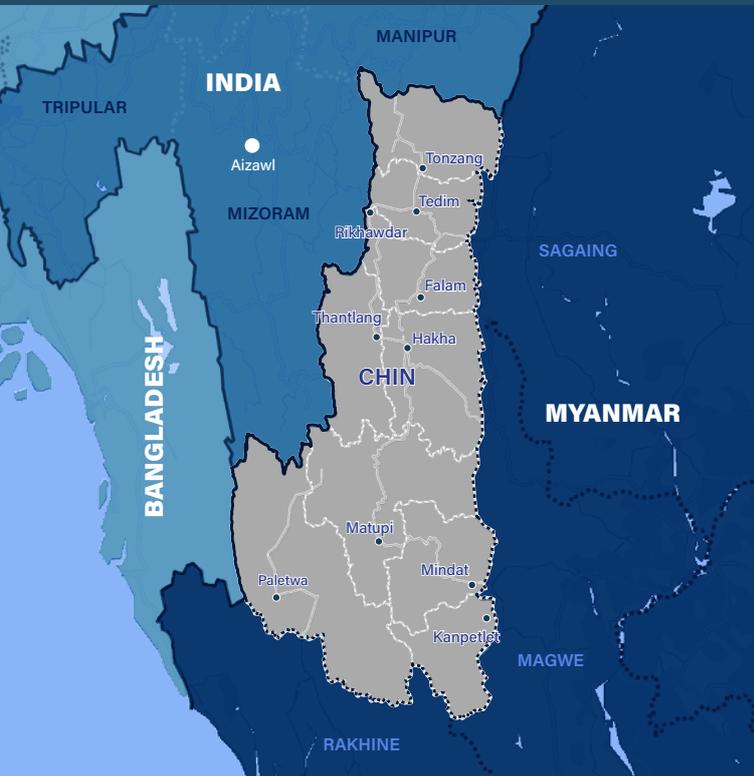


RESISTANCE AND THE COST OF THE COUP IN CHIN STATE, MYANMAR

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New research supported by The Asia Foundation as part of the Cross-Border Conflict: Evidence, Policy and Trends (XCEPT) programme explains conflict and instability in Chin State, Myanmar's western border region with India, since the 2021 military coup. Often seen in the past as a marginal and impoverished area, Chin State has become a key site of resistance against the military regime. The data and insights, collected through first-hand research at ground level in December 2022 and January 2023, outline the evolving landscape of armed and political actors and the shifting balance of power. This project also spotlights the situation faced by thousands of Chin civilians displaced by violence, seeking refuge along the India-Myanmar border. The key findings summarised below, underpinned by detailed contextual analysis, provide evidence for humanitarians and development policy makers seeking to support conflict-affected populations.

Source: Google Map, Myanmar Township Boundaries
MIMU v9.3 – MIMU Geonode (themimu.info)

CONTEXT

The violent crackdowns that followed the military coup in February 2021 led many civilians in Chin State to take up weapons and defend themselves. Conflict between local non-state armed groups (including both established ethnic armies and new resistance forces) and the Myanmar military continues in the absence of any political solution or decisive military victory. Airstrikes and arson attacks by the military have led to the destruction of thousands of civilian homes, religious and community buildings, and crops and livestock. Hundreds of people have died in Chin State, and tens of thousands are displaced.

Civilians in military-controlled parts of Chin State and in areas under the control of armed resistance groups lack proper access to food, education, health and livelihoods support. Political and geographic challenges have stymied a coordinated humanitarian response. The region shares a 510km border with India, as well as a smaller segment with Bangladesh. The displacement of civilians across the India-Myanmar to Mizoram and Manipur is likely to continue in the medium term, as the conflict shows no sign of ending. The Indian government's position toward Myanmar's conflict has challenged local and international responses. Communities in parts of the border region have played a significant role in providing humanitarian support on the ground. However, long-term solutions for aid, livelihoods and future security of Chin populations are absent, leaving them uncertain around their strategies for survival.¹

KEY FINDINGS

Resistance has been particularly strong in Chin State as armed and political actors have rejected the coup.

- Violent crackdowns, airstrikes and arson attacks against civilians and residential buildings sparked a significant resistance movement involving thousands of people from across various tribal groups, with support from the extensive Chin international diaspora.²
- New resistance groups emerged, some joining established alliances with the region's largest ethnic armed organisation, the Chin National Front/Army. Along with its network of allied local resistance groups, it claims authority in 80 percent of the state's territory.
- The Arakan Army has sustained its presence in the south, concentrating in at least five military posts in that part of Chin State. It is also reportedly aiding activity of various township-level Chin/Chinland Defense Forces through training and provision of arms.³
- The Myanmar military continues to reinforce troops in its remaining posts in Chin State.⁴ It is reported to be cooperating with the Zomi Reunification Organisation, a northern-based Chin armed group.

Chin political stakeholders have not reached a common position on issues of public administration and future governance arrangements.

- Two different coordinating bodies, the Interim Chin National Consultative Council and the Chinland Joint Defense Committee, are pursuing plans for future governance arrangements in Chin State. Diverging views on political and military priorities have created internal instability and stymied progress toward a state-wide governance system in opposition to the military's administration.
- The Chinland Joint Defense Committee's primary mandate remains military cooperation while its political endeavours have seen little progress. The Chin National Front unilaterally moved to form an interim administration for Chin State with negotiations ongoing between state-level and township-based resistance groups and other political stakeholders.
- Political power struggles have not impacted activity on the ground as public administration in armed group-controlled territory continues to be run locally. Any successful attempt at a future state-wide administration will need to generate sufficient common ground among local bodies.

1. Emily Fishbein, 'The Military Tried to Burn Thantlang Down: How a Myanmar Township Defied the Odds to Become a Resistance Stronghold', in *Time*, 9 November 2022.
2. Zsombor Peter, 'Myanmar Diaspora Bankrolling Armed Resistance to Junta Back Home' in *VOA News*, 25 February 2022.
3. CDF groups reported to be receiving training from the AA include CDF-Mindat, CDF-Kanpetlet and CDF-Matupi.
4. Gautam Mukhopadhyaya, 'No End in Sight: The Continuing Conflict in Myanmar Two Years After Military Coup', *The Wire*, 11 February 2023.

Conflict has led to widespread destruction and displacement in Chin State. The main aid response has come from the Chin diaspora.

- Internally displaced people have relocated to makeshift camps or resettled in other villages or urban areas. Those displaced in the south have tended to remain in Chin State whereas those further north, where transport infrastructure is more developed, are crossing into India.
- Chin diaspora fundraising efforts are estimated to account for up to 90 percent of funds received by local humanitarian and resistance groups, though support is often based on tribal or sub-ethnic links and is highly unequal across different groups.
- Some international organisations are able to provide relief on the ground though access on the Myanmar side faces extreme logistical challenges.

Since February 2021...

- Estimates of new IDPs range from 44,000 (UNHCR) to 120,000 (CHRO)
- 51,400 have crossed the border from Myanmar to India, over 75% to Mizoram
- Chin diaspora in USA, UK, Australia, Europe, Canada, New Zealand, South Korea and Japan provide the most funds to the resistance
- Research respondents claim as little as 20% of humanitarian need for IDPs is met

The long-term wellbeing of Chin people displaced along the Indian border depends on livelihoods opportunities and access to education or other skills development, as well as continued local support.

- During the initial refugee influx, the government of India's Mizoram State financed the majority of refugee camp construction, with further support coming from local authorities, religious and community organisations, and volunteers.
- Coordination of refugee support occurs at district and village level and has included issuance of temporary registration cards and admission of refugee children into public schools. Aid for refugee camps is coordinated by local authorities, civil society organisations and local refugee committees.
- Financial insecurity and access to health and education services are key areas of concern for refugees, with many relying on remittances from abroad, or casual employment. Humanitarian conditions have for the most part been stable, but Chin refugees' long-term prospects in India remain unclear.

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