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YOUTH MIGRATION AND STATE LEGITIMACY IN POST-COUP MYANMAR: A KACHIN STATE PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This study comprehensively examines youth migration from Kachin State, Myanmar, following the 2021 military coup, focusing on its socio-political and economic drivers and regional impacts. Using qualitative semi-structured interviews with 10 diverse participants, the research reveals that political instability, heightened safety concerns, and forced conscription by both the military junta and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) are the primary drivers of migration. Economic precarity, characterized by limited employment opportunities, low wages, rising living costs, and skill mismatches, further intensifies these pressures. While remittances offer crucial financial support to families and displaced people's businesses foster local resilience, significant labor shortages among skilled and unskilled youth hinder regional productivity and innovation, leading to brain drain. This study addresses critical gaps in the migration literature by analyzing an underexplored ethnic region, offering nuanced insights into the complex interplay between migration and state fragility and conflict. Policy recommendations are provided to restore political legitimacy, improve education, and foster inclusive economic development, ultimately leveraging migration's potential benefits.

Keywords: Youth Migration, Political Instability, Economic Challenges, Social Influences, Labor Shortages, Remittances

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Introduction

The concept of state fragility has gained traction, with legitimacy crises, ethnic conflicts, and governance failures causing significant societal disruptions (Grimm et al., 2014; McLoughlin, 2015). Myanmar serves as a contemporary example, where the 2021 military coup has exacerbated state fragility, intensifying long-standing issues of ethnic tensions, human rights abuses, and political instability. This coup has not only undermined democratic governance but has also compromised state legitimacy, escalated violence, and forced mass displacement across the nation.

Historically, global migration has been influenced by economic disparities, political instability, security concerns, and social networks (Emmer & Lucassen, 2012; Katsarski, 2019). The global migration has risen sharply, reaching over 281 million international migrants by 2020 (International Organization for Migration, 2022). In Myanmar, migration has been historically driven by ethnic conflicts, political instability, and economic inequalities. However, the 2021 military coup significantly accelerated youth migration due to increased human rights violations, violence, and economic hardship. According to UNHCR, ongoing political conflict in Myanmar has displaced 3,187,200 people as of 24 June 2024, with 276,612 internally displaced persons (IDPs) having returned by 31 December 2023 (Operational Data Portal, 2024). The country's long-standing civil wars and post-coup instability have drastically increased humanitarian needs, with those requiring aid rising from around 1 million before the coup to over 14 million in 2022.

Youth aged 15-29 are critical migrants, influencing future socio-economic dynamics due to key educational and career decisions (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.; Kim, 2006). Specifically in Myanmar, migration involves youth aged 20-29, categorized into skilled migrants seeking advanced career opportunities and unskilled migrants pursuing better employment (United Nations Population Fund, 2020). Migration impacts countries of origin by causing significant "brain drain," thereby hindering economic innovation and development (Higgins, 2008). Conversely, migration reduces unemployment and enhances local economies through remittances. Destination countries benefit by filling labor shortages, exemplified by Filipino nurses addressing demographic workforce gaps in Germany (Valenzuela, 2024).

Kachin State, located in northern Myanmar, is a unique case in this broader crisis due to its complex ethno-political dynamics, abundant natural resources, and persistent socio-economic marginalization (Roi, 2022). The longstanding conflict between the Myanmar military and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) has created continuous instability and internal displacement, with socio-political conditions deteriorating post-coup (Fong & Shibuya, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2022). Despite natural wealth, including jade and timber, the state's economic landscape remains informal and reliant on resource extraction industries, offering limited sustainable employment opportunities for local youth (Walsh, 2021). Studying this anomaly is crucial for formulating effective policies to support regional stability and economic resilience.

Analyzing migration trends from Kachin State is essential not only for understanding local impacts but also for grasping broader regional security and geopolitical dynamics. Given Kachin State's strategic proximity to China, shifts in migration patterns hold implications for cross-border stability, economic exchanges, and bilateral relations between Myanmar and its influential neighbor. Furthermore, the forced migration of skilled and unskilled youth contributes to labor shortages and economic stagnation within Kachin State, affecting local productivity and resilience amid ongoing conflicts.

This article addresses significant gaps in political science knowledge (1) to examine the socio-political and economic factors influencing youth migration from Kachin State, Myanmar, following the 2021 military coup. Additionally, it seeks (2) to identify the

potential economic consequences, both positive and negative, resulting from this youth migration in the region. By connecting empirical findings to broader theories of state legitimacy, migration, and conflict-induced displacement, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of Myanmar's current crisis. It proposes targeted policy recommendations to mitigate negative impacts and more effectively harness migration's potential benefits.

Literature Review

Social Factors

Social capital and educational aspirations significantly influence youth migration decisions. Family, friends, and community networks provide crucial assistance, such as housing, employment guidance, and information on living conditions, thereby reducing migration risks and facilitating integration into new environments (Zenteno et al., 2013; Urooj et al., 2020; Heckert, 2015). Limited local educational infrastructure motivates youth to seek advanced education abroad, enhancing their career prospects. The reason is that young people pursue quality education and vocational training opportunities abroad to boost their employability and earning potential. (Hoxha, 2022; Selotlegeng-Mbe, 2023; Edvoy, 2025). Despite extensive research on these aspects, there remains a gap in understanding how these social networks specifically influence youth decisions in politically unstable contexts such as Kachin State, Myanmar.

Political Factors

Political instability, human rights abuses, and governance failures are key drivers of migration. Violent political climates and electoral conflicts, such as those involving civil wars or ethnic tensions, push youth towards safer regions (Walther et al., 2021; Fagbemi & Fajingbesi, 2022; Oyewole & Jamiu, 2023). Safety concerns, exacerbated by conflicts such as the Syrian crisis, amplify migration pressures (Castles et al., 2014; Chaves-González et al., 2021). The Syrian crisis exemplifies how severe safety concerns lead to large-scale migration, as millions fled violence to neighboring countries (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2024). Additionally, forced conscription and denial of fundamental human rights, including freedom of movement, education, and healthcare (Hanson, 2010; Bhabha, 2014), notably after Myanmar's 2021 coup, drive migration (Ng, 2024). Disillusionment with governance, corruption, and poor political representation further motivates youth seeking inclusive societies. Helbling & Morgenstern (2023) and Nnaemeka (2022) suggest that youth lose faith in their governments due to widespread corruption and ineffective leadership. Youth often migrate to escape xenophobic political climates and seek out societies that offer better opportunities for representation and inclusion (Josefsson, 2023; Farini, 2019). Research gaps exist in understanding the combined impact of these factors within Myanmar's unique political context.

To further contextualize political drivers, it is essential to engage with established theories in political science on political violence, civil-military relations, and state legitimacy. Theories on political violence highlight how state fragility and legitimacy crises create environments conducive to conflict and forced displacement (Kalyvas, 2012; Hegre & Sambanis, 2006). Recent scholarship by Brenner (2019) examines Myanmar's political violence, ethnic conflict, and civil-military relations, providing insights into how these dynamics intensify migration pressures. Additionally, comparative studies from conflict zones such as Ukraine and Syria reveal similar patterns of forced conscription and displacement, underscoring the need to explore these themes in Myanmar's context (Fearon & Laitin, 2003).

Economic Factors

Employment opportunities, economic instability, and living standards are primary economic drivers of youth migration. Wage disparities and mismatches between local labor market conditions and youth skills push migration (Hoxha, 2022; Kennan & Walker, 2003;

Dennison, 2022; Selotlegeng-Mbe, 2023; Dibeh et al., 2018). Economic crises, such as inflation or poverty, further incentivize migration for financial stability (Kandilige & Hamidou, 2019; Praag, 2019). The promise of better living standards, healthcare, and welfare systems in developed countries significantly attracts migrants (Selotlegeng-Mbe, 2023; Dibeh et al., 2018; Hoxha, 2022). Current literature inadequately examines how these economic drivers uniquely affect migration decisions in politically unstable regions such as Kachin State.

Economic Impacts

Youth migration offers both positive and negative economic impacts. Remittances improve living standards, facilitate local business growth, and stimulate economic development (Heckert, 2015; Mendola, 2012; Hanson, 2008; Balan, 2015; Ratha et al., 2011). However, "brain drain" significantly harms local economies, leading to labor shortages, productivity losses, and reduced capacity for innovation (Lulle et al., 2021; Szyszka, 2017; Heckert, 2015). Further investigation is needed to assess how effectively remittances can offset the negative consequences of brain drain, particularly in Kachin State.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative methodology, using semi-structured interviews, to examine the socio-political and economic factors influencing youth migration from Kachin State, Myanmar, following the 2021 military coup. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for their flexibility in capturing in-depth personal experiences while allowing consistency across themes. A purposive sampling method was used to select 10 participants across four distinct groups, as shown in Table 1. Participants were selected to provide diverse, comprehensive perspectives, addressing personal migration experiences, economic impacts, professional analyses, and governmental viewpoints, effectively minimizing potential bias.

Participants in this study were categorized into four groups, each selected based on criteria to ensure comprehensive insights. The first group, unskilled youth migrants, were individuals aged 15-29 who completed high school without a bachelor's degree, and were employed abroad in manual or vocational roles, migrated post-2021, and represented diverse destination countries. The second group, skilled youth migrants, consisted of individuals aged 15-29 who held a bachelor's degree and pursued further studies or professional careers abroad after 2021, each residing in a different destination country. The third group, think tank researchers, comprised experts aged 30-50 who hold at least a bachelor's degree and have at least 5 years of relevant work experience in public policy or research, currently based in Kachin State. Lastly, government personnel aged 30-50, holding at least a bachelor's degree, with over five years' experience, currently employed within the Kachin State Parliament, formed the fourth group.

Table 1 List of Participants

No.	Name	Gender	Age	Group	Work experience	Length of migration	Residing country
1	A	Male	23	Unskilled youth migrant	5 years	1 year	Taiwan
2	B	Male	22	Unskilled youth migrant	3 years	2 years	Dubai
3	C	Female	25	Unskilled youth migrant	2 years	1 year	Singapore
4	D	Male	29	Skilled youth migrant	7 years	5 months	USA.
5	E	Male	28	Skilled youth migrant	8 years	1 year	Thailand
6	F	Male	27	Skilled youth migrant	4 years	4 months	Thailand

No.	Name	Gender	Age	Group	Work experience	Length of migration	Residing country
7	G	Male	40	Think-tankers	10 years	-	Kachin State
8	H	Male	35	Think-tankers	9 years	-	Kachin State
9	I	Male	46	Government personal	10 years	-	Kachin State
10	J	Male	32	Government personal	5 years	-	Kachin State

Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and key insights across interview transcripts, which were then cross-validated with secondary data to enhance reliability. This methodological approach enabled a nuanced understanding of migration motivations and their economic impacts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

However, this study has explicit limitations. The analysis is constrained by its exclusive focus on migrant perspectives, thereby lacking insights from non-migrant youth who chose to remain despite challenging conditions. Nevertheless, to address this limitation, the researcher integrated extensive secondary data from academic literature and official reports to supplement and strengthen the analysis. Although the participant group included some non-immigrants, such as research think tank members and government personnel, their roles were more institutional than representative of the broader non-migrant youth population. Thus, while caution should be exercised in generalizing these findings broadly across all youth populations in Kachin State, the incorporation of secondary data provides a foundation for understanding migration drivers.

Research Findings

According to the interviews, the research findings include four main factors: 1) social factors, 2) political factors, 3) economic factors driving youths' migration, and 4) the economic impacts on Kachin State caused by youth migration.

Social Factors

Family influences, financial support, and educational aspirations drive youth migration. Family influence significantly shapes migration decisions, as parents and guardians are primarily concerned about their children's safety and future opportunities. Families strongly encourage migration to ensure safer living conditions and better prospects abroad. Financial assistance from family significantly reduces migration barriers by covering travel and settlement costs. Additionally, youth prioritize migration to access higher-quality education abroad, especially in Thailand, as it is more accessible for them and enhances career development in neighboring countries. Thus, youth are compelled by inadequate local education, further worsened by political instability and the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), leading them to seek better educational and career opportunities abroad.

Political Factors

Political instability following the 2021 military coup has intensified youth migration, driven by security concerns, forced conscription by the military junta, and legitimacy issues with the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). Youth migrate primarily to escape security concerns, including frequent gunfire, bomb explosions, and insecurity in daily life. Simultaneous forced recruitment threats from both the junta by conscription law affecting all Myanmar citizens and KIA by conscription practice to Kachin youth, especially males, have collectively heightened internal displacement within Myanmar and migration pressures abroad. Furthermore, forced conscription practices by the KIA have severely undermined its local

credibility. However, some Kachin youth voluntarily align with the KIA to resist the junta, highlighting complex political motivations shaping migration.

Economic Factors

Economic constraints such as inadequate local incomes, rising living expenses, limited job opportunities, and a mismatch between available skills and market demands are major contributors to youth migration. Youth experience significant financial pressures exacerbated post-coup, prompting migration for better income and stability abroad. Employment opportunities remain scarce, tied to natural resource extraction, lacking economic diversity and resilience. Moreover, a mismatch between youths' skill sets and available local employment opportunities compels many youth to migrate, often leading them to work in unrelated fields abroad. Following the 2021 coup, many qualified young people have struggled to secure employment aligned with their educational backgrounds and professional skills. Consequently, they often find themselves forced into career transitions, undertaking jobs unrelated to their expertise when migrating abroad.

Economic Impacts

Youth migration has significant economic repercussions, including severe labor shortages in both skilled and unskilled sectors, resulting in decreased productivity across industries. The outflow of skilled individuals (brain drain) negatively impacts innovation and regional economic growth, though local skills development initiatives offer potential mitigation. Remittances sent home by migrants significantly support family stability and basic living conditions but contribute minimally to broader local economic growth. However, the arrival of Burmese people from outside Kachin State and from conflict-affected areas like the Sagaing District has contributed to Kachin State's economic resilience by introducing diverse skills and entrepreneurial initiatives. Small businesses established by these displaced populations not only create employment and sustain local markets amid ongoing instability but also help mitigate the negative impacts of youth migration by offering jobs and essential services to host communities, thus partially offsetting them.

Discussion and Conclusion

This discussion section critically analyzes the socio-political and economic factors identified as primary drivers of youth migration from Kachin State, Myanmar, following the 2021 military coup. It further evaluates the economic consequences, both positive and negative, of this migration on the local economy. It explicitly discusses the implications for state legitimacy, inter-group relations, and future political instability.

Analysis of Socio-Political Factors

Political instability emerged as a critical driver of youth migration in Kachin State, significantly intensified by Myanmar's 2021 military coup. This finding aligns with broader literature, particularly studies by Walther et al. (2021) and Fagbemi & Fajingbesi (2022), which emphasize political instability as a major driver of migration. Participants A, B, C, D, E, and F consistently reported a substantial deterioration of safety and security concerns following the coup, highlighting increased violence, regular occurrences of gunfire, bomb explosions, and overall unpredictability in daily life. Such drastic escalation in political instability has compelled youth to seek safer living conditions abroad, profoundly shaping their migration decisions.

A deeper analytical interpretation of the interview data reveals specific mechanisms that link political instability directly to migration decisions. Participants F and J reported that perceived threats to personal safety and forced conscription, both from the military junta and the KIA, acted as immediate triggers for migration decisions. The recurring pattern identified is the role of threat perception, which escalates rapidly during political violence, causing immediate protective responses such as migration. Similar mechanisms have been

documented in other conflict zones like Syria and Ukraine, where forced conscription and severe political violence similarly triggered migration decisions (Kalyvas, 2012).

Additionally, the imposition of conscription laws by the military junta has severely restricted youths' freedoms, heightening their sense of insecurity. These findings correspond with those of Hanson (2010) and Bhabha (2014), who demonstrated how human rights violations, especially restrictions on personal freedom and forced military service, significantly encourage migration. Youth in Kachin State face dual threats of conscription from both the Myanmar military junta and the KIA, further complicating their security concerns and decisions regarding migration. Narratives of Participants F and J clearly illustrate how these forced conscription policies disrupt everyday life, pushing many young individuals to relocate to escape the constant threat of being recruited into armed conflicts.

Furthermore, legitimacy issues surrounding the KIA also strongly influence youth migration. Participants D, E, and G mentioned that forced conscription practices by the KIA have significantly eroded trust and legitimacy among Kachin youth, aligning closely with theories proposed by Nnaemeka (2022) and Helbling & Morgenstern (2023), who argued that loss of trust in political institutions motivates young people to leave their home regions. Despite widespread concerns over forced recruitment, Participant E described a complex dynamic in which certain youth voluntarily joined the KIA to resist the military junta actively. This voluntary alignment highlights a nuanced and complex political environment, indicating that while forced conscription undermines trust, opposition to the military coup also motivates some youth to align with local armed groups, further demonstrating the intricate interplay of socio-political factors in migration decisions.

These findings hold critical implications for state legitimacy and inter-group relations in Kachin State. The erosion of legitimacy due to forced conscription and political violence potentially deepens ethnic tensions and weakens state authority, thereby exacerbating future political instability. Such dynamics underscore the necessity of restoring state legitimacy and addressing grievances to foster sustainable peace and stability.

Examination of Economic Factors

The analysis reveals that economic factors, particularly employment scarcity and wage disparities, significantly influence youth migration decisions in Kachin State. Participants A, B, I, and J consistently highlighted the inadequacy of local wages, which were insufficient to meet daily living expenses, and this became especially pronounced following the economic disruptions caused by the 2021 military coup. These findings align closely with Kennan & Walker (2003), who demonstrated that wage disparities between regions serve as a significant incentive for migration. Additionally, Participants B and C reported that rising living costs since the coup have further exacerbated economic hardship, compelling young people to pursue employment opportunities abroad where wages and living standards are comparatively higher. This aligns with Elena & Oksana's (2021) assertion that elevated living costs in economically unstable regions significantly motivate migration as youth seek financial security and improved livelihoods elsewhere.

Furthermore, the research identifies significant long-term economic implications stemming from the loss of skilled labor, commonly referred to as brain drain. This phenomenon severely affects local economies, reducing productivity, hindering business effectiveness, and limiting industrial innovation. The findings from Kachin State are consistent with those of Lulle et al. (2021), who highlighted that the departure of skilled workers can lead to prolonged economic stagnation and negatively affect crucial sectors such as healthcare, education, and technology. Despite these negative consequences, the study recognizes potential for reverse brain drain if conditions in Kachin State, particularly political stability, improve. Such stability could encourage skilled migrants to return and apply their acquired

expertise locally, aligning with Ndiangui's (2021) view that repatriating talent supports regional economic recovery.

Additionally, the research underscores a significant mismatch between job opportunities in Kachin State and the skillsets of local youth. This mismatch has been aggravated by political instability and the subsequent withdrawal of foreign direct investments (FDI) after the military coup, further limiting relevant employment opportunities. These findings align with those of Visintin et al. (2015), who showed that skill mismatches negatively affect regional labor markets, often forcing highly qualified individuals into unrelated employment. Participants D and F described being compelled to change careers and seek employment in entirely different fields abroad, highlighting this mismatch as a critical economic factor driving youth migration. Such forced transitions signify significant economic pressures, underscoring an urgent need to align local job markets with the skill sets and professional aspirations of young individuals in Kachin State.

Evaluation of Social Factors

The analysis highlights that family influence and financial support play substantial roles in shaping youth migration decisions from Kachin State. Families not only provide emotional encouragement but also significant practical support, such as covering initial migration costs, travel expenses, and facilitating settlement abroad. These findings align closely with the perspectives of Zenteno et al. (2013) and Heckert (2015), who underscore family networks as essential for reducing migration risks, providing critical assistance, and fostering a sense of belonging and security among migrants. Participants B and G indicated that their decision to migrate was directly influenced by family members who prioritized safety, security, and improved life prospects for their children.

However, this study also presents contrasting perspectives. Participants F and G argued that family support, while helpful, was secondary compared to more immediate pressures such as severe political instability, safety threats, and economic hardship. This contrast suggests a nuanced view of family influence on migration decisions, acknowledging that, despite the significant emotional and practical roles families play, these socio-political and economic pressures remain the primary motivators for many youths migrating from Kachin State.

In addition, inadequate educational infrastructure emerged as a powerful social catalyst for youth migration. Participants A, E, G, and H consistently reported dissatisfaction with local educational quality and limited access to advanced academic and vocational training, prompting them to seek better educational prospects abroad. This finding closely mirrors the results reported by Hoxha (2022) and Selotlegeng-Mbe (2023), which indicated that the availability of quality education significantly shapes youths' decisions to migrate. Further intensifying the situation are disruptions caused by Myanmar's Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), which has severely limited local educational opportunities, prompting youth and families to consider education abroad as the only viable option. These factors collectively underscore an urgent need to invest in local educational infrastructure and policies to create sustainable educational opportunities in Kachin State.

In-Depth Analysis of Economic Impacts

The economic impacts of youth migration from Kachin State include both positive and negative dimensions, requiring a nuanced evaluation. A significant positive impact is the role of remittances, which provide immediate financial benefits to families, improving living standards, housing conditions, and basic infrastructure. Participants A and B consistently reported how remittance funds were crucial for everyday household expenses, enabling family members to invest in improving their quality of life, such as enhancing household facilities and addressing critical needs like electricity and sanitation. These findings align closely with Monsutti (2019), who highlighted remittances' role in stabilizing household finances and improving living conditions in migrants' home communities.

However, this study critically evaluates the limited contribution of remittances to broader long-term local economic development. While providing essential short-term financial relief, remittances often do not extend into productive investment or stimulate significant local economic growth, reflecting concerns raised by Barajas et al. (2009). Participants C, H, and G confirmed that a substantial portion of remittance funds is typically repaid to migration-related debts rather than invested in initiatives that could drive sustainable economic improvements within Kachin State.

Another positive economic aspect identified is the emergence of small businesses initiated by displaced people relocating to Kachin State from other conflict zones, as mentioned by Participant G. These small enterprises have helped sustain local economic activity during periods of political and economic instability, enhancing economic resilience. This phenomenon is consistent with Alix-Garcia & Saah (2010), who demonstrated how displaced populations could positively impact host communities by increasing local demand for goods and services. Further, this study supports the insights of Sak et al. (2018), illustrating that integrating displaced entrepreneurs into local economies is a vital mitigation strategy, helping counterbalance the economic downturns associated with youth migration and broader political instability.

Conversely, the detrimental economic effects, particularly skill drain and labor shortages resulting from youth migration, significantly impact Kachin State's economic health. The loss of skilled and unskilled labor severely reduces productivity, negatively affecting business performance, industrial efficiency, and innovation potential. This aligns with Lulle et al. (2021), who underscored the economic stagnation and weakened development caused by the emigration of skilled professionals from developing regions. Moreover, Participants D and H provided compelling examples of the loss of talented individuals, illustrating both cultural and economic setbacks, thus emphasizing the critical need for targeted policy interventions to retain human capital and minimize long-term adverse outcomes.

Comparative Contextualization with Other Migration Cases

A comparative analysis with subnational regions in the Philippines, such as Mindanao and Luzon, provides a more contextually relevant basis for effectively managing the economic impacts of youth migration in Kachin State. Mindanao, like Kachin State, has experienced long-term socio-political instability, ethnic conflicts, and economic marginalization, driving significant youth migration. Structured remittance policies in these regions have substantially enhanced local development by improving household incomes, education, healthcare access, and living standards (Sobreviñas & Cruz, 2022). Furthermore, Luzon's experience illustrates how structured reintegration initiatives can effectively mitigate brain drain by enabling returning migrants to apply their acquired skills locally, fostering economic innovation and growth (Debonneville, 2021; Aimee, 2022). Drawing from the Philippines' experience, Kachin State could benefit significantly by implementing targeted reintegration programs, enhancing remittance management, and strategically using migrants' skills, ultimately reducing adverse migration impacts and maximizing economic resilience.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

To effectively address youth migration in Kachin State, policymakers should adopt a multifaceted approach that carefully navigates local political power dynamics. Policymakers need to prioritize stabilizing political conditions by engaging in inclusive dialogue and implementing reforms that are sensitive to ethnic and political diversity. Reassessing military conscription laws, possibly introducing voluntary or community service alternatives, can alleviate fears and reduce migration driven by forced conscription. The Kachin Independence Army (KIA) should similarly commit to transparency and accountability, avoiding coercive recruitment to restore trust and legitimacy among local Kachin youth. Strengthening educational infrastructure through targeted investments, vocational training programs, and

strategic partnerships with NGOs and international educational bodies will reduce migration driven by educational aspirations. Economic strategies should emphasize diversifying the local economy beyond resource extraction, attracting sustainable foreign direct investments, and fostering local entrepreneurship.

However, policymakers must remain cognizant of potential unintended consequences, such as exacerbating local inequalities or inadvertently reinforcing ethnic divides. Lessons from successful subnational migration management in contexts like Mindanao in the Philippines suggest the importance of structured remittance programs and reintegration initiatives. Leveraging partnerships with international organizations and NGOs could further enrich the implementation of these strategies, ensuring a balanced and inclusive approach to migration management that benefits both migrants and the local community (Debonneville, 2021; Sobreviñas & Cruz, 2022).

In conclusion, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of youth migration in Myanmar's post-coup context by revealing the complex interplay between political instability, economic insecurity, and social influences in Kachin State. The findings show that migration is not only a consequence of economic hardship, but also a direct response to acute political threats, including forced conscription and legitimacy crises involving both the military junta and the Kachin Independence Army. By integrating perspectives from migrants, researchers, and government personnel, this study offers a holistic account of how state fragility, trust in local institutions, and conflict dynamics shape migration decisions. Theoretically, the research advances existing migration literature by contextualizing youth migration within frameworks of state legitimacy, political violence, and structural inequality. It addresses key gaps identified in the literature review, particularly the lack of empirical data on migration motivations from ethnic minority regions under authoritarian regimes. Moreover, the study highlights the dual economic outcomes of migration: short-term household stability through remittances and long-term developmental challenges due to brain drain and labor shortages. In response, it proposes targeted policy recommendations focused on political reform, investment in education, and inclusive economic planning to both reduce the drivers of forced migration and harness the potential benefits of migration for sustainable regional development.

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