from various academic journals, books, and other credible sources in support of my research. Ref Bibliography for details.

Overview

Historical, Pol, and Economic Context

Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, has a long history of ethnic and cultural diversity, with over 135 officially recognized ethnic groups. The majority of the population is comprised of the Bamar ethnic group, while minority ethnic groups, including the Shan, Karen, Rakhine, and Rohingya, make up the rest of the population. The ethno-nationalism insurgency in Myanmar has its roots in the country's colonial history and the marginalization of ethnic minority groups by the majority Bamar population. Ethno-nationalist insurgency in Myanmar refers to the ongoing conflict between the central government of Myanmar and ethnic minority groups seeking greater autonomy and self-determination. The country is home to numerous ethnic groups, including the majority Burmese, as well as ethnic minorities such as the Shan, Karen, Rohingya, and Kachin, among others. These ethnic groups have historically lived in separate regions and have distinct cultural, linguistic, and religious practices. The current ethnic conflict in Myanmar can be traced back to the period of British colonial rule, when different ethnic groups were brought under the control of a single central government.

After independence in 1948, the Burmese-dominated government attempted to assimilate ethnic minorities into the majority culture and suppress their cultural, linguistic, and religious identities. This led to a series of ethnic insurrections and civil wars, which continued even after military rule ended in 2011 and a democratic government was established. The Republic of the Union of Myanmar and under the leadership of supposed quasi-military rule, Burma underwent shifts to liberal democracy in recent years. The military junta was dissolved, and Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi released from house arrest achieving great success with her NLD Party (National League for Democracy) in 2012's by elections.

A Decade of Transformation (2012 - 2020)

Following its liberation from British rule IN 1947, Myanmar endured nearly 22 civil wars. Su Kyi's regime concluded peace agreements with 15 groups, while 7 ethnic groups persisted in their conflict. The reforms initiated by Their

Sein administration (2011-2015) and subsequently pursued by State Counsellor Suu Kyi (2016-2021) yielded the most prosperous decade since the 1950s. (“Myanmar’s Spring Revolution: A People’s Revolution”). During this period of relative peace Myanmar experienced significant development throughout the country. Roads were improved, infrastructure was developed (with electricity grid access reaching 70% of the population), connectivity was enhanced, a cyber revolution was enabled, and modest progress was achieved in the fields of education and healthcare. Socio-political space expanded significantly, corruption decreased, transparency increased, the Tatmadaw’s influence diminished, and civil society organisations (CSOs) strengthened, empowering people, releasing political prisoners, and welcoming exile dissident’s home. Political parties were re-legalised. Censorship was eased and subsequently formally lifted, allowing dissent and public discussion to be tolerated once again. Trade unions and the right to strike were reintroduced.

After decades of brutal military dictatorship, poverty, and stagnation, the people of Myanmar regained their vitality and unleashed unprecedented energy. Despite unresolved ethnic issues and emerging communal tensions, the reforms proved beneficial, and Myanmar opened to the world. These changes resulted in improved lives for the people, who began to harbour high hopes for the future. The prevailing sentiment was one of hope and optimism, with a sense of progress. However, all this peace and prosperity proved elusive until the military empire, known as the Junta, struck back and imposed an emergency in the early hours of February 1, 2021.

Military Coup and The Resistance

The Myanmar military took the world by surprise staging a coup d’état that abruptly curtailed the country’s democratic transition and has sparked mass protests leading to deadly violence. The junta justified the move as constitutional, alleging fraud in November 2020 elections which saw landslide victory for the National League for Democracy (NLD) defeating the military-backed party. The arrest of their popular leader civilian and the State Counsellor leader Aung San Suu Kyi and her anointed president, Win Myint, generated immense popular anger and wide spread protest throughout the country. Demonstrations erupted across the country in opposition to the coup. The military responded violently, leading to the deaths of hundreds of demonstrators. The crackdown intensified forcing many communities to take up arms to defend themselves, leading to the formation of local Defence forces. Elected lawmakers ousted in the coup eventually established the National Unity Government (NUG), which declared a “defensive war” on the military in early September 2021.

The military launched an ambitious offensive to subdue its opposition throughout the country. (“Myanmar/BurmaInsurgency- GlobalSecurity.org”) which quickly devolved into a scorched earth campaign, with junta troops regularly looting villages, torching homes, and torturing and killing civilians. Two years later, the ruling Junta led by military Commander-in-Chief, General Min Aung Hlaing has made little headway, while the armed opposition has increasingly adapted and made significant gains, despite being outmatched in equipment, training, and manpower.

largescale and widespread demonstrations took place in opposition to the military coup in Mar 2021. ACLED records over 6,000 anti-coup demonstration events. The military responded with deadly violence to these demonstrations and in many cases firing live rounds at demonstrators’ heads (Human Rights Watch, 2 Dec 2021). Women have played a key role in the movement (Al Jazeera, 25 Apr 2021), often standing on the front lines at demonstrations (Times, 31 May 2021). According to Armed Conflict Local Event Data, ACLED Myanmar was the deadliest country in the world for demonstrators in 2021 (ACLED’s infographic: Deadly Demonstrations). Despite the crackdown, demonstrations have continued, often taking the form of flash-mob style events. The degree of violence against civilians by state forces since the coup has been severe, with 620% increase in such events recorded in 2021 compared to 2020. (“Country policy and information note: critics of the military regime ...”) Multiple cases of civilians being burned to death have been reported (Myanmar Now, 14 Dec 2021). Amid mass arrests of people accused of expressing opposition to the coup, the military has tortured detainees and committed acts of sexual violence against women and men. Hundreds of local defence forces have emerged across the country in response to violence perpetuated by the ruling Junta. In addition, several gps called Peoples defence forces were formed under the provisional National Unity Govt, NUG. The NUG moved to consolidate the activity of local defense groups under a central command structure. Local defense groups have aimed to make the country ungovernable by the military junta. In some locations, where local defense groups have gained an advantage, such as in areas of Sagaing and Magway regions, ousted lawmakers and other activists have set up alternative governing systems (Myanmar, 12 Nov 2021). In response to atrocities by the Junta many civil servants have continued the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), refusing to work for the military junta and thus further denying the military the capacity to govern at the local level.

The main actors in the current conflict include the Myanmar military also known as the Tatmadaw, various ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) and the civilian govts, the PDFs, the local militias created by the Tatmadaw called Pyu Saw Htee (Frontier Myanmar, 14 Jun 2021). Among them, the Karen’s civil war is the longest civil war in history which has been continued for more than half of a century. Other ethnic groups, such as the Shan, Arakanese, Chin, and Kachin are also entangled in civil war. These militias have targeted civilians and have engaged in clashes with local Defence forces. Major EAOs involved in the conflict areas and operating from the border regions are as under.

Thai Border

Tanintharyi, Ethnic composition: Bamar, Karen, Mon, Shan, Rakhine. The largest ethnic armed group in the area is the Karen National Union (KNU). The KNU has had minor conflicts with the government and have previously had control over small regions that have been retained by the government (according to the Thai NGO The Border Consortium). (“Gender Concerns International”)

Mon// Ethnic composition: Mon, ethnic Bamar, Kayin and Pa-O ethnic groups, others. The main armed actor in Mon areas is the New Mon State Party (NMSPP). It has held a

ceasefire since 1995 and governs two autonomous territories. (“Gender Concerns International”) Karen National Union (KNU) also has presence in the state. The two organizations have districts that overlap considerably. Mon/Kayin border conflict: In 2022, Resistance forces become more united, with many PDF units and ethnic armies forming partnerships to launch joint attacks against junta troops. Despite the military’s ongoing counteroffensive campaigns, resistance groups opposing military rule in Myanmar achieved significant strategic and territorial gains in 2024. (“Conflict Watchlist 2025: Myanmar - ACLED”)

2023: The Three Brotherhood Alliance, a coalition of ethnic armies, comprising Myanmar National Truth and Justice Party MNTJP/MNDAA, Palaung State Liberation Front PSLF/TNLA, and, United League of Arakan/Arakan Army ULA/AA launched Operation 1027 in northern Shan state, seizing control of key areas from the military, marking a key victory for the resistance and a turning point in the war. June 2024 the MNTJP/MNDAA’s capture of Lashio town in northern Shan state and the PSLF/TNLA’s capture of Mogoke, a major ruby mining hub in the Mandalay region, inflicted both symbolic and tactical setbacks on the military. (“Conflict Watchlist 2025: Myanmar - ACLED”) The Three Brotherhood Alliance revived last year’s Operation 1027 in late June, following a brief ceasefire brokered by China in January & launched the second phase of Operation 1027 in northern Shan State and Mandalay, leading to the capture of Lashio and Mogote after accusing the junta of violating the terms of the China-brokered ceasefire by bombing ethnic militia territory. These gains by the Brotherhood Alliance sparked a debate regarding its potential to directly threaten Mandalay city, which is situated 277 kilometres away from the military’s capital, Nay Pyi Taw, and home to a substantial civilian population. In January 2024, China brokered a ceasefire between the junta and the Three Brotherhood Alliance during negotiations held in the Chinese city of Kunming. While China has refrained from openly criticizing Min Aung Hlaing’s regime, it has also balanced unofficial relationships with ethnic armed groups in a bid to safeguard trade and security along its border with Myanmar. In Sep 2024 the embattled military had to propose a peace agreement with the resistance, urging them to “solve political problems politically,” but it is widely snubbed by the NUG and ethnic armies who want the junta held accountable for their brutality and barred from politics.

yin // Ethnic composition: Karen. The biggest opposition groups Karen National Union (KNU) and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) Conflict between government and Karen. Since the ceasefires in 2011 and 2012, areas influenced by Karen armed actors have seen increasing expansion of government administration.

Kayah/Ethnic composition: Kayah, Bamar, Shan, Karen. Rural parts of Kayah state are contested by a number of ethnic armed actors, with the most prominent and politically active being the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP). In the mining hub of Mawchi, numerous armed actors contest the area. South East conflict: After seven decades of ethnic armed conflict, new ceasefires in Karen areas of the southeast remain fragile, as do the

territorial arrangements resting on them. All across the southeast, communities remain subject to multiple authorities with parallel systems of governance of varying degrees of formality. Local communities are burdened with multiple tax regimes and a difficulty managing relations with rival armed actors.

Bangladesh/India Border

Chin State, with a Chin ethnic composition, has faced minor conflicts. Following years of mobile guerrilla warfare, the Chin National Front (CNF) and the government agreed to state-level and Union-level ceasefires. These ceasefires allowed the CNF to establish bases and move freely within designated areas, including Tlangpi, Dawn, and Zangtlang Village Tracts of Thantlang Township, and Zampi and Bukphir Village Tracts of Tedim Township. The CNF enjoys a level of autonomy in these areas. The Arakan Liberation Party (Rakhine Buddhists) has a limited presence in Chin State.

Rakhine State, an ethnic state in Myanmar, faces ongoing religious violence between Rohingya Muslims and ethnic Rakhine Buddhists. Rohingyas constitute 80-96% of the population near the Bangladesh border and coastal areas. In 2012, conflicts erupted between Rohingya Muslims and ethnic Rakhine Buddhists, with Buddhist Rakhine fearing becoming a minority. Rohingya NGOs overseas accused the Burmese army and police of targeting Rohingya Muslims through arrests and violence. The Burmese government did not include Rohingya minority groups in the 2012 census, classifying them as stateless Bengali Muslims since 1982. Since 2016, the government army and police have launched a military crackdown in response to attacks on Myanmar border posts by Rohingya insurgents. The army has been accused of widespread human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, gang rapes, arson, and infanticides. In 2024, the ULA/AA captured 14 towns and threatened the Western MRC in Ann township, one year after the humanitarian ceasefire with the military in November 2023. Rohingya civilians remain the most persecuted group in Myanmar, denied citizenship and subjected to atrocities by the military, ULA/AA, and armed groups.

Chinese Border

Kachin State: The ethnic composition of Kachin State is Kachin, Shan, and a small number of Tibetans. Since 2011, there has been continuous armed conflict between the government and the armed wing of the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). This conflict has resulted in the displacement of approximately 90,000 people from over 100 villages, with about 70,000 fleeing deeper into KIO territory. and there has been a marked decrease in areas controlled by the organisation. The Tatmadaw has consolidated its presence by inducting more troops into the area. The KIO administration still holds strongholds in many parts of its old territories, particularly in southeastern Kachin, including Hpakan and Tanai Townships. In March 2022, KIA/KIO and its allies reopened their battle front in northern Myanmar, named after the anniversary of their revolution. They captured five towns, including Chipwi and Pangwa, from the military. These groups demonstrated their growing military capabilities by shooting down helicopters, sinking navy boats, and seizing heavy weaponry during their territorial advances. In the Sagaing Region, the Resistance

Group gained ground with the People's Defence Forces (PDF) capturing Kawlin and Pinlebu towns, which are crucial for supply transportation.

Shan State. Ethnic composition: Shan, Bamar, Han-Chinese, Karens, Wa, Ta'ang, Lisu, Jinghpaw. The three main armed actors in Shan State are the Pa-O National Organisation (PNO), Restoration Council Shan State (RCSS), and Pa-O National Liberation Organisation (PNLO). These groups demonstrate the governance roles played by ethnic armed actors. The PNLO has secured a degree of autonomy over several rural village tracts and financial support for roads and other development projects. The RCSS emerged from pre-existing rebel movements and has rapidly expanded in recent years to establish its independent administration system in rural areas throughout Shan State. Skirmishes between the group and the Tatmadaw have decreased significantly since 2013, although they still occur. Escalation of conflict remains a continuous threat, given the absence of clear agreements between the two sides. Post-coup, skirmishes have increased in Shan State.

North-Western conflicts: Since 2011, there has been a continuous armed conflict between the government and the armed wing of the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). This conflict has resulted in approximately 90,000 people from over 100 villages fleeing deeper into KIO territory, with about 70,000 of them seeking refuge. Secondly, the area controlled by the KIO has significantly decreased. Despite this, the KIO administration system still persists in many parts of its old territories, particularly its stronghold in southeastern Kachin. EAOs' responses to the military coup have been mixed. Groups like the KIO/KIA and KNU/KNLA have supported anti-coup activists who fled to their areas. Battles in Kachin and Kayin states increased in 2021. EAO troops fought alongside local defence forces. Clashes between the military and the KIO/KIA expanded into Sagaing region as they supported local defence groups. Sagaing region has been home to over one-fifth of all organized political violence recorded nationally since the coup.

The military staged its coup under the pretense of combating electoral fraud, and has since claimed it will hold new elections in 2023 (The Diplomat, 2 Aug 2021), it has subsequently set about systematically dismantling the NLD. NLD members have been detained on politically motivated charges. NLD offices have been destroyed, and members' homes seized and sealed (Development Media Group, 2 Dec 2021). The military and its militias have tortured and killed NLD members and looks poised to continue its campaign of violence against its main electoral opposition before holding any elections.

The evolving tactics: The Resistance

In the first 11 months of 2024, ACLED recorded 277 incidents of resistance groups capturing towns and bases from the military, a significant increase from 62 locations captured in 2023. Myanmar is experiencing a 'network insurgency' with cooperation and mutual support among ethnic armies and People's Defence Forces (PDFs) aimed at dismantling the State Administration Council (SAC) and defeating the Myanmar military.

Currently, the formidable ethnic armed organizations', particularly the Shan State Army (SSA) and the United Wa State Army (UWSA), are engaged in a ceasefire with the government. The persistent violence underscores the likelihood of local defence forces (LDF) emerging in the

forthcoming year. These groups are likely to establish alliances to enhance their operational capabilities. Alliances with ethnic armed groups are also anticipated to endure, despite the challenges of formalizing such groups under the command of the National Unity Government (NUG). The ability of LDF to secure and retain control over territory or, at the very least, prevent the military from exercising governance will be pivotal to the success of the anti-coup movement. Furthermore, the coordination between armed and unarmed elements of the resistance movement will be crucial in consolidating their gains. The resistance against the junta will persist, accompanied by increased cooperation, and the military's attempts to quell a population that harbours a profound opposition to its rule are unlikely to be successful.

In February 2024, the military activated its conscription law in response to mounting losses to combat its unpopularity and force youths into military service, further fragmenting society. Males aged 18-35 are forcibly conscripted, while those aged 35-60 join 'anti-terrorism' people's security teams. The military also recruits poorly trained civilians to the front lines. In 2024, thousands of civilians, including Rohingya, were forcibly recruited as human shields. The junta's disintegration is underway due to pressure on all fronts, internal strife, territorial losses, and the humanitarian crisis. It's losing ground, especially in the north. Near the Chinese border, nearly 2,500 junta soldiers surrendered to the Three Brotherhood Alliance in January.

In 2024, the Junta has repeatedly targeted civilians with extreme violence in its counter offensives to regain lost territory. Despite plans to hold elections, which are seen as a key part of the military's manifesto, any elections would be severely limited, poorly administered, and have limited participation from only military-allied politicians. The election talk is widely seen as an attempt by the military to exit the conflict. The military leadership has been criticised for its weakness and mistakes, and it refuses to address key negotiating issues such as governance structures and bottom-up federalism that resistance groups have called for since the 2021 coup, which have further entrenched the cycle of violence.

The Future of Resistance 2025

In 2025, the junta's grip on power is likely to face some stiff resistance. The military might struggle to quell a population that's so against their rule. One of the key battlegrounds will be Mandalay, which is west of Lashio. Ethnic groups from the Brotherhood Alliance forces are making moves there. The resistance groups will probably keep their focus on areas near their recent gains. They want to make sure they have a strong presence, collect more money, and put pressure on Nay Pyi Taw. It's possible that we'll see new battlefronts open up in central Myanmar, like in Mandalay, Sagaing, and Magway. Some resistance groups fighting with the Brotherhood Alliance have even said they're moving their troops to central Myanmar. Securing strategic towns in Mandalay and Magway will keep the resistance groups going and help them expand their operations. Larger groups could also give resources to the local groups fighting in those areas or work together on military actions.

On the other hand, the military is expected to push ahead with its attempt to hold elections in 2025, which remains an unlikely scenario. Military leaders continue to approach political parties and some of the ethnic armed groups that are currently not fighting them, asking them to support

potential elections. They have also invited opponents to disarm and enter the elections as political parties and appealed to China for support. However, the opposition groups led by the National Unity Government (NUG) have mobilized to boycott military led elections. The KIA/KIO has also declared it will not accept elections in areas under its control. If elections are pursued in 2025, this will result in associated violence, affecting civilians.

The EAOs are fighting for greater autonomy and recognition of their cultural, linguistic, and religious rights. The causes of the ethnic conflict are complex and include historical tensions, ethnic discrimination, and competition for resources. The unequal distribution of political power, economic resources, and land has also contributed to the conflict. In addition, the military's efforts to centralize power and control over ethnic minority regions have led to widespread resentment and resistance. The Rohingya crisis, in which the Myanmar military and Buddhist extremists have been accused of ethnic cleansing and human rights violations against the Rohingya Muslim minority, has further escalated the conflict and drawn international attention.

The Burmese nation building process has always been exclusionary. All of its ethnic groups' interests have not been rightly addressed by the state apparatus namely the educational process, preference of language and culture, domestic institutional frameworks etc. Neglect for the minorities has always been omnipotent in the nation building process of Burma. This diversified ethnic scenario and the nation building process has not found its right position in the broader discourse in spite of being highly relevant to understand its present crisis. Despite numerous peace accords, the conflict has continued, with some groups accusing the government and the ruling Tatmadaw of failing to implement the terms of the earlier agreements. The international community has criticized Myanmar's handling of the conflict, with some countries and organizations imposing economic sanctions and calling for accountability for human rights abuses. The junta has lost control over critical infrastructure. While it still controls most of the airspace, large townships bordering China, Thailand, and India are now under resistance control. A SAC-M report in May found that the junta lacks control over enough territory to fulfil its core duties, having lost authority in townships spanning over 80% of the country, home to nearly 70% of its population. The NUG has established a network of education and healthcare services in resistance-controlled areas, staffed by personnel who refuse to work for the military government and have found ways to bypass censors.

The economic pressure of the protracted conflict is mounting: half the population of Myanmar lives in poverty, inflation is soaring, and one in four people face food insecurity. Neighbours watch Myanmar's collapse with fear, fearing instability will spill over. Immigration and drugs trafficked to fund rebel purchases have surged along the Thai border. China, concerned about the economic fallout, has been influencing Myanmar's ethnic armies while showing impatience with the junta, with which it maintains high-level diplomatic engagements.

India-Myanmar relations.

The ongoing ethnic conflict in Myanmar has had a significant impact on India-Myanmar relations. The crisis has created a complex and challenging situation for India as

it tries to balance its strategic interests in the region with its humanitarian and ethical obligations. On one hand, India has a close relationship with Myanmar, given its strategic importance as a neighbour and its shared cultural and historical ties. On the other hand, India has a large and influential ethnic Myanmar population, particularly in its north-eastern states of Nagaland, Manipur & Mizoram, who have been deeply impacted by the conflict on both side of the border. The conflict has resulted in a large influx of refugees into India, putting a strain on its resources and security. It has created instability and insecurity along the border shared by the two countries, leading to increased illegal cross-border activities such as drug trafficking and human trafficking. The displacement of people as a result of the conflict has led to a rise in refugees, many of whom have crossed into India. This has put pressure on the resources and services available in the bordering regions of India and has led to increased tensions between local communities and refugees.

The ethnic conflict has also had an impact on India's strategic interests in the region, as the country seeks to maintain stability and security in its northeast region, which shares a long and porous border with Myanmar. India has been involved in several initiatives to promote peace and stability in Myanmar, but the ongoing conflict has made it difficult for India to fully realize its interests in the region. India has taken a cautious approach in addressing the conflict, seeking to maintain good relations with both the Myanmar government and the ethnic minorities. India has provided humanitarian aid to the refugees, while also engaging in diplomatic efforts to encourage a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The impact of ethnic conflict has been significant in terms of our relations. The crisis has resulted in a shift in the political and security dynamics of the region, affecting the relationship between India and Myanmar.

Trade & Commerce: One of the main effects of the conflict has been on trade between the two countries. India-Myanmar trade has been impacted by the conflict as a result of disruptions to transportation routes, and the displacement of people who are a key component of the cross-border trade. This has led to reduced economic activity and increased economic difficulties for the people of both countries.

Diplomacy: The conflict has resulted in India having to carefully balance its diplomatic engagement with Myanmar. On one hand, India is interested in maintaining good relations with Myanmar given its geopolitical significance and the large Indian diaspora in the country. On the other hand, India has expressed concern over the humanitarian situation in Myanmar and has supported international efforts to address the crisis.

Security cooperation: The conflict has led to increased cross-border migration and refugees, which has increased the security concerns of both India and Myanmar. This has resulted in the two countries cooperating more closely on border security and in addressing the issue of illegal migration. As neighbours, the two countries share a long and porous border, and India has traditionally been concerned about the spillover effects of conflict in the region. The conflict has led to changes in trade, diplomacy, and security cooperation between the two countries, as well as an increased role for China in the region.

Role of China in the Conflict

The role of China in the ongoing ethnic conflict in Myanmar has been a subject of much discussion and analysis. On one hand, China is seen as a major economic partner of Myanmar and has invested heavily in its infrastructure and energy sectors. On the other hand, China has been criticized for its support of the Myanmar military government and its perceived indifference to the human rights violations committed against ethnic minority groups in the country. China has become increasingly involved in the conflict in Myanmar, leveraging its close relationship with the Myanmar government and its strategic and economic interests in the region. This has raised concerns in India, which has traditionally been the dominant power in the region and has a keen interest in maintaining stability and security along its borders. China has been accused of supplying weapons to the Myanmar military and providing diplomatic support to the government, which has allowed it to pursue its military campaign against ethnic insurgent groups without much international criticism. China has also been criticized for its policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, which has been seen as an obstacle to finding a peaceful solution to the conflict. Chinese interests in the region are not solely driven by economic considerations and that it has a strategic interest in maintaining stability in Myanmar. This is due to its close proximity to the Indian Ocean, which is a crucial waterway for the transport of oil and other vital resources to China. In recent years, China has made efforts to promote peace and stability in Myanmar, including participating in peace talks between the government and ethnic minority groups particularly in Shan State and Kayah. However, its influence on the conflict remains limited and the situation remains volatile. The impact of China's role in the conflict on India-Myanmar relations remains to be seen and is an important area for further research and analysis.

In terms of security cooperation, the conflict has led to increased concern about cross-border security and the threat of terrorism and extremism in the region. This has led to increased cooperation between India and Myanmar on border security, as well as increased cooperation with regional actors such as China. The impact of the ethnic insurgency in Myanmar on India-Myanmar relations is complex and multifaceted. While the conflict has had a negative impact on trade, diplomacy, and security cooperation, it has also created opportunities for increased engagement and cooperation between the two countries and with regional actors such as China.

Civil society & the Conflict in Myanmar

The Role of Civil Society in the Myanmar Conflict. Civil society has played a pivotal role in shaping the discourse surrounding the Myanmar conflict and drawing global attention to the issue. Civil society organisations and local communities have actively engaged in advocating for human rights, promoting peace and reconciliation, and providing humanitarian aid and support to those adversely affected by the conflict. These organisations have been instrumental in providing essential aid and support to those affected by the conflict, particularly to ethnic minorities who have been displaced from their homes. Additionally, they have endeavoured to raise awareness about the conflict and its impact on local communities through campaigns, media coverage, and advocacy initiatives.

Local communities, particularly in conflict-affected areas, have also made a significant contribution to peacebuilding efforts. For instance, local peace committees have been established in certain regions to facilitate communication and cooperation among diverse ethnic groups and to address conflicts in a peaceful manner.

Civil society organisations have also endeavoured to establish connections between diverse ethnic groups and foster reconciliation. For instance, they have orchestrated events, facilitated dialogues, and conducted workshops to bring together members of various communities, thereby promoting understanding and fostering trust. Despite these initiatives, the role of civil society in the Myanmar conflict has been constrained by numerous challenges, including restricted access to conflict-affected areas, limitations on freedom of expression, and security concerns. The ongoing efforts of civil society organisations and local communities continue to play a pivotal role in shaping the discourse on the conflict and promoting peace and reconciliation in Myanmar. Some notable examples include:

- a. The peacebuilding endeavours undertaken by various ethnic-based civil society organisations, which are actively engaged in negotiating peace agreements between conflicting parties.
- b. The pivotal role played by religious leaders, including Buddhist monks, in promoting peace and reconciliation through interfaith dialogues and community-based peacebuilding initiatives.
- c. The concerted efforts of local communities, including women's groups, in promoting dialogue and reconciliation through grassroots peacebuilding initiatives.
- d. The significant contribution of youth organisations in promoting peace and reconciliation through educational campaigns, awareness-raising initiatives, and mediating conflicts within their communities. The situation remains intricate and subject to continuous evolution, necessitating a proactive approach to monitoring and staying abreast of the latest developments and alterations in the conflict.

The prospects of peace

The ethnic conflict in Myanmar has been ongoing for several decades and has been a source of concern for the international community. The recent coup by the Tatmadaw has further aggravated the complex peace process. The conflict has significantly impacted the relationship between India and Myanmar, including changes in trade, diplomacy, and security cooperation. India has a long and complex relationship with Myanmar, which is a neighbouring country and shares a porous border with India. The conflict has affected trade between the two countries, as the conflict-affected areas are also the main trade routes between India and Myanmar. Additionally, the conflict has had an impact on the security situation in the border regions, which undermines India's security interests.

China has played an important role in the conflict by supporting the military government in Myanmar and providing military and economic aid. China has also played a role in mediating between the different actors in the conflict and has helped to broker peace deals in the past. With China now publicly backing military rule in Myanmar since Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit in August, the military will try to increase its combat, economic, and

diplomatic power to subdue its large and diverse opposition. The NUG and allied resistance groups have outlined six conditions for negotiations with the military, including demanding the military withdraw from politics, a condition unlikely to materialize soon. China's involvement in Myanmar's conflict is growing. Beijing has pressured resistance groups along the border to cease fighting, retreat from certain areas, and join peace talks. They have also demanded the United Wa State Party/United Wa State Army (UWSA), a powerful non-Bama ethnic actor and weapons supplier to the resistance groups, to stop supporting them. Following the takeover of Lashio town and the capture of Chipwi and Pangwa, rare-earth mining towns, Chinese authorities closed major border crossings to cut off essential supplies. In October, China conducted live-fire exercises at the border with northern Shan state. In a further escalation, Chinese authorities detained the MNTJP/MNDAA leader and placed him under house arrest, demanding the withdrawal of troops from Lashio. China has also offered to establish joint security companies with the military to protect its investments, increasing its military presence in Myanmar.

In terms of prospects for peace, the government and other actors have taken various initiatives to achieve peace in the conflict by inviting non-signatories of the EAO to participate in ceasefires and peace agreements. The international community, including the United Nations, has also been involved in efforts to achieve peace and has called for an end to the violence and a political solution to the conflict. Since the coup, Myanmar has become the subject of international sanctions designed to punish members of the junta and restrict the flow of weapons into the country. Such mounting economic difficulties may compel the junta to change its course.

Geopolitical Concerns & Implications.

The ongoing ethnic conflict in Myanmar has major geopolitical implications, both regionally and globally. Regionally, the conflict has a significant impact on the relationships between Myanmar and its neighbours, especially India and China. The conflict has caused tensions between India and Myanmar, as India is home to a large number of refugees fleeing the violence in Myanmar. This has put a strain on the diplomatic relationship between the two countries and led to discussions about how to address the issue.

China has used its influence in Myanmar to support the military regime, which has further complicated the situation. China has significant economic interests in Myanmar, including its involvement in the development of major infrastructure projects, and it has used its influence to support the military regime in the face of international pressure. The conflict also has implications for the global community, particularly concerning the responsibility to protect and respect human rights. The international community, including the United Nations and other organisations, has expressed concern about the human rights situation in Myanmar and has called for a resolution to the conflict. Furthermore, the conflict has the potential to escalate and draw in other countries, particularly due to the presence of multiple actors with competing interests in the region, including China, India, and other neighbouring countries. These countries have varying degrees of influence

and stake in the conflict and its resolution, which can contribute to the intricate dynamics of the situation.

Geopolitical Implications of the Myanmar Conflict. The Myanmar conflict has far-reaching geopolitical implications that impact regional stability, international relations, and global security. Globally, the conflict poses challenges to the stability and security of the Southeast Asian region, which is already grappling with territorial disputes in the South China Sea, terrorism, and economic competition. It also hinders the international community's ability to address human rights abuses and promote peace and stability in the region. Therefore, it is imperative that the ongoing conflict in Myanmar be addressed comprehensively, considering its geopolitical implications and impact on regional stability and security. This will require collective efforts from the international community, including the United Nations, regional organisations, and key factors such as China and India.

Findings of The Research

The findings of my research can be interpreted in the context of the existing literature on ethnic conflict, civil society, international relations, and human rights. The existing literature provides valuable insights into the causes and consequences of ethnic conflict, the role of civil society in conflict resolution, the impact of conflict on international relations, and the effects of conflict on human rights and development.

- a. **Impact of Conflict:** The conflict has significantly affected trade, diplomacy, and security cooperation between India and Myanmar.
- b. **China's Influence:** China's growing influence in Myanmar, particularly its support for the Junta and its impact on regional stability, is a key finding.
- c. **Prospects for Peace:** The prospects for peace remain uncertain, with challenges including the deteriorating human rights situation and displacement of communities.

The research highlights the impact of ethnic insurgency on Myanmar's nation-building process and its effects on India-Myanmar relations. The findings have implications for understanding regional conflict and promoting peace and stability.

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1. Dynamics of conflict in Multi ethnic Union of Myanmar, Timo Kivimaki and Paul Pash, PCIA Conflict -Analysis study, 2009. (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, October 2009)

- a. This comprehensive study examines the structures, drivers, and key actors of conflict in Myanmar's multiethnic landscape. It assesses the potential of international aid to mitigate or escalate tensions using the adapted 'Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment' (PCIA) methodology, incorporating fieldwork and interviews with ceasefire factions, government agents, civil society organisations, and external donors. The study uncovers underlying factors like fragmented identities and grievances, state repression tactics, one-sided violence and democide, and opportunities for violence.
- b. The study is a pioneering reference for conflict-sensitive aid in Myanmar. It warns against apolitical interventions and stresses the need for engaging with historical grievances, ethnic bargaining, and inclusive politics for sustainable peace. Its insights into military tactics, ethnic grievances, and resource dynamics make it a compelling guide even today.

2. Ethnicity, Insurgency & Civil War, Paper Author: JD Fearon and David Laitin Aug 2001, Dept of Pol science, Sandford University.

- a. The authors' main argument is that ethnic or religious diversity isn't the main cause of civil wars in Myanmar. Instead, conditions that encourage insurgency are the main driver, not ethnic grievances or diversity. (Their research, spanning from 1945 to 1999, shows this.) Key findings of the research show that civil wars are more likely in countries with weak central governments, especially in newly formed or post-colonial states; rugged terrain that helps insurgents hide; large populations and low GDP per capita, which is a proxy for state capacity; and political instability, including regime transitions.
- b. The authors argue that insurgency is the primary cause of most civil wars, not spontaneous ethnic rebellions.

They propose policies to control and address underlying grievances. While addressing ethnic divisions may not resolve conflicts, state and international interventions should focus on strengthening state institutions, improving governance, and fostering economic development to reduce insurgent opportunities.

- c. This paper has garnered extensive citations in conflict studies, political science, and development policy research. It effectively shifts the academic focus from identity-based explanations of ethnic conflicts towards more structural and institutional causes of civil conflicts.

3. Emerging Geopolitical Trends in South Asia Author: Mathews George Chunakara Source: Srilanka Guardian.

- a. South Asia's strategic importance is highlighted in this paper, which presents compelling arguments to support its significance. Home to nearly 2 billion people, South Asia holds a critical geopolitical position due to its nuclear-armed states (India and Pakistan), key maritime routes in the Indian Ocean, and its bordering global powers (China, Iran, and Russia).
- b. The region faces competition for influence from the United States, China, and Russia. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) aims to strengthen its presence in Pakistan through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Sri Lanka through the lease of the Hambantota Port, Nepal and the Maldives through infrastructure investment and political leverage. India, perceiving itself as the natural regional hegemon, engages with emerging economies of Southeast Asian states through the "Act East" and "Neighbourhood First" policies. India actively promotes the SAGAR doctrine (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and counters Chinese influence through the Act East policy and regional diplomacy.
- c. South Asia needs multilateral cooperation, like the QUAD, BIMSTEC, and SCO, to address shifting alliances and instability. This includes US-India defence partnerships, the deepening Pakistan-China axis, Afghanistan's collapse, the rise of ultranationalism and militarism, the revival of SAARC for conflict resolution and economic integration, demilitarisation of foreign policy approaches, and prioritising human security over hard power. Chunakara emphasises that military buildup, major power competition, and regional rivalries create an unstable strategic environment that requires dialogue, multilateralism, and equitable regional frameworks.

4. Burma: Research Paper Author: Paul Bower Institution: House of Commons Library, International Affairs & Defence Section Date: February 2004.

- a. Myanmar (Burma) has a history of military rule, with General Ne Win seizing power in 1962 and leading decades of authoritarian rule. The 1988 pro-democracy uprising was crushed by the military, forming the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). The conflict has led to widespread human rights violations, particularly against ethnic minorities in areas like Karen, Shan, and Kachin states. These include arbitrary

detention, torture, and suppression of freedom of expression and assembly. The charismatic leader Aung San Suu Kyi led the Democracy Movement, winning a landslide victory for the National League for Democracy (NLD) in the 1990 elections. However, the military refused to recognise the result, placing Suu Kyi under repeated house arrest and sparking international outcry and sanctions.

- b. The paper examines long-lasting civil wars involving ethnic insurgent groups like the Karen National Union, the South Sudan People's Liberation Army, and the National Democratic Alliance-K. Despite temporary ceasefires in the 1990s, these conflicts persisted due to the lack of autonomy and development in ethnic regions. The paper also explores Myanmar's economic crisis and isolation during prolonged military rule, highlighting underinvestment, corruption, economic mismanagement, and exploitative partnerships with natural resources. The neglect by successive military regimes led to widespread poverty, especially in rural ethnic regions.
- c. The paper was commissioned to provide a brief overview of developments in Myanmar to British Members of Parliament. The paper discussed potential policy options and advocated for human rights. It addressed strategic dilemmas like isolation vs engagement, humanitarian aid vs sanctions, and support for democratic forces. The author captured a pivotal moment when Myanmar was deeply entrenched in military authoritarianism, facing international condemnation, internal rebellion, and growing calls for democratic reform. The report informed UK foreign policy discussions and humanitarian strategy towards Myanmar.

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