

Measuring Knowledge and Understanding of the Peace Process in Myanmar



A key step toward designing an inclusive peace process is understanding the knowledge, perceptions, and expectations of the people involved. With this in mind, the Joint Peace Fund, an initiative that supports the peace process in Myanmar with technical, financial, and advisory assistance, is working with IPA and Myanmar Survey Research to gather quantitative and qualitative data on public knowledge and understanding of Myanmar's peace process. The data will be shared with stakeholders involved in the peace process, with the goal of promoting greater levels of public participation in the process.

Policy Issue

Myanmar has experienced intermittent internal conflict since independence in 1948. This has often taken the form of violent conflict over control over subnational regions of the country between ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) and the national government; over 5,000 armed clashes have been recorded since 2010.¹ The protracted conflict has a confirmed death toll numbering in the tens of thousands,² and has displaced several hundred thousands of people.³ In addition, the protracted conflict has affected the population of Myanmar in myriad ways, causing human rights abuses, disempowering ethnic minorities, and slowing opportunities for economic growth.⁴

In 2015, Myanmar's national government signed its first Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), as opposed to many bilateral agreements signed and broken in the decades preceding it. The agreement included eight EAOs, and ten have now joined in total. A body of empirical evidence suggests that increased inclusiveness in peace processes can enhance the sustainability of agreements.⁵ A key step toward designing an inclusive peace process is understanding the knowledge, perceptions, and expectations of the people involved: a deeper understanding of public opinion can improve the ability of decision-makers to develop specific proposals and programs met with the public's support.⁶ With this project, researchers aim to better understand the mechanisms behind this peace process's popular support, the role of messaging in garnering support for peace



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COUNTRY

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proposals, and how exposure to and experience with violence shapes individuals' attitudes.

Evaluation Context

The Joint Peace Fund is an organization that supports the peace process in Myanmar. The organization provides financial, technical, and advisory assistance to support programming that involves the government, ethnic armed organizations, civil society, NGOs, and community-based organizations. In addition to direct assistance for ongoing negotiations and implementation of existing peace agreements, the fund supports peace-building initiatives enabling broader participation, particularly among women and youth. Identifying a need for a valid, up-to-date representative baseline of people's knowledge and understanding of the peace process, the fund is collaborating with IPA to conduct a Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) survey.

Details of the Intervention

Note: This study is not a randomized controlled trial.

Researchers are working with IPA and Myanmar Survey Research to conduct a quantitative survey and qualitative focus groups to help the JPF better understand public knowledge of the peace process in Myanmar.

The study's mixed-methods design comprises both a quantitative face-to-face survey with 4,280 individuals in 428 wards and village-tracts, and a subsequent qualitative exploration of key questions through 93 focus group discussions and key informant interviews with approximately 550 people.

The goals of the survey are i) to develop a baseline of people's knowledge of, attitudes toward, and expectations of the peace process that is valid, up-to-date, and representative (at the national, state, and regional levels); ii) to determine their needs for information and learning about the process; and iii) to analyze where important gaps exist in people's awareness and understanding in order to design strategies to meet these needs.

Subsequently, 76 focus group discussions are being held. These discussions, which typically include 6-8 participants, target women, youth, minority ethnic groups, and citizens with higher-than-average knowledge about the peace process to better understand these groups' unique perspectives. Additionally, key informant interviews are being held with 17 civil society representatives.

The data will be shared with stakeholders involved in the peace process to inform their strategies and promote greater levels of participation.

Researchers also embedded a survey experiment in the quantitative KAP survey to examine the effects of sharing information about attitudes of peers or respected figures on respondents' own attitude formation about strengthening federalism (power being devolved to the state/region level from the national level). Some respondents were given context about average levels of support for strengthening federalism among their peers or well-known elites in Myanmar, while a comparison group did not receive this information. Some respondents were also given a statement about a

hypothetical outcome of the negotiations over federalism, while others were not.

Results and Policy Lessons

Study ongoing; results forthcoming.

Sources

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