

# YOUTH IN MYANMAR'S SPRING REVOLUTION

THEIR ROLES, STRATEGIES AND POLITICAL VISIONS

September 2023



## Foreword

By all indications, the Myanmar youth population from diverse backgrounds has been at the forefront of the nationwide uprising against the military junta, the subsequent Spring Revolution and the evolution of the political development since the Myanmar military attempted to stage a coup nearly 3 years ago. In the wake of the February 1st, 2021 coup, it was our young people who courageously took to the streets to defy the formidable coup makers, expressing their demands to abolish the 2008 Constitution, and pressuring the military to give up power. Their honesty, fortitude, and dedication have become the driving force of sustaining the Spring Revolution to this day.

That's why, over year after the military seized power, my Ministry started thinking about systematically documenting their remarkable creativity, sacrifice and collecting their voices to help amplify their aspirations for the future and their messages for actors in the pro-democratic movement, including us. We then commissioned a team of Myanmar young researchers from diverse ethnic, gender and geographical backgrounds to carry out an independent study. I'm proud to say that the findings from this report are reflection of our youth free from the view or influence of the Ministry.

This Youth in Myanmar Spring Revolution report is more than just a compilation of statistics and data; it serves as a testament to the unwavering determination of our nation's youth, who have displayed remarkable courage and resilience in their resistance movements. This research highlights the participation and tactics, sacrifices, leadership, and aspirations of our country's youth in the aftermath of the coup. We believe that the information from this report will help inform the approaches that empower our youth and raise awareness about the challenges they face in Myanmar and acknowledge their political aspirations.

Approximately thirty percent of Myanmar's population comprises of youth—an energetic and dynamic force that embodies our nation's strength, invaluable resources, and the very hope for our future. I am confident that their dedication and voice will continue to guide our efforts to bring about a true federal democracy and bring an end to the dictatorship in the country.

Last, but not least, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all those who contributed to this report, not only the research team and those coached and supported the research team but also to each and every youth who took the time to participate in this research with their valuable insights.

We shall win!

Naw Susanna Hla Hla Soe  
Union Minister  
Ministry of Women, Youths, and Children Affairs  
National Unity Government

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## Acronyms

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| AA    | Arakan Army                                      |
| CRPH  | Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw        |
| CSOs  | Civil Society Organizations                      |
| CDFs  | Chinland Defence Forces                          |
| CDM   | Civil Disobedience Movement                      |
| CNA   | Chin National Army                               |
| EAO   | Ethnic Armed Organization                        |
| FGDs  | Focus Group Discussions                          |
| IDP   | Internally Displaced Person                      |
| KNDF  | Karenni National Defense Force                   |
| KII   | Key Informant Interview                          |
| KNU   | Karen National Union                             |
| LGBTQ | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer   |
| LDFs  | Local Defence Forces                             |
| MYWCA | Ministry of Women, Youth, and Children's Affairs |
| NUG   | National Unity Government                        |
| NUCC  | National Unity Consultative Council              |
| NLD   | National League for Democracy                    |
| NGO   | Non-governmental Organisation                    |
| PDFs  | People Defence Forces                            |
| UWSA  | United Wa State Army                             |
| SSPP  | Shan State Progressive Party                     |
| SAC   | State Administration Council                     |

# Executive Summary

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Youth have been a major driving force sustaining Myanmar's Spring Revolution following the 2021 military coup. This report sheds light on the sacrifices, and aspirations of youth during the post-coup period in Myanmar. It explores the tactics adopted by youth in their resistance activities and examines how they understand political problems and leadership in the Spring Revolution. Finally, it highlights why young people's participation matters and how it could be further strengthened.

- Youth reported that they had given up their education, employment opportunities, and the establishment of their own families. In order to cope with the coup situation, many youths chose to migrate to foreign countries for either education or employment opportunities.
- Youth leadership has been significant at the grassroots level, where young people have taken an active role in organizing anti-coup movement activities, forming local governance mechanisms, and delivering public services such as education and healthcare in the absence of a functioning government.
- In their leadership, youth have been more cooperative and dedicated to collaborating with Myanmar's wide range of opposition players, including EAOs and other armed resistance groups. They stand as the bridge between the public and established groups and leaders such as NUG, NUCC, and other political parties.
- Despite the attempts to be more inclusive by appointing youth to top positions within revolutionary leadership, many youth activists still felt that their voices were not adequately represented and that youth representation in leadership bodies is still insufficient. Youth highlighted a lack of a platform for youth to be involved in leadership as the main obstacle to youth participation, followed by youth being underestimated by older generations.
- Young people's understanding of federalism appears to have improved during the revolution, with some respondents indicating the need for a political awareness training program.
- Despite the presence of diversity and ideological differences that pose challenges among actors in collaboration, young people are positive about the direction of the revolution. However, youth suggested the NUG improve collaboration with other stakeholders including EAOs and other key stakeholders.

The study leads to some potential recommendations to the National Unity Government-Ministry of Women, Youth, and Children's Affairs (NUG-MWYCA) and other Leadership bodies that are important for the revolution.

Following accusations of electoral fraud in the November 2020 Myanmar general elections, the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) led by Min Aung Hlaing tried to seize power illegally in the early morning of February 1, 2021, ousting the National League for Democracy (NLD)-led civilian government. Following the military's attempted takeover, arrests came in for President U Win Myint, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, and many members of the previous Cabinet, as well as an entire slew of political activists, lawyers, and human rights defenders known for their standing against the military. After outlawing the civilian government, the military immediately installed a new regime and called it the State Administration Council (SAC), with Min Aung Hlaing appointing himself Chairman of the SAC in February 2021 and the country's Prime Minister in August 2021. New laws and regulations were enacted following the announcement of the state's emergency to control the situation. The 2021 coup d'état brought an end to Myanmar's fledgling democratization process and opened up a new phase of political movements and spaces for activism, where the young generation began its bid to create a new nation.

A massive public reaction opposing the military's attempted takeover emerged rapidly in many forms. One of the very first forms of protest against the military coup was the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) with headed with the slogan, "Avoid the trap and don't go to the office" (ရုံးမတက်နဲ့ ရုန်းထွက်). The CDM was initiated by medical workers, doctors, and civil servants from different government departments refusing to work under the illegitimate junta. It called for the general public to resist the military coup in solidarity, calling upon the regime to unconditionally release detained political leaders and restore democracy. This non-violent resistance movement quickly received widespread support from people within the country and favorable attention from the international community.<sup>1</sup> Associated with the CDM movement were various forms of protest against the regime, such as refusing to pay bills, refusing to go to work, medical workers leaving hospitals, teachers quitting schools, railway workers abandoning their posts, and civil servants leaving their departments to join the mass demonstrations on the streets.<sup>2</sup> Along with the CDM movement, many students from primary all the way to university levels refused to attend school, rejecting any form of activity that would seemingly legitimize the military coup. More than 360,000 members, including doctors, teachers, police, and soldiers, were also said to have participated in this civil disobedience movement.<sup>3</sup>

Another dynamic form of protest against the military's attempted takeover soon followed – widespread peaceful public demonstrations. Roads, streets, and most of the central public places in many cities across the country were filled with ten of thousands of people expressing their rejection of the military's illegal coup attempt. Even though the Covid-19 pandemic was raging during the same period, the groundswell of public anger brought people out en masse into the streets. Generations understood the hardships of life under authoritarian military rule, many having experienced successive military administrations. Younger people were outraged at the loss of the freedoms they had grown up under, and the effects of a decade or so of Myanmar's "opening up" began to show. This was demonstrated by the broad use of social media for protest-related imagery, slogans, and other creative forms. Images, slogans, and videos of various protest tactics were widely shared during the early stages of the military coup on Myanmar's social media channels,

such as Facebook, Twitter, and Telegram channels. These included sheets of paper bearing the image of Min Aung Hlaing that were fixed to the streets and stamped on by protesters, serving as a symbolic target for the public's ire at the military coup, and traditional clothing like the Hta-Mein that were strung up on lines across the street to slow down police and soldiers creating protection against charging soldiers who were forbidden from treading on an image of their commander-in-chief, and member of the LGBTQ community using arts such as drag performances and colorful displays of pride flags to draw attention to their causes and challenged the misogynist attitudes.<sup>4</sup>

It was not long before the military's violent crackdown came. Mya Thwet Thwet Khine, a young woman from Naypyidaw, was the first casualty, shot by police with live bullets while demonstrating. Peaceful mass demonstrations in urban areas were brutally suppressed by security forces. Since then, the death rate of protesters has continued to rise due to the brutality of security forces' live bullet rounds. According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners report on February 11, 2022, SAC security forces killed more than 1500 unarmed civilians within a year of the coup.<sup>1</sup> Most of the deaths took place on the streets while peacefully demonstrating. Human Rights Watch (HRW) warned that the Myanmar military's actions have led to a systematic and widespread attack on people, which it claims are "crimes against humanity".<sup>1</sup> HRW also released a series of videos that showed how the security forces ruthlessly dispersed people.<sup>1</sup> As of August 2, 2023, the number of people killed by the Junta had reached 3861, and more than 24,000 people had also been arrested.<sup>1</sup>

The Committee Representing the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH), comprising 15 elected candidates from the 2020 general elections, was founded on February 5, 2021 to coordinate legislative activities and engage with the international community.<sup>5</sup> On April 16, 2021, the CRPH announced the formation of a parallel government, the National Unity Government (NUG), the legitimate governing body in Myanmar. Based partly on the electoral mandate bestowed by the 2020 General Elections, the NUG formed a cabinet of 17 ministries. It was later reaffirmed in January 2022 by the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC), a quasi-legislative body involving the CRPH, other elected candidates, political parties and their leaders, civil society organization (CSOs) including the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), general strike committees, women, youth, ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), the interim state/federal/ethnic representative committees and civil society organizations (CSOs).<sup>6</sup>

Despite brutal crackdowns, the Myanmar people's rejection of the military coup continues today, with its expression transformed into many different outlets. Protests, for one, continue across the country, especially at the grassroots village and township level, continuing to receive the participation of thousands. In cities, most protests continue in flash mob form due to the heavy security presence and brutal arrests and shootings. The proliferation of People's Defense Forces (PDFs) across the country has also become an iconic image of the anti-coup resistance. Now past its two-year mark, CDM movements are still holding ground, PDF groups continue their armed resistance movement, and youth proactively persist in fundraising for CDMs, PDFs, and the National Unity Government (NUG). Even if the Junta may have expected enormous international pressure and sanctions, they may have underestimated people's reactions against them.

## 1.1. Role of Youth in the Revolution

Youth participation in the current revolution—in street protests, CDM movements, and the PDFs—despite its wide coverage in the media, is only beginning to be researched. One report by Su Mon Thant (2021) focuses on understanding post-coup youth activism by conducting qualitative research with youth who participated in the initial phase of the anti-coup movement.<sup>7</sup> Her research reveals that the reasons for youth participation in the current movement are the lack of social security (including jobs and education), restrictions on freedom and basic human rights, and outrage over the ignoring of their votes in the 2020 elections. She conceptualizes three types of youth based on their demands and aspirations during the demonstration: 1) democrats – youth demanding an end to the military regime and a return to civilian rule; 2) federalists – youth rejecting a restoration of the status quo and demanding a new federal state; and 3) intersectionalists – youth demanding a strong federal state with a society that ensures human rights, justice, and equality for all. In general, none of the groups wanted a negotiation with the military regime, nor would they accept a civilian government operating under the unchanged 2008 constitution.<sup>8</sup>

Another insightful piece was Isabel Chew and Jangai Jap's (2023)<sup>9</sup> research examining inclusivity in youth perceptions of national identity and citizenship in Myanmar and how this changed in the post-coup period. Their findings revealed that most youth who participated in their research held more inclusive views of national identity and a positive attitude toward ethnic minorities and the Rohingya people, while the older generation who participated in their research held more conservative views. While the research reveals how youth in Myanmar perceive that "Rohingya are an important part of Myanmar society and support their citizenship rights,"<sup>10</sup> there are still real questions about accepting them both socially and as one of Myanmar's official ethnic groups.

A third study conducted by the International Crisis Group (2023) discussed how Myanmar's Spring Revolution had broken some gender and age barriers and created a new political landscape with a more inclusive space for the participation of youth and women.<sup>11</sup> However, it noted that "the momentum for challenging age and gender norms appears to have stalled".<sup>12</sup> Young people, particularly women, continued to be excluded from formal political power despite their strong involvement in the democratic resistance movement. Despite low youth representation in the higher positions in the NUG, National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC)<sup>13</sup>, or the leaderships of ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), youth continue to strive and contribute as they always have throughout previous revolutions and resistance movements against the Myanmar military.

## 1.2. Objectives of the Study

The participation of youth from the beginning of the non-violent movement—strikes, demonstrations, CDM, and boycotts—to the spread of armed resistance has been one of the primary driving forces of the revolution. It is essential to understand the underlying factors that contribute to youth participation in the Myanmar Spring Revolution, and how this participation has changed over the two years of the military’s failed coup. This report seeks to examine the tactics adopted by Myanmar youth and the challenges encountered in the democratic resistance movement. Most importantly, this report will examine how youth understand the causes of political problems in Myanmar and the kind of country they hope to build. Finally, it aims to address why young people’s participation matters and how it could be further strengthened.

Broadly, the aim of this project was to chart out the struggles, sacrifices, and aspirations of youth during the post-coup period in Myanmar.

1. To understand the role of youth, their participation in the revolution, and youth motivations for participating;
2. To understand the strategies employed in the moment, the challenges youth have encountered, and to document their efforts and sacrifices in the revolution;
3. To understand the political goals that youth hope to achieve and understand their vision for the future country; and
4. To deliver youth’s voices to key leaders of the revolution and provide potential recommendations on youth participation based on their values and expectations.

## **Section 2 : Methodology and Demographics of the Study**

### **2.1. Methodology**

This study used a mixed-methods approach to examine the role of youth in Myanmar's Spring Revolution— involving both a qualitative and a quantitative component. The qualitative component involved a series of semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs) as part of the primary data collection, as well as a comprehensive desk review of relevant secondary resources and materials. The quantitative component involved a survey method to support the study's objective of understanding the factors underlying the participation of youth, the risks and challenges they encountered, the changes in activism and strategies they used, and their vision or aspirations for the future of Myanmar.

A non-probability sampling strategy, a mix of snowball and networked models, was adopted to select qualitative interview participants. The quantitative survey form was disseminated to youth from different states and regions across Myanmar, who also happen to be conduits for sharing the form on to their networks of fellow youth.

#### **2.1.1. Qualitative Data Collection**

To gain in-depth insights into the context of the research topic and provide participants with the opportunity to reflect on their own experiences, a series of semi-structured Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with open-ended questions were used. The questions were divided into four sub themes: participation, struggle/risks, unity and diversity, and aspiration/hopes. A total of 35 relevant stakeholders, including youth actors as well as established activists and experts, were interviewed via the teleconferencing application Zoom from June 28 to November 11, 2022. Each KII interview took between 1 hour to 1 hour and 30 minutes.

Although the original plan was to organize Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with at least three to four participants per FGD, this format did not materialize. This was due firstly, to the safety concerns of participants, who preferred to meet alone or with only one other familiar individual. Second, network instability and connection issues, as well as scheduling difficulties for individuals on the move, made it challenging to sustain prolonged discussions with more than one other participant. Ultimately, the decision was made to conduct key informant interviews with participants. The breakdown of the interviewees for the qualitative interviews is shown in Figures 1-2.

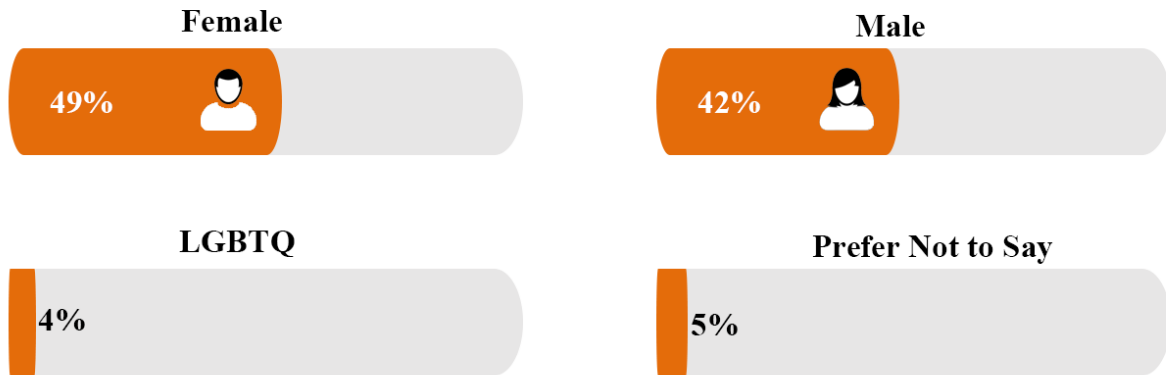


Figure 1: Gender Distribution of Key Informant Interviewees (n=137)

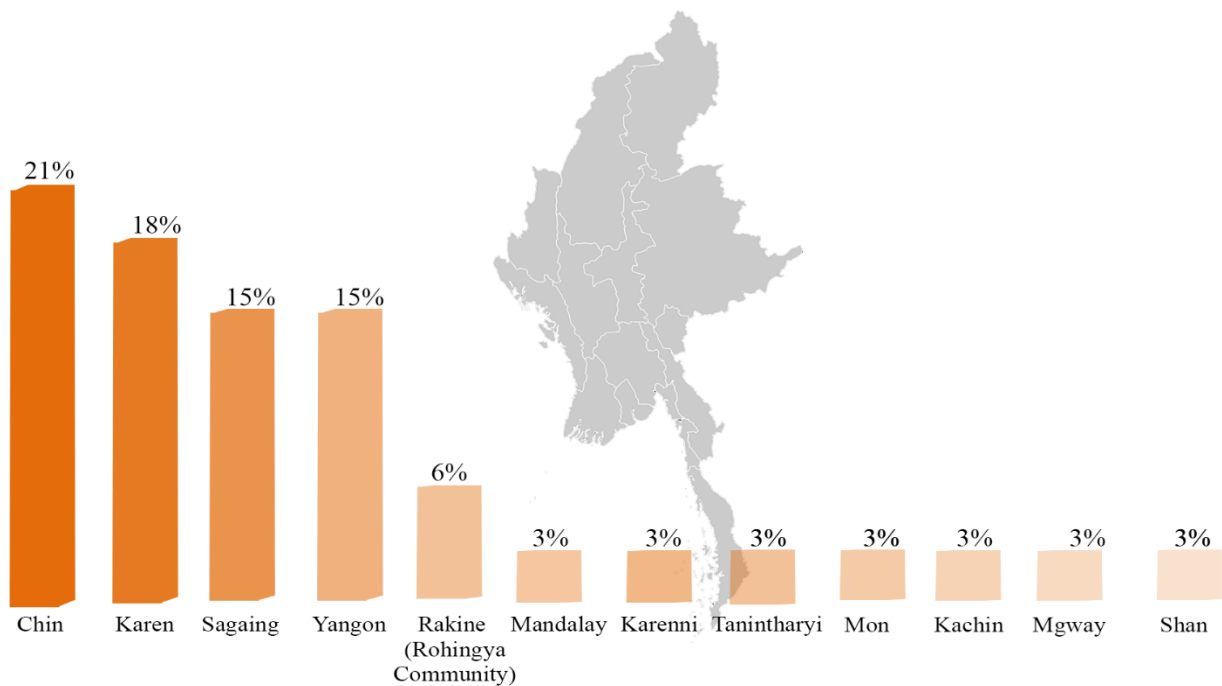


Figure 2. Regional Distribution of Key Informants Interviewees

### 2.1.2. Quantitative Survey Collection

The quantitative data collection involved a survey questionnaire distributed over Google Forms, sampling 137 youth respondents between the ages of 16-35 years of age. The survey questionnaires primarily consisted of 41 open-ended and multiple-choice questions in the Burmese language, organized into 4 thematic sections. The survey was conducted from December 19, 2022, to February 28, 2023, with quantitative data collected in three phases (Round 1, Round 2, and Round 3) to minimize exposure to

security risks. Each round took about two weeks, after which the research team closed the survey link, downloaded the data for safekeeping, and started again with a new form and link. Additionally, respondents were asked to use a VPN platform while filling out the survey.

Out of 147 responses, 10 were removed: outliers that exceeded the age limit (i.e., 16–35), duplicate responses submitted by a single person, and empty responses. The final sample was a total of 137 responses, and we are confident about the accuracy and quality of this data.

Young people of all age groups participated in the survey, with the highest proportion in the age group 21–25 (32%), followed by 26–30 (28%), then 31–35 (23%), and 16–20 (18%) (See Figure 3).

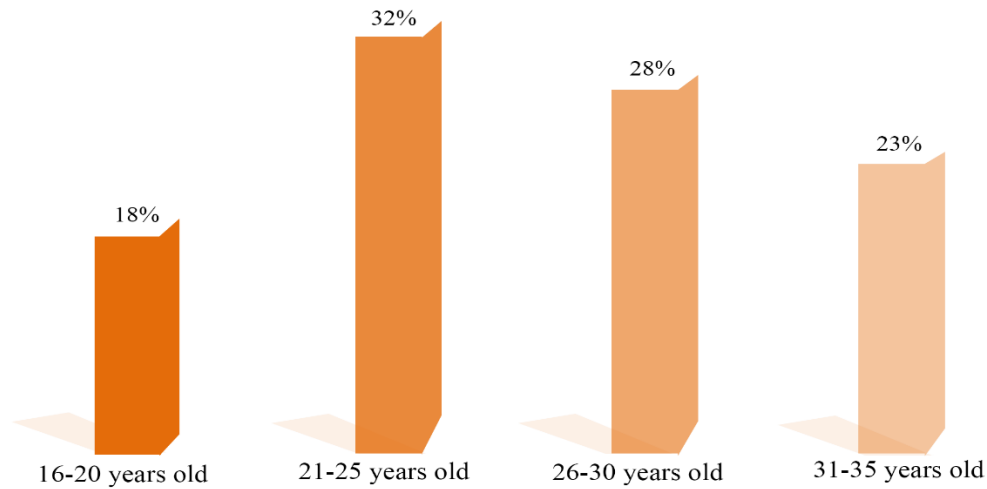


Figure 3: Distribution of Survey Respondents by Age Group (n=136)

The 137 survey respondents comprised 49% female and 42% male respondents, with 4% identifying as LGBTQ and the remaining 5% preferring not to mention their gender (Figure 4).

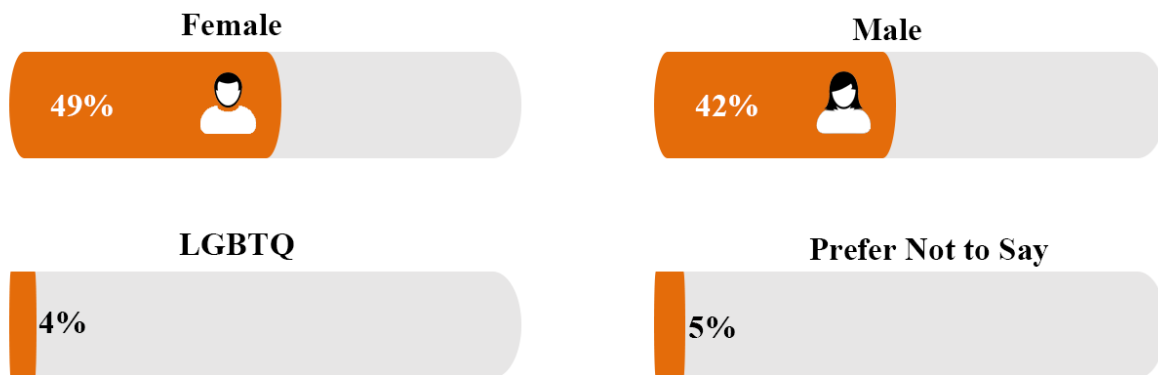


Figure 4: Distribution of Survey Respondents by Gender (n=137)

The survey also collected information on the highest education level attained by the respondents. Youth graduating from university constituted the largest group at 31%. They are followed by undergraduates (27%), who were meant to be continuing their undergraduate studies, and high school students (21%), who were finishing high school and preparing for college. About 10% of respondents also reported completing post-graduate level education, while 7% reported attending non-formal education. Finally, 3% of respondents had only just finished middle school before the coup (See Figure 5).

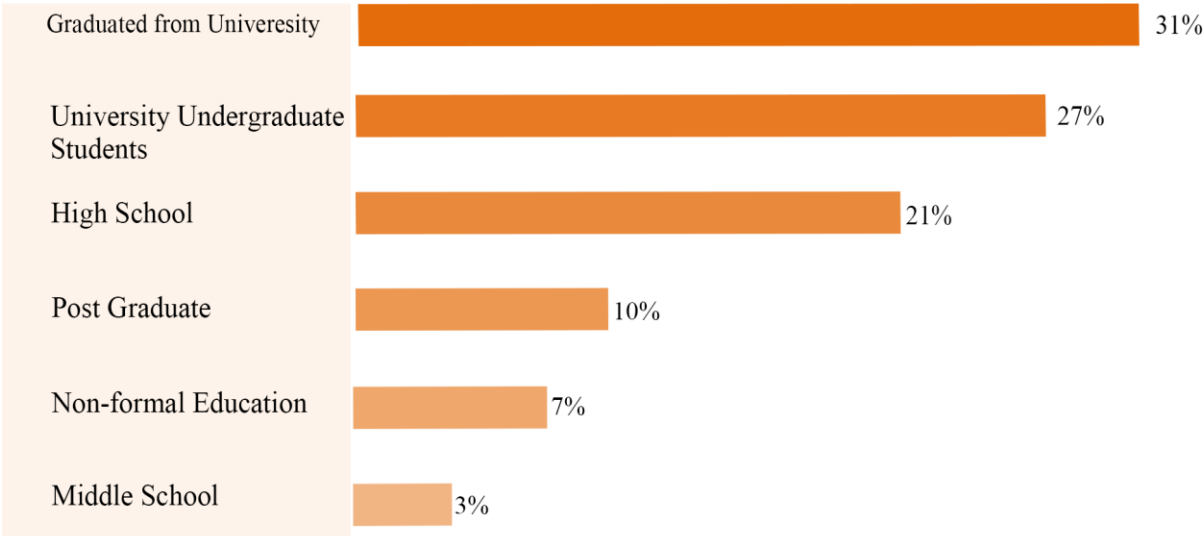


Figure 5: Distribution of Survey Respondents by Education Level (n=137)

Youth from a total of 14 states and regions participated in the survey, with Yangon (22%) and Karen State (21%) showing the highest proportion. This is followed by Chin State (9%), Shan State (8%), Ayeyarwady (7%), and Bago Region (6%). Others were spread out across the remaining regions and states (See Figure 6)

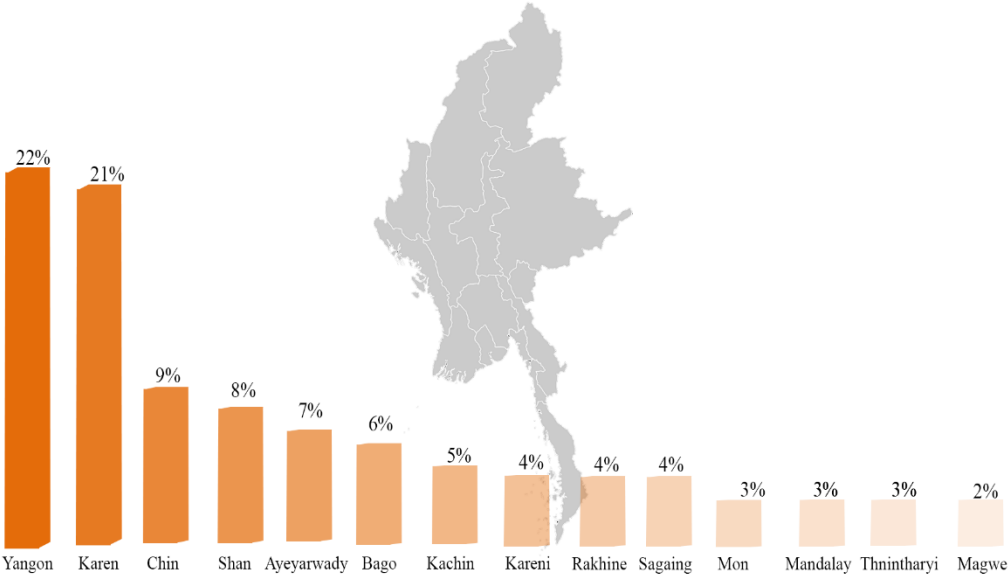


Figure 6. Regional Distribution of Survey Respondents (n=136)

## **2.2. Security precautions**

Given the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing instability in the country, we conducted all KIIs remotely via secure and encrypted communication platforms. Researchers set up appointments with sampled respondents for interviews through known and familiar networks, as a degree of trust was required for the conduct of these interviews. Several respondents were also identified by the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Women, Youth, and Children Affairs of the National Unity Government.

Before the interview took place, we obtained informed consent from all respondents by explaining the research objectives, process, and security precautions taken in the survey. We also encouraged all KII interview and survey respondents to use nicknames instead of real names. No identifiable demographic data was recorded (e.g., specific place names or positions in organizations). Following the interviews, we kept all audio recordings, notes, and analysis in secure and encrypted data containers. For security reasons and the convenience of participants, interviews were conducted on the Zoom platform, and respondents could remain anonymous by hiding their identities or hiding their faces, or hang up if they felt uncomfortable answering any of the questions. Researchers also informed the respondents that they could leave the interviews at any time if they felt uncomfortable during the interview section.

For the quantitative research, we distributed the survey link through encrypted messaging applications such as Signal and Viber. Participation and the depth of the answers given were completely voluntary. Several interviewees and respondents who felt insecure about the survey questions were able to withdraw their participation.

## **2.3. Limitations of the Study**

### **2.3.1. Scope**

Given the current security situation in Myanmar, the youth survey could not be publicly promoted via social networking apps, leading to a slower survey response rate. However, the use of different strategies, such as the snowball sampling method, to seek more respondents for the survey as well as qualitative interviews, compensated for this constraint.

### **2.3.2. Sampling and Representation**

One downside of online surveys and snowball sampling is that groups with limited internet access or marginalized groups outside our network (such as the Rohingya community and people from remote or conflict-affected areas) might be underrepresented. The team found it challenging to reach potential survey respondents from Chin State, Karenni, Kachin, Rakhine, Magway, and Sagaing regions, for example. Therefore, the survey is likely to suffer from limited geographical sampling bias. In addition, the sample skewed towards youth who had some form of university education.

Due to internet instability and internet cut-off in many parts of the country, some of our interviewees were only able to participate in a few parts of the interview due to poor internet connectivity in their area. Also,

owing to the sensitivity of the topic, some potential respondents to the qualitative interview, especially those from Rakhine State, canceled our request for a meeting after reviewing the brief questions designed for the interview. However, we still received samples from almost all states and regions, even if the numbers were not uniform.

## Section 3 : Youth Participation in the Resistance Movement

### 3.1.Type of Activities (Initial Months following the Coup)

Soon after the Myanmar military attempted its takeover on February 1, 2021, tens of thousands of people of all ages voluntarily came out of the streets across the country to organize peaceful demonstrations against the military coup. Along with street demonstrations, youth have coordinated multiple activities to demonstrate their opposition to the military coup. Our survey found that most of the 134 respondents began their participation in the anti-coup movements in the early months of 2021. They were involved in street protests, the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), boycotting military businesses, fundraising and supporting groups, online strike activities, and refusing to pay taxes. Some joined the armed resistance groups, and a handful did not participate, as shown in Figure 7. According to the data, street protests have the highest percentage of 67%, which means young people strongly and actively participate in the street protests. This section explores the different types of youth participation in the Spring Revolution and the resulting risks and sacrifices they have faced.

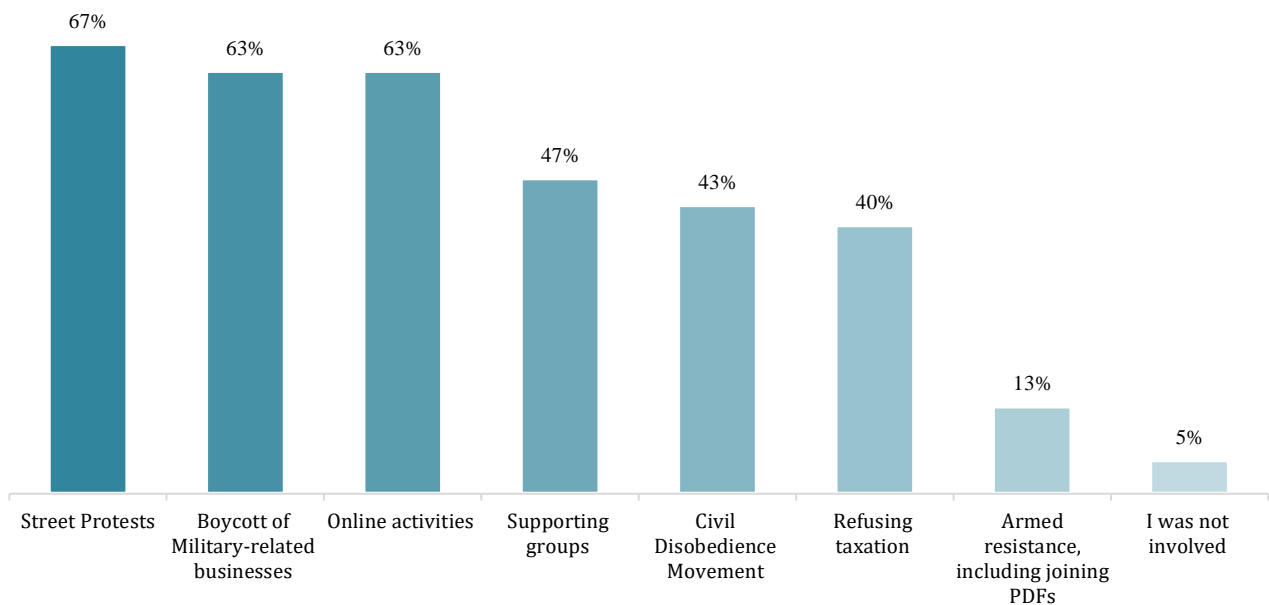


Figure 7: Survey Respondents' Participation in the Early Coup (n=134)

### 3.2. Role of Youth in the Anti-Coup Movement

Youth from a variety of backgrounds who have actively participated in every aspect of resistance—political, armed, and unarmed—now make up the majority of the resistance movement.

According to our KIIs, young people play different types of roles, including participants, organizers of anti-coup movement activities, facilitators, logisticians, and leaders in political entities. It was also evident that young people were at the center and engaging with various revolutionary groups from different sectors,

including local armed groups, IDP management committees, national and international media, CSOs, and NGOs, as well as local and national political entities such as strike groups, EAOs, NUG, CRPH, etc. The revolution brought together the Bamar people and ethnic minorities to share and exchange their diverse ideologies, which were previously not common among the younger generation before the military coup. A 25 year-old male from Chin State, who was a government employee before the military coup said:

*I work with various groups from different sectors, including the IDP management committee, fundraising groups, resistance groups, and other ethnic nationalities. After I founded the Mindat Post media, I also worked for national and international media as well as other NGO organizations. I have gained a lot of life experience, such as communication, teamwork, etc., from working with different groups from different backgrounds. ”*

A 25 year-old Bamar female from Sagaing Region also said that she had to deal with various revolutionaries' groups as follows:

*I have to work with a lot of people, particularly supporting groups. Now, I also become a board member in youth affairs. I also cooperate with healthcare workers, education workers, and most key revolution actors in my region. I also have to act as a public relations officer to deal with NUG and another department. ”*

A 23 year-old male from Chin state, who was a CDF member, said:

*Before the coup, I worked as a civil servant in the Municipal Construction Committee. From March 2021, I joined CDM and fled Matupi and Hakha townships. When the military began a violent crackdown on protesters in June, I decided to take armed action to fight against the military. I learnt basic military training at the Chin National Army (CNA) camp and participated in the formation of CDF-Paletwa. ”*

This research survey assessed the youth's role and position in social and political fields during this revolution. The level of youth participation in the revolution is significant; youth participation can be found in most of the revolutionary activities, from fundraising to defense forces. Without doubt, the survey result shows that 31% of respondents said youth involvement is “very high,” and 28% of respondents said “high” (See figure 8).

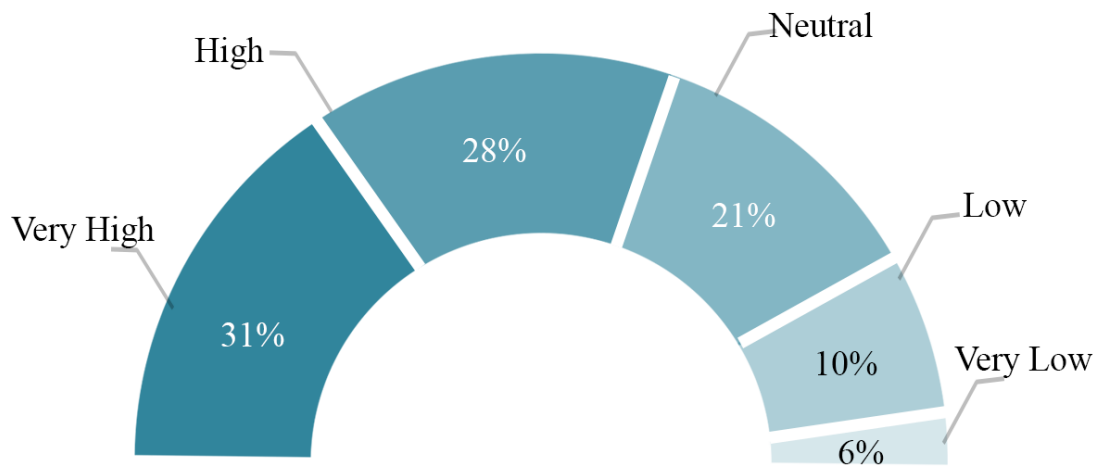


Figure 8: Level of Youth Involvement in the Resistance Movement (n=132)

### 3.3. Use of Social Media and Digital Technologies

A hallmark of the Spring Revolution has been the creative ways in which social media and digital technologies have been used to mobilize against the military coup. Youth participation in the opposition movement comes with the extremely prolific use of social media, which assists communication, collaboration, and coordination, but also combats the associated spread of disinformation and misinformation. Our respondents were clear that digital technologies were a hallmark of the Spring Revolution and a key difference compared with the uprising in 1988, giving rise to new opportunities and new risks.

Spreading information was a key use of digital technologies. A 27 year-old youth from Sagaing mentioned that:

*The access to information technology and the internet allows people from different parts of Myanmar to see the reality of what is happening. It allows people to communicate and have access to the right information so that they can form associations or groups to come together to collectively achieve what they want with their destinies. This makes the difference and makes the movement stronger compared to the 1988 uprising.*



Youth have also used digital technologies to provide education programs. The coup and the CDM led to serious disruptions of employment and schooling routines, and the digital space allowed for new ways of bridging these ruptures. Many high school students joined the CDM after the coup and stopped going to school. But while they were too young to participate in activities that took them away from home for extended periods, such as armed resistance, they sought connection to others. In order to sustain the children's access to education during the crisis, youth came together in groups to create online learning platforms using technology and innovative strategies.

A female youth from Chin state who had been supporting interim education for the IDP community remarked:

*I keep supporting my friends from the ground to continue working for education. They are now teaching even if they have to skip their meals. I only hope for the children not to distance themselves from learning and education, especially teenagers. This is a tough time for them too. ”*

A female youth from Sagaing noted how social media enabled youth to connect across the country, and brought about new means of accessing and pooling these rich resources of youth's time:

*Youth have some knowledge and education, with time to sacrifice, and social media enables them to connect. ”*

Social media has played a significant role in fundraising by revolutionary groups, including raising funds for internally displaced persons (IDPs), logistics, healthcare, education, and defense. Through social media platforms such as Facebook, the youth have been able to reach out to a wider audience and generate support from both inside and outside the country. They have also been able to collect donations through various means, such as crowdfunding campaigns and online donation platforms. Additionally, social media has enabled them to provide updates on the use of donated funds, ensuring transparency and accountability to their supporters. A 25 year-old youth from Chin State also mentioned the use of social media in fundraising activities:

*After I was released from prison, I participated again in the revolution, particularly in the fundraising team and IDP committee. I was a secretary for the IDP committee, and I sought donors and funding through social media in order to support the displaced people in every matter such as shelters, food, education and health. ”*

Further, social media served as a channel for youth to communicate information about anti-coup movement activities and share updates on the latest developments in the revolution. Through social media platforms, youth were able to mobilize public participation in various anti-coup movement campaigns, such as silent strikes, black-shirt campaigns, black profile campaigns, and many more.<sup>14</sup>

Youth's use of social media and technology has granted them a degree of respect and influence across movements.<sup>15</sup> Established activists praised their young colleagues' contributions and how they have shaped the resistance with the tools and the methods they bring to the table.<sup>16</sup> In particular, young activists' use of

technology in developing education initiatives has drawn significant approval from resistance actors and pushed youth capabilities into the spotlight.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, social media also introduces new security challenges for youth. Social media becomes a record of online presence and activity, a ledger of views and ideologies that the military junta also uses to easily trace the locations and activities of the young people through geotagging, photographs, maps, events, messages, and others. A 25 year-old male strike committee member from Sagaing mentioned that:

*They also monitor my Facebook page. This has a lot of impact on my family and makes them insecure. Therefore, I started to be careful with my social media posts. ”*

Other mentions of the use of social media in our qualitative interviews included:

- ✓ **Information and Updates:** Social media acts as a bridge to connecting the youth, the public, and political leaders. The military junta also uses social media to spread propaganda and fake news to rally support through the media for their positions.
- ✓ **Global Engagement:** Myanmar youth have used social media to connect to foreign activist groups and international stakeholders in a larger network of global activism, to learn strategies and lessons, seek material support, and bolster awareness of the country's current situation.
- ✓ **Armed Operations:** Youth used these platforms of communication to discuss tactical and technological advances in armed resistance operations and training, such as introducing drones, developing larger explosive devices, or developing complex artillery systems for conflict with the junta.

### 3.4. Motivations for taking part in the resistance movement

Young people have participated vigorously in the resistance movements with multiple motivations. Interviews revealed differing reasons for participation, beginning from the simplest and most direct sense of moral outrage against the injustice of the military's seizure of power.

A Bamar female youth, who joined the CDM and was a doctor before the coup, mentioned that:

*My participation in CDM is because of my faith that this coup is unjust and unfair. It's my determination to fight till the end. ”*

Others reflected on the loss of self-determination, and a commitment to restoring it – a 35 year-old male from Karen, who is also a PDF, stated that:

*As I am one of the ethnic groups, I want to get self-determination from this revolution. I believe we are going to get it. Now the young generation has a lot of political knowledge, but there is still a lack of unity.* ””

Interviews revealed a sense of solidarity and a need to contribute to the wider social and political effort, even if one’s own contributions were seemingly small. A Chin youth in his 20s who actively participated in the revolution as a protest leader in his town, and was detained for six months, is now an executive member of the Internally Displaced Persons Committee and Defense Fundraising Committee. He said:

*My actions may not have had much effect on the revolution as a whole, but I believe they have played a supporting role in the victory of this revolution to a certain extent.* ””

This sense of contribution was also marked amongst women. A woman in her 30s who served as a chef in liberated areas said that:

*As a woman, I cannot fight the military as men do on the battlefield. However, this revolution will take time. I can contribute in very small ways, such as by cooking food for my comrades. This is somehow contributing to this revolution.*

””

Another Karenni female youth reflected:

*As a woman fighter, it was challenging to go to the frontlines. Therefore, I took part in the rescue and medical support parts. We give psychological and mental help to the IDPs by giving encouragement and political*

””

A 23 year-old LGBTQ youth, who serves as a medical assistant in the PDF camp expressed a sense that:

*I believe my contribution also counts in this revolution, even if it is a drop of water.*

””

### 3.5. Impact of the Coup on the Community

Youth interviewed shared their experiences of the impact of the coup and resulting crackdowns on their lives and community. These ranged from displacement, property loss, deaths in the family, challenges to livelihoods, and bodily harm and physical danger. Across Myanmar, an estimated 2 million of people have been displaced internally due to the fighting as of 2 February 2023<sup>18</sup>, and more than 13.2 million people faced food insecurity due to conflicts, loss of livelihoods and access to markets<sup>19</sup>. A female youth from Kalay region in her 20s recounted:

*The main challenges for my community are that we have a thousand displaced people affected by fires (SAC has burned houses in the Sagaing area).* ”

Another 25 year-old youth informant from Chin State who serves as an IDP committee member noted the social impact of displacement and the loss of access to social services:

*We have around six thousand displaced people. We face financial limitations to support displaced people in their health, education, shelter, food etc. We haven't got any support from international orgs etc. There are 6 people already dead for not getting good healthcare in the IDP camp.* ”

Youth and others living in IDP camps described continuously living in fear. Junta troops attacked IDP communities with artillery, bombs, and airstrikes, burning down hundreds of houses and communities' buildings. Stories of junta troops using innocent people as human shields, killing others, and raping women were recounted. The IDPs have to remain on alert for the arrival of junta troops to the villages, in addition to the poor conditions for women and children in these IDP camps. A 30 year-old female informant from Sagaing, who is working for supporting groups, mentions one of the IDP situations that:

*There are a lot of pregnant women giving birth during displacement. Some mothers have lost their one-month-old children due to limited health care providers. It's very heartbreaking.* ”

Within urban communities, youth describe increased criminality and insecurity, a loss of freedom of movement and expression, and vulnerable livelihoods. The SAC issued several statements to impose curfews, charge those who opposed or criticized them. People were denied the right to assemble and gather for any of these reasons. People in many communities were threatened by the insecure living conditions under the coup. Meanwhile, crime (for instance, robbery, murder) rose in many areas, alongside violations of the rule of law by the SAC<sup>20</sup>.

A female informant from Kachin state also stated:

*The community cannot be gathered anymore to discuss community development and the crimes caused by robbery. ”*

Another 30 year-old female informant from Mon State added that:

*After 6pm, people close their doors and lock themselves in houses for security reasons, especially because it's not safe for women to go out alone at night. ”*

Based on these findings, the survey was also designed to crosscheck the youth's perceptions on the coup's impact on their respective communities or their original place. Without surprising, a majority of youth in the survey (65%) highlighted the economic crisis as the overarching concern faced by their communities (see Figure 9). Another 33% and 29% pointed towards “conflict and violence” and “crime and insecurity” respectively. Respondents also singled out the lack of public services and mental health issues (23% each) in their community.

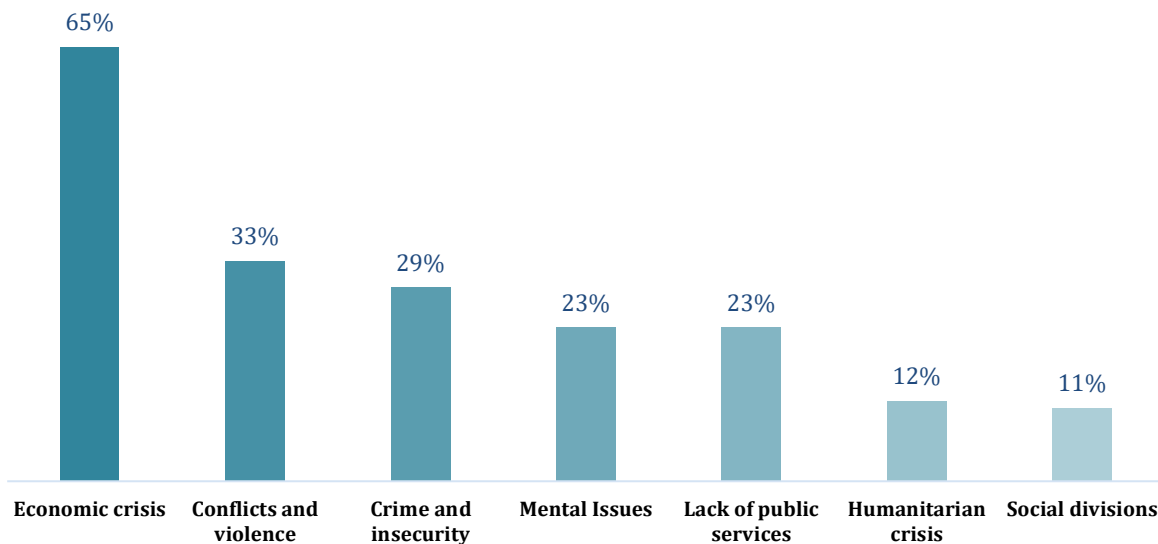


Figure 9: Youth Perceptions of the Coup's Impact on the Community (n=133)

### 3.6. Threats Faced by Youth in the Post-Coup Era

When asked about their perceptions of risk, the youth surveyed reflected that their biggest risks were the threat of being arrested by the SAC (75%) and insecurity during travels (68%) due to high travel restrictions and being scrutinized by SAC's security check-points (see Figure 10). The qualitative interviewees also indicated that a few of our respondents were on the SAC's warrant list and that they were being filed a Section 505 lawsuit by SAC. In order to counter these risks, several youth fled to “liberated” areas, or

attended defense training under Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs). Other youth went into hiding, or left the country by crossing the land borders. A 27 year-old woman who attended the military defense trainings by EAOs shared her experience:

*I left home to organize a protest. But at the end of March, I decided to go to the camp in Tanintharyi, which was designed to organize defense training for the local PDF. I attended the basic military training and then expected to return to the town. But I could not return to my town, because I was charged under 505 (a/e). ”*

Interviewees reflected a sense that the SAC’s arbitrary arrests of young people violated human rights and, more importantly, their human dignity. Freedom of speech and movement became meaningless under the coup. A university student from Sagaing in his early-20s shared his concerns:

*Since I entered into a strike-way together with the student union, SAC noticed our activities and started to follow us. On August 20, 2021, they came to our house to arrest me, and they destroyed materials such as TV, chair and valuable things from my house. They also waited for me at my house wearing plainclothes for 24 hours. They also monitored my Facebook page. This has a lot of impact on my family and makes them feel insecure. ”*

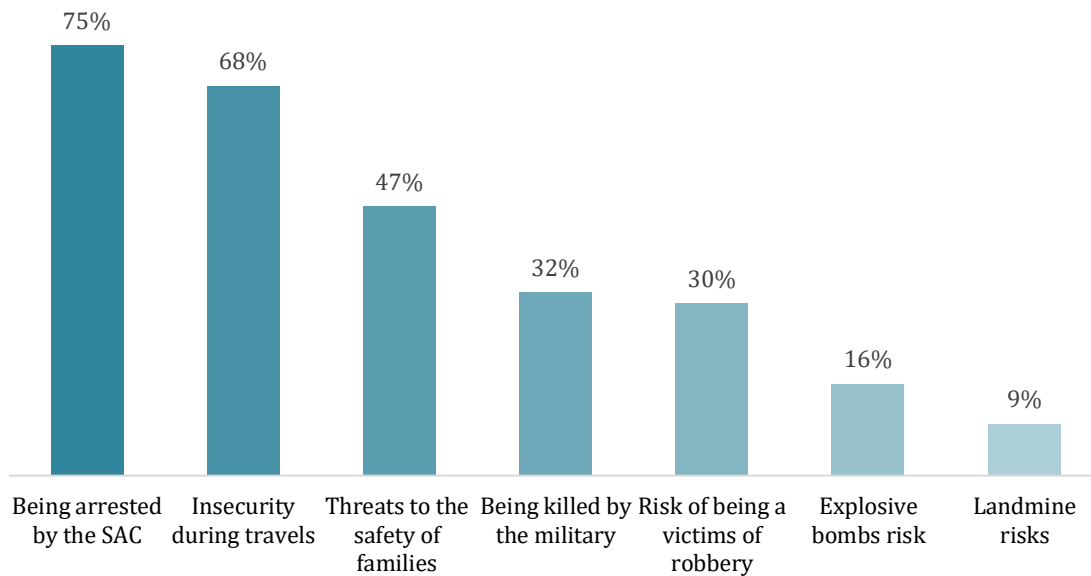


Figure 10: Threats Faced By Youth Under the Coup (n=144)

Most young people have experienced significant risks not only to themselves but also to friends and family. Figure 10 reflects that 47% of respondents faced risks to their family members. Another 32% reflected that they faced the risk of being killed by the military, and another 30% faced the risk of being victims of

robbery. Smaller numbers faced the risks of bodily harm from bomb explosions and landmines as a consequence of the fighting. An interviewee who was a PDF supporter shared his experiences dealing with the risk posed to his friends and family:

*The more I am involved in this revolution, the greater the risk for myself, as well as for my families and friends. I have to hide in many places. My family also has to move to another place. As my parents are old, they face many inconveniences when moving out of our place. Thus, I choose to stay separately from my family because I don't want to give them any trouble because I am involved in this revolution.* ””

The 35 year-old Bamar female, who was a member of the NLD, and took shelter in liberated areas mentioned that:

*Emotionally, I stayed away or apart from my family. However, the military sued me under Section 505(a/c) They raided our house and sent notice. My children and families can no longer stay at home, and we have to flee to the liberated area. I will keep fighting the Junta regardless of those risks.* ””

**3.7. Changes in Youth Participation by August 2022**

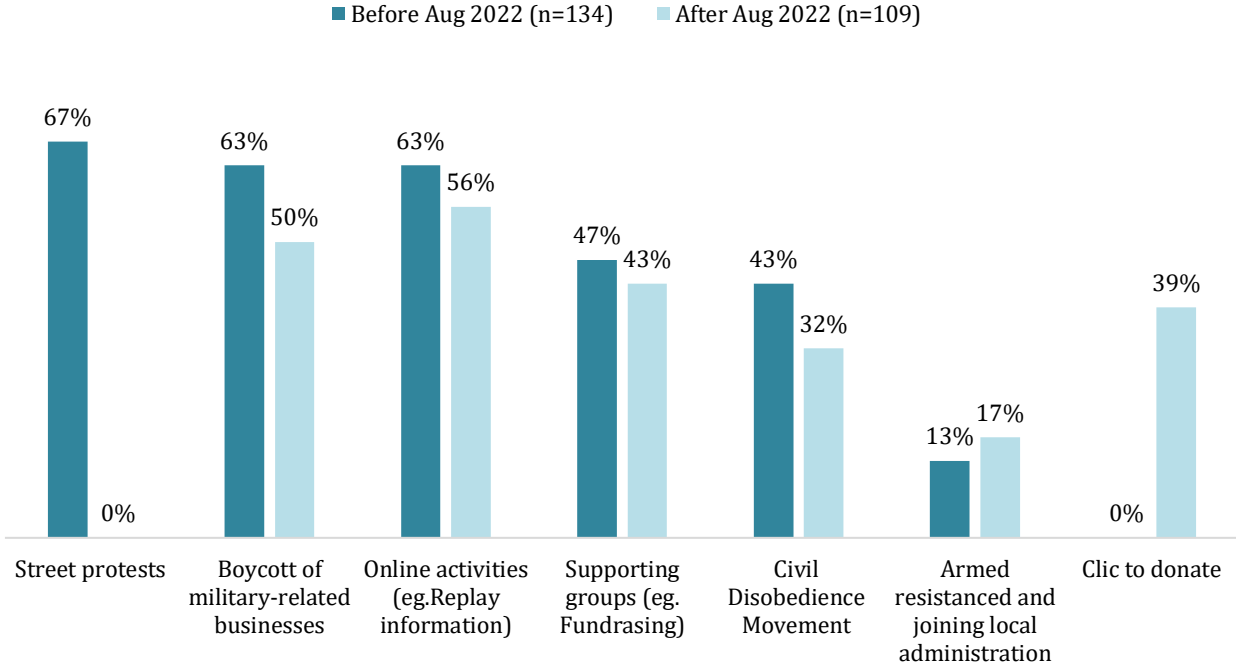


Figure 11: Changes to Participation amongst Survey Respondents

The quantitative survey data explored how youth participation changed before and after August 2022. Figure 11 shows how youth participation in resistance movements shifted slightly with reduced involvement in each of the activities after August 2022. According to the data, before August 2022, the young people had mostly engaged in street protest activities (67%), boycotting military businesses (63%), and online strike activities (63%). Significantly, those involved in street protests declined completely to 0% after August 2022. Boycotts of military businesses (63%) and online strike activities (63%) also declined slightly to 50% and 56%, respectively, after August 2022. Nevertheless, “Click to Donate” activities<sup>21</sup> have apparently increased to 39%.

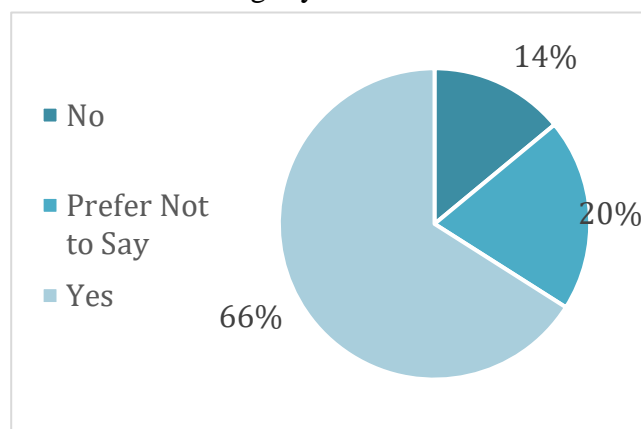


Figure 12: Youth Participation In Anti-coup movement / activities (n=133)

Moreover, the survey data seems to show that youth participation has shifted since August 2022, youth participation in seemingly “less risky” activities increased (for instance, click to donate involvement increased from 0% to 31%), while youth participation in physically-involved activities generally decreased (for instance, street protest decreased from 66% to 0%, and CDM decreased from 42% to 26%)

For a smaller group of youth (i.e. 19 out of 133 respondents) who responded that they were no longer involved in any form of anti-coup activities after August 2022, a variety of reasons were given for this non-involvement. Among them, the majority (42%) responded that they worried for their own safety and security. Another 37% stopped being involved in anti-coup activities because they worried for the safety of their families and friends. Another 32% did so due to livelihood insecurity, with only 5% suggesting that they do not trust in the revolution; and another 5% preferring “to remain neutral” (Figure 13).

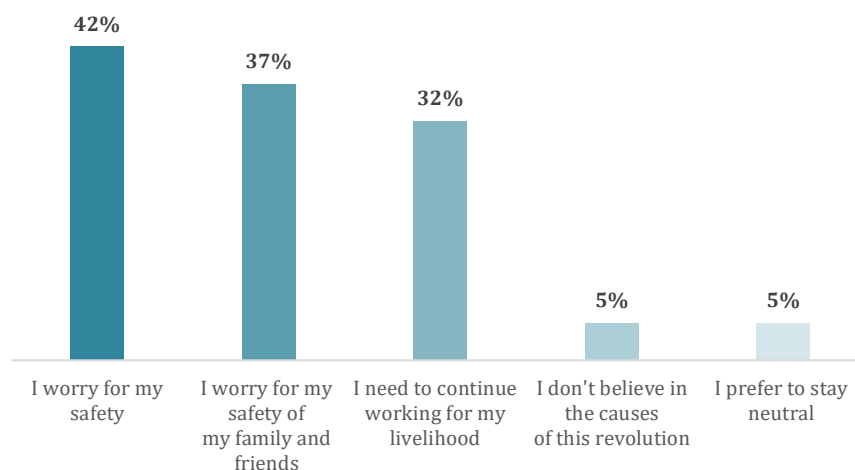


Figure 13: Reasons for No Longer Being Involved in Anti-Coup Activities After August 2022 (n=19)

The qualitative interview data gave some insight into other reasons for changing involvement. One PDF member, 35, stated that he had to change his mode of involvement as he had lost his toes and could not use his legs normally after an accident while experimenting with a homemade bomb. However, he is still participating in the resistance movement as much as he can. Another female PDF member from the liberated area noted:

*One of my female comrades fell in the battle, after that, the PDF team didn't allow female comrades to go to the battlefields. Since then, I have supported logistics (food) at PDF Camp.* ””

### 3.8. Lost Ambitions and Futures

Youth also reflected that they had given up ambitions and sacrificed futures in order to be involved in the resistance movement. They were asked what they would have been doing were it not for the military coup. By far the largest loss was education. 62% of youth responded that they would have continued their education if there had been no coup (see Figure 14). Smaller numbers reflect that they have given up employment and business opportunities. A female CDM doctor said that she had to abandon her scholarship opportunity because her identity documents were confiscated after joining the CDM. The young woman lost not only her career but also the opportunity for further education. She stated:

*I feel unsafe, especially at night. That made me fear, and I now escaped to Chin State.* ””

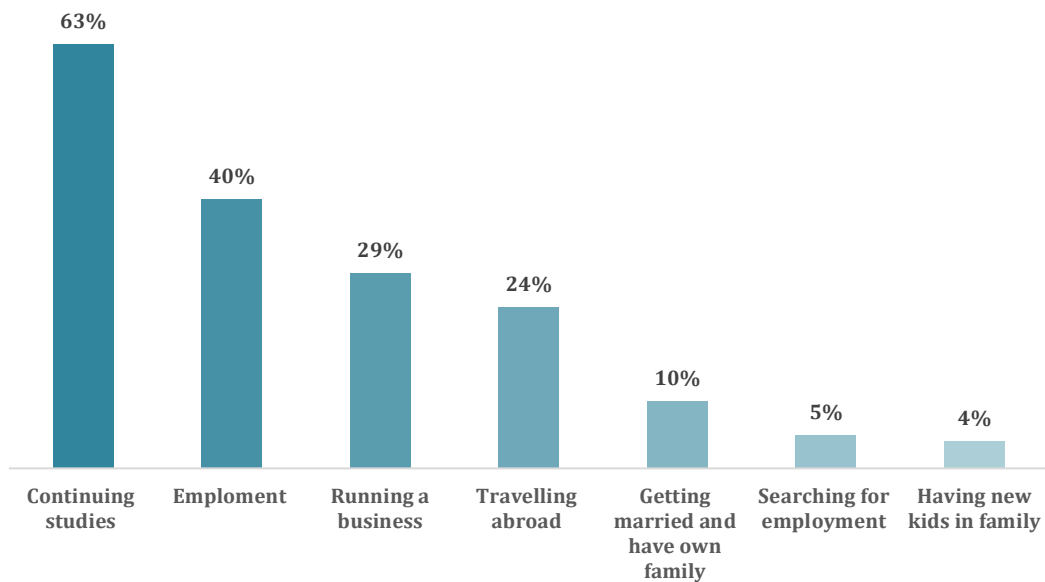


Figure 14: What Youth Would Have Done If the Military Coup Had Not Happened (n=136)

### 3.9. Youth Coping Strategies with the Current Coup

Respondents were also asked what their main coping strategies were in response to the coup. The results showed that migration was the most common mitigation strategy (59%), followed by going abroad for a period of education (48%), and fleeing to liberated areas to keep participating in anti-coup movements (46%) see Figure 15.

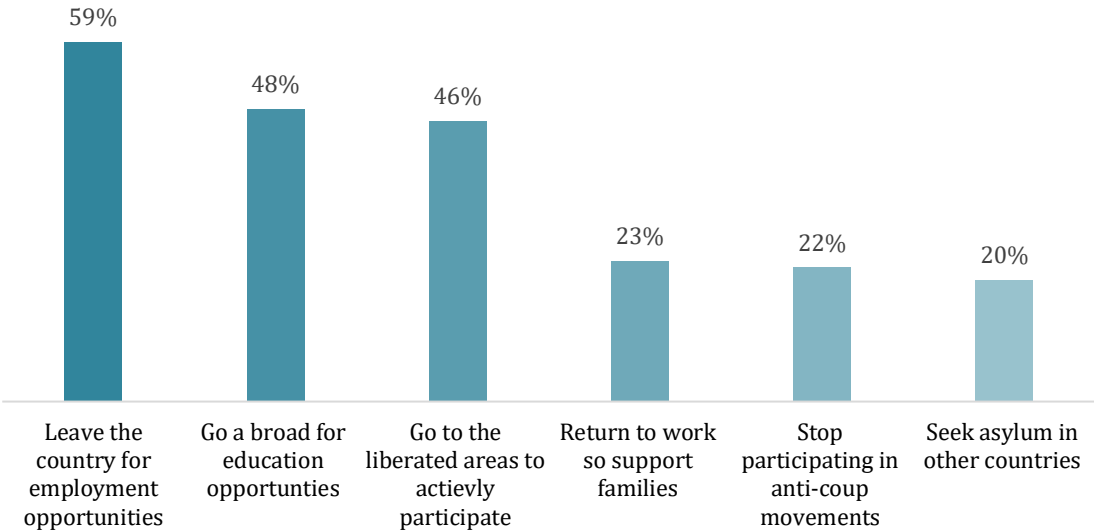


Figure 15: Youth Coping Strategies with the Coup (n=130)

## Section 4 : Unity and Diversity in the Spring

The Spring Revolution has been a diverse movement that brings together people from different backgrounds, united loosely by a common goal of establishing federal democracy and restoring human rights. The movement included young people of different ethnicities and classes, women and the LGBTQ community, labor unions, student groups, strike committees, civil society groups, and others. This diversity brought together unique perspectives, experiences, and skills that enabled young people to create innovative activities for the anti-coup movements.

When the military intensified its crackdown on anti-coup protesters, many young people from urban areas sought refuge in areas controlled by ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), leading to the formation of new friendships and connections between Bamar people and ethnic minority groups. For instance, the Karen National Union (KNU) was one of the early EAOs to provide shelter and basic military training to thousands of urban youth who fled from urban areas. Consequently, the interaction between youth and others from Bamar and ethnic minority groups has increased significantly, sparking new types of discussions and creating a newfound sense of engagement among the younger generation. This section explores **how young people deal with and adapt to the challenges of diversity and maintain unity among themselves while working together in anti-coup movement activities**. It also examines the youth's perspectives on the challenges of diversity and unity among the political leadership.

### 4.1. Youth Experiences of Diversity and Unity in the Revolution

The qualitative interviews revealed that youth reported being able to put aside most differences and work collaboratively together for the success of anti-coup activities. Occasionally, they reported some minor issues, but also reported a stronger willingness to collaborate under the common goal of fighting against the military dictatorship. Common challenges to working together include language barriers, culture shock, communication gaps, differences in political ideology, and a lack of trust that lead to misunderstandings when working together. **Among them, differences in ideologies/perspectives based on political belief, social norms, and generation gap stand out as the most significant challenges to young people working together.**

#### 4.1.1. Differences in Political Beliefs or Perspectives

Differences in political beliefs and historical experiences were often cited as a key challenge in our interviews, especially between urban Bamar youth and ethnic minority youth. Our interviews found that most urban youth in Myanmar joined the resistance movement after witnessing military atrocities against peaceful protests following the 2021 military coup. Urban Bamar youth tended to have limited awareness of Myanmar's political system and were less aware of historical atrocities committed against ethnic minorities by the military. Meanwhile, ethnic minority youth, who have lived under the oppression of the military for decades, have their own political agenda of establishing self-governing states, beyond the withdrawal of the military.

Not surprisingly, such differences in historical perspectives have become one of the underlying challenges to building trust and strengthening unity among young people of different ethnicities at the grassroots level. There are also incidents in which Bamar youth who took refuge in ethnic minority areas were sometimes accused of "invading ethnic minority areas" and "applying Burmese nationalism" or chauvinism, hindering efforts to build trust and cooperation.

A 27 year-old Karen man reported that:

*The main issue is the difference in beliefs between Bamar and ethnic minorities (Karen). The Karen people often criticize Burmese "Chauvinism" (ချင်းစိုးဝါဒ), as they have been oppressed by the military for more than 70 years. Although young people nowadays try to forget those concepts and beliefs, this still remains the main issue in many problems between Bamar and ethnic minorities. It takes a lot of time to gain trust between each other. and we still have so many doubts about each other.* ””

A Bamar young activist and member of the Student Armed Force based in Rakhine State also said that:

*Despite having a good relationship with AA leaders, we had some race-based arguments among the Student Armed Force and AA soldiers, such as Burma being an invader in Rakhine State. We ignored these because it is important to have a good relationship and understanding with ethnic brothers.* ””

It is generally observed that differences in political views and experiences have occasionally created some debate among young people. In the quantitative survey, we asked respondents to choose from different factors that posed the most significant barriers to working together in the revolution. Ideological and political differences were cited by the largest number of survey respondents (47%) as the top barrier to this revolution, followed by geographic differences (21%), and religious differences (12%), while gender, age gap, and race were less cited as barriers to working together in the revolution (see Figure 16).

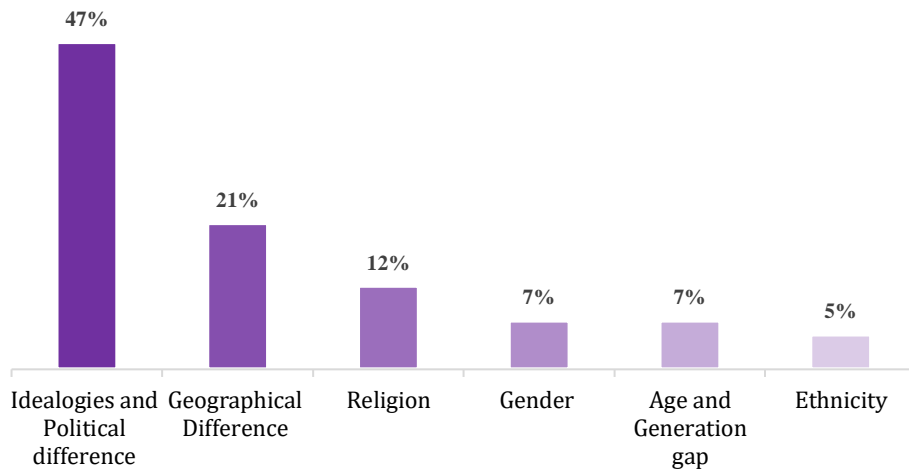


Figure 16: Challenges for Youth in Working Together (n=99)

### 4.1.2. Generation Gap

The generation gap between older generation and youth today was frequently mentioned in our KII interviews as an impediment to working together in the earlier period of the anti-coup movement. Young people felt that they had to spend a considerable amount of time gaining the trust of older generations as they began to lead revolutionary activities, including fundraising, managing public administration, and armed resistance. Debates often occurred between generations due to differences in perceptions, experience, and other social norms (e.g., gender) when collaboration was involved in resistance activities. This affected youth participation in leadership roles and limited their ability to carry out activities in collaboration with older generations.

A 32-year-old female from Mon State shared that:

*From my experience, the younger and older generations initially struggled to collaborate due to ideological differences, but this has improved as political awareness has been raised online. The younger generation had to prove themselves capable of leading the revolution. It took a lot of sacrifices for the older generation to recognize youth's abilities. Similarly, those from rural and urban backgrounds had different experiences and were divided systematically. ”*

Women seem to face a double challenge in seeking the trust of older generations while engaging in revolutionary activities, as a 29 year-old female from Karenni State explained:

*There are also different perceptions between old people and youth. As youth and women, we have learned freedom of speech, so we don't like the patriarchy system. Likewise, men also don't like when a woman takes on a leading role. Thus, it is important to compromise a lot among old people and youth, and among women and men as well. ”*

### 4.1.3. Communication and Language Barriers

Other minor barriers cited by young people are ineffective communication, language barriers, and cultural differences. Lack of effective communication was mentioned as leading to misunderstanding among different revolutionary groups and people, where top-down communication channels lead to delays in the flow of information, decision-making and implementation of revolutionary activities.

Further, youth complain about a lack of transparency between young people and elder people (leaders), which has led to unnecessary misunderstandings during revolutionary activities. It was also learned that the leaders (i.e., NUG) were less interested in providing guidelines or explaining future plans to young people after they finished their basic military training (for example). Also, in some areas, the information gap sometimes contributed to a lack of trust and misunderstanding among armed resistance groups.

A 23 year-old Bamar male commented that:

*The information gap is the main obstacle to this revolution. We can see news in Upper Myanmar about PDFs shooting each other because of the information gap, lack of trust, and misunderstanding. It is important to close the communication gap to increase trust and reduce misunderstandings between PDFs.* ””

Along with communication barriers, language barriers are also cited as another minor issue that creates misunderstandings among young people. When the coup forced many youth from urban areas into ethnic regions, they came to interact with people who spoke ethnic languages and had different cultural backgrounds, leading to culture shock and communication barriers. These issues also contribute to occasional misunderstandings. A 35 year-old Karen youth who helped a lot of urban young people traveling to liberated areas shared his experience that:

*I have good communication with people from the urban area (ie. Bamar) and with local people (Karen). There were a lot of culture shocks among Bamar young people when they started to arrive here in the liberated area. I used to explain and guide them how to behave, speak with local people and with local soldiers in order to reduce misunderstanding.* ””

#### **4.2. Is Diversity an Obstacle to the Spring Revolution?**

The study examined whether such challenges ultimately posed an obstacle to young people working together. **Yet despite the presence of the above barriers, it was found that young people could easily resolve such issues and were willing to build positive cooperation toward a common goal. Thus, youth did not see such issues as a significant barrier among them in working together.** Indeed, it was observed that youth remain open-minded and cooperative; and their political knowledge and acceptance of diversity have significantly increased following the coup. In addition, young people were less interested in seeking recognition and rank, and tended to focus more on the successful accomplishment of the task. This also led to a smoother workflow and greater success in performing the activities together among young people.

Furthermore, it was also noticed that **most of the youth-led activities were successful due to their consistency, self-reliance, and commitment to their responsibilities**, even if these efforts were small. In addition, young people seemed to be more patient and humble in seeking common agreement in a diverse environment; willing to build trust and understanding among each other. Therefore, despite the presence of differences and misunderstandings, the youth were able to solve them well without serious conflicts.

A 25 year-old Bamar male, who was a member of the Basic Education Students Union stated that:

*In our Education Central Board, there are many people from different backgrounds, like Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Muslims, and people of all races. Since we are young, we care little about religious issues. Our attitude is that we are all Myanmar citizens, and we have a responsibility to protect our citizens. Thus, the main thing is to move forward to achieve our common goals.* ”

A 23 year-old Karen female, a member of the media team in the liberated area, also added that:

*Consistency is the most important factor in seeing successful results. Like, we don't have immediate public trust, so we have to be consistent with our activities. It is harder for women to gain trust from people. We must walk the talk. If we consistently carry out our activities until results are achieved, we earn the public's trust.* ”

The survey sought to understand young people's general perception of diversity and whether it affects their ability to work within revolutionary movements or with key revolutionary actors. Overall, young people do not perceive social, cultural, and ethnic diversity as an impediment to working together or strengthening collaboration in revolution movements. Survey results showed that 35% of respondents strongly disagreed with the statement that diversity is an obstacle to this revolution, 25% said they also disagreed, and 22% were neutral with this statement (See Figure 17).

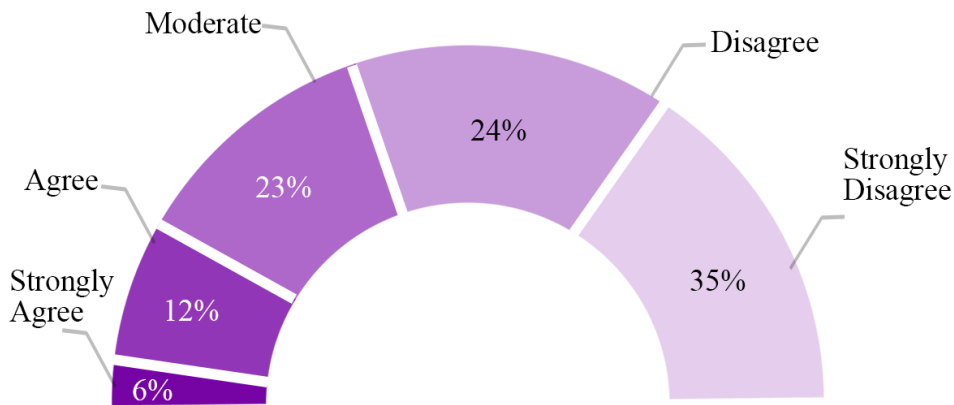


Figure 17: Has Diversity been a Barrier in the Revolution? (n=133)

The integration and cooperation of young people from diverse backgrounds in this revolution have been significant. Despite occasional challenges, young people have shown remarkable resilience and adaptability in working together towards their common goals. More importantly, youth are less conservative than older generations and are willing to embrace change and new ways of thinking. Hence, young people are able to build stronger social networks and easily integrate with people from

different backgrounds, within defense, politics, and the CDM, regardless of religion or race. This has been possible due to the common goal of overthrowing the military dictatorship.

### 4.3. Changing Public Attitudes in the Revolution

The current revolution in Myanmar has seen a significant change in public attitudes compared to past political movements, such as the 1988 uprising. This was due to increased access to information and internet technology, which allowed people to communicate and enabled them to see the reality of events and the military's brutality. In addition, the revolution raised solidarity, public awareness, and compassion for minority agendas, political views, gendered experiences, and human rights.

#### 4.3.1. Increased compassion for ethnic minorities

After encountering the military's brutal crackdown toward peaceful protestors and destruction in Bamar majority regions, it was reported that public understanding and empathy for ethnic minorities, as well as the Rohingya community, have grown where ethnic minorities have experienced the military's brutal attack and destruction for more than six decades. Previously, the self-determination demanded by ethnic minorities was often viewed negatively as a form of separatism and used by the military as propaganda about the disintegration of the Union. Now the public, especially the young, has rejected the propagandic assertion that the military is the protector against foreign invasion and the disintegration of the Union. Instead, the people are now more united in their common goals of establishing a federal democratic union and ending military dictatorship.

A 27 year-old Chin youth remarked that:

*Such unity has never been seen before. Many people can understand the feelings of ethnic minorities, such as the Rakhine War. I also don't believe in the ultimate outcome of a revolutionary zero-sum game. In the end, we still have to go to the negotiating table. This may be different from what other people think.* ”

A Bamar male interviewee also explained:

*Before, we didn't understand much about how ethnic people are suffering because we are being taught about the Tatmadaw's heroism. Another reason is that we don't believe that one can kill, destroy, or burn other houses. Now that we see how the military is cruel and actually does such things even to Burmese people, we understand why ethnic people hate the Burmese military.* ”

Witnessing the military's acts of terror, the public's determination has grown stronger, leading to a loss of respect for the Tatmadaw. It is found in our KII interviews that young people are determined to win this revolution and end military dictatorship, thus, committing to cooperate and build trust regardless of their races and identities.

A female respondent from the Sagaing region stated:

*Now, after the atrocities committed against us by the terrorist SAC, the public's determination is even stronger. Now, the public no longer respects the Tatmadaw as we usually do, but calls them the Fascist Tatmadaw because of their brutality and inhumanity. The Bamar proverb "Bayint Naung Phaung Phet (ဘုရင့်နေ့ခင် ဖောင်ဖျတ်)" which says that the Bamar hero destroyed the raft to make his soldiers determined to fight the enemy, is also now being quoted. Since the public had lost their homes, they wanted to win the revolution and end military dictatorship. ””*

#### **4.3.2. Increased compassion for minorities (esp. the Rohingya Community)**

More importantly, our KII interviews suggest that there have been some positive changes in public attitudes in terms of accepting people from different communities, particularly the Rohingya community in Myanmar. Many young people, for instance, have become more aware of racial and religious diversity, which has led to a better understanding of the struggles and suffering of the Rohingya community. Online platforms and information have helped young people learn and develop their attitudes, promoting a sense of unity in carrying out revolutionary activities.

A Bamar man, a leader of a student strike group, said young people have been educating each other to avoid discriminatory behavior as they work together to increase unity among them:

*One significant change is that there is no division among young people regarding their races, colors, and religions. Even if someone accidentally spelled out the "Kala" word, other young people would remind them not to do it. Hence, we should also teach our generation about democracy, human rights, and how to respect diversity. Now, young people can discuss a lot of things together without any issue with race or religion. ””*

A Rohingya female from Rakhine State also shared her experiences about the changing public attitude towards her:

*After the coup, the public attitude has changed in a positive way. For example, there is less usage of Kala toward us, and the Rakhine people also treat us nicely. I am very glad for such a change. Before 2012, we had a very good relationship, but it was destroyed after 2012. Now, after the revolution, the relationship is again improving in a good direction. ””*

A Rohingya male from Rakhine State also stated that public social and political values have improved in terms of accepting minorities, including the Rohingya community, as follows:

*With this transformation, I observe a lot of changes in social behavior. Before the coup, civilians in Myanmar had relatively limited views on ethnicity. They also despise Rohingyas. After the coup, the wider public gained political awareness and a better understanding of the struggles and suffering of Myanmar's minority ethnic groups. And this revolution unites many communities, making them more unified than ever, without prejudice towards ethnic minority groups. They respect and value each other. This is a positive attitude for the revolution and for developing Myanmar. This unity is also a threat to destroy the Myanmar military. ”*

#### **4.3.3. Increased political awareness and knowledge**

In addition, the revolution raised public political awareness about human rights, federalism, authoritarianism, gender, equality, freedom of expression, etc. The public, including the Burmese majority, has now widely accepted demands for federal democracy, which they understand is not a form of separation, as the military had used to propagandize it, but a potential solution to the current political crisis and historical grievances. Indeed, young people in the revolution have recognized the importance of raising political awareness and education, particularly with regards to federalism, which is seen as a critical issue in the country's current political landscape. Many youth realized that young people from ethnic minority groups have a better understanding of the need for federalism and its potential benefits, while Bamar young people often lack knowledge about the political system and its complexities.

A young PDF member from the Sagaing region elaborated:

*The public's political knowledge has greatly improved. But we should spread this awareness to the public more. If the public is weak in terms of political knowledge, this will be an obstacle in our revolutionary path. ”*

#### **4.3.4. Increased gender awareness**

Further, the study noted an improvement in notions of gender equality among young people and an increasing acceptance of the rights of LGBTQ people. Youth acknowledged that women are actively participating in most of the revolutionaries' activities and taking leading roles. For example, discrimination based on gender is reportedly less prevalent, according to our KII interview findings, whereas most of our respondents appreciated women-led and gender sensitive activities such as “Hta-Mein Strike ”<sup>22</sup>.

A 30 year-old Chin male respondent explained:

*Gender awareness has improved. We now have a lot of female soldiers. They work as much as male soldiers, even though they were called to return home by their parents. We have no gender discrimination at our headquarters or military base. Everyone is treated the same. ””*

A 20 year-old male respondent from Sagaing Region remarked that:

*The main change I see in social values is gender awareness, patriotism, and LGBTQ in a positive way. Many people now understand and accept those values. ””*

A 25 year-old female respondent from Chin State added:

*There are a lot of changes among young people. Before, most people thought LGBTQ rights were not their business and blamed them for being different, but now people accept them more than before. ””*

Overall, this revolution has seen several changes in political and social values in Myanmar. Most importantly, people are now aware of the Myanmar military's brutalities towards ethnic groups and the Rohingya community; hence, the public has become more sympathetic towards their struggles. In addition, there is more political awareness among the general public, especially pertaining to political ideas such as federalism and minority rights. Young people have become more accepting of different communities, including the LGBTQ community, and have shown improved awareness of gender-based issues.

#### **4.4. Challenges of Unity and Coordination Between Key Actors: Youth Views**

Unity is widely recognized as vital for the success of the Spring Revolution. Following the military coup, there was a proliferation of revolutionary groups throughout the country, resulting in the formation of new organizations such as the NUG, Consultative Committees, regional-based political coalitions, and armed resistance groups. Mapped onto pre-existing EAOs and political parties in the country, the collective collaboration among these groups is widely perceived as the most effective strategy for the people to resist the military junta. This has also become the prevailing aspiration of revolutionary groups, particularly among young people.

This study also examined youth's perceptions of the level of solidarity and coordination among key leadership actors through the KIIs and survey findings. In the KIIs, we asked respondents to identify groups they saw as the key leaders of the revolution as well as any other significant groups who were not involved in the revolution. In addition, the KII assessed the level of cooperation and areas where youth perceived cooperation to be the weakest.

#### 4.4.1. Youth Perceptions of the Key Actors in the Revolution

Interviewees and survey participants were asked which political actors they thought were the most important to the Revolution. KIIs with key youth actors identified different actors in the revolution, including the general public, EAOs, PDFs/Local Defence Forces (LDFs), NUG/NUCC/CRPH, political parties, CDMers, and youth groups. The public was seen as the primary actor in sustaining the revolution, with its continued engagement to support the revolution, such as fundraising, participating in civil disobedience, silent strikes, and more. Young people recognize that the revolution cannot continue without public participation.

A 35 year-old Karen male, also a PDF member, said:

*The public is, of course, the main player. Then, I am very motivated by the CDM people. They struggled a lot and sacrificed their jobs and families. They are the first step and the main key player who will lead this revolution. ””*

In our interview with youth leaders, EAOs are also seen as important players due to their long-standing presence and experience in the country's armed struggle. These groups have been fighting for self-determination and autonomy for decades, have developed strong knowledge about political systems (e.g. federalism and power-sharing arrangements), and are perceived as having strong experience establishing public administration functions. Thus, many PDFs/ LDFs expect EAO guidance in terms of militarizing and forming public administration in their areas of influence.

A 23 year-old male from Chin State, who is also a leader of CDF-Paletwa, said:

*Next, EAO is the key player in this revolution. Since they already have experience, their leadership is very important. They can guide us on important issues, such as how to implement strategies, how to initiate public administration, etc. There is more coordination between existing EAOs and emerging armed groups. This is a good sign. ””*

Not surprisingly, the National Unity Government (NUG) is also seen as an important player in the revolution for several reasons. First, it is composed of leaders who were elected by the people, giving them

legitimacy as a public government. Second, NUG is seen as a key player at the international level for gaining support from other countries. Third, they are responsible for setting goals, guiding, and maintaining the values of the revolution, which is important for ensuring that the movement stays on track. Youth also mentions that NUG has a responsibility to guide and lead the public in a positive direction.

A 23 year-old Bamar LGBTQ, who is also a medic on a PDF team in the liberated area, states that:

*NUG is more responsible to keep the people participating in this revolution. They should not give people false hopes, but have to show their work and motivate the people to participate in the anti-coup movement.* ””

#### 4.4.2. Youth Perceptions of Other Groups

According to KIIs and surveys, there are also groups that should play a pivotal role in the success of the revolution but have not yet participated. Youth highlighted that the collaboration of these groups is crucial for the success of the revolution.

For instance, interviewees pointed out that many political parties, including ethnic political parties, have been somewhat invisible in the revolution, and they are criticized for focusing on their own interests rather than working with the revolutionary forces to find solutions together.

Additionally, some civil society organizations are also seen as not sufficiently involved in the revolution, where their roles are critical in order to support public services in places where government functions have failed. A 23 year-old male from Paletwah CDF share his opinions that:

*In this revolution, the role of political parties is invisible in this revolution. I don't think they should focus on their own interests. They should consider what the people want. They should work with the revolutionary forces to find solutions together.* ””

Finally, the youth express their disappointment towards certain EAOs groups, such as UWSA, SSPP, and AA, for not being involved in the revolution but instead focusing on their personal or economic interests. A 25 year-old Bamar male, who is a member of the Basic Student Union, said:

*Some EAOs are not decisive, for example, AA [Araḳan Army]. They are keeping a neutral role. The NUG should work harder to cooperate with such groups that have a strong army. Within NUG, there are a lot of people, but many do not work and put their full effort into the revolution.* ””

#### 4.5. Youth Views on level of Unity and Coordination among Key Actors

Effective cooperation between different actors is considered important because it allows for more effective efforts to achieve the common goal of removing the military junta and establishing a federal democratic state. Currently, different actors are fighting the military separately; however, many young people held a perception of insufficient cooperation and coordination among key leaders. In fact, young people believe that success depends on the ability of these groups to work together. Survey results also reflected weak coordination among key players, with 24% and 9% of respondents citing it as weak and very weak, respectively. On the other hand, 47% of respondents rated the coordination among key actors as just moderate, where stronger coordination is needed. (See Figure 18)

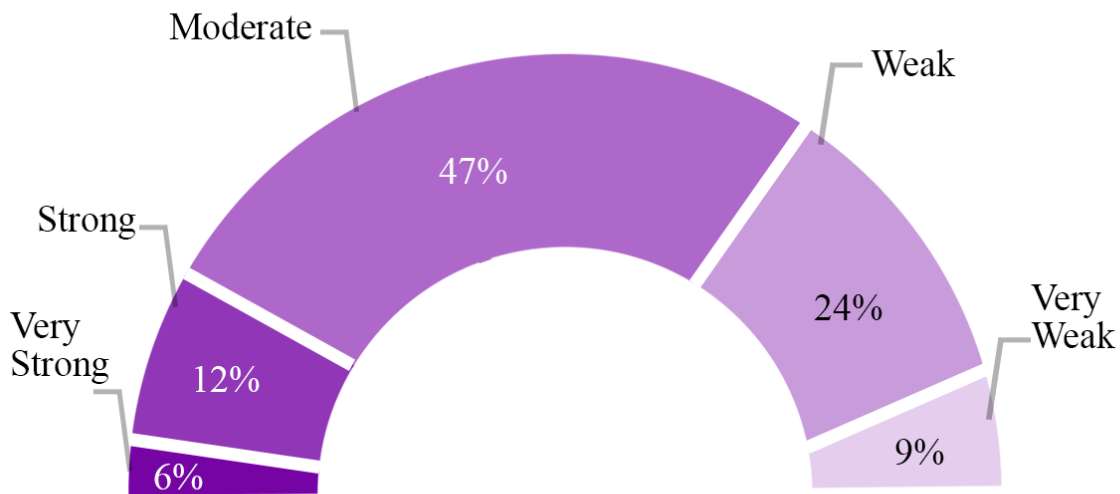


Figure 18: Perceptions of the Level of Coordination Among Key Actors (n=133)

##### 4.5.1. Where Youth Saw Coordination as the Weakest

A prevalent narrative emerged in the study that singled out the NUG as weak in its coordination with key actors in the revolution. In KIIs, the NUG was mentioned as weak in coordination with local defense groups, EAOs, political groups, CSO groups, youth groups, and administration groups. Based on these narratives, the quantitative survey then examined where (or in which relationship) young people perceived coordination as weakest. Respondents were given the option to select two out of ten different choices. The weakest coordination links were revealed to be between NUG and PDFs (32%), NUG and the CSOs or wider public (32%), between the NUG and EAOs (32%), and between the NUG and youth themselves (21%). Further, 15% of respondents also reported that coordination is weak amongst PDFs and armed-resistance groups (Figure 19). One possible explanation for this is that the respondents placed their hopes

and consequently, the responsibility for the coordination of revolutionary groups on the NUG, and hence saw it as not matching their high aspirations.

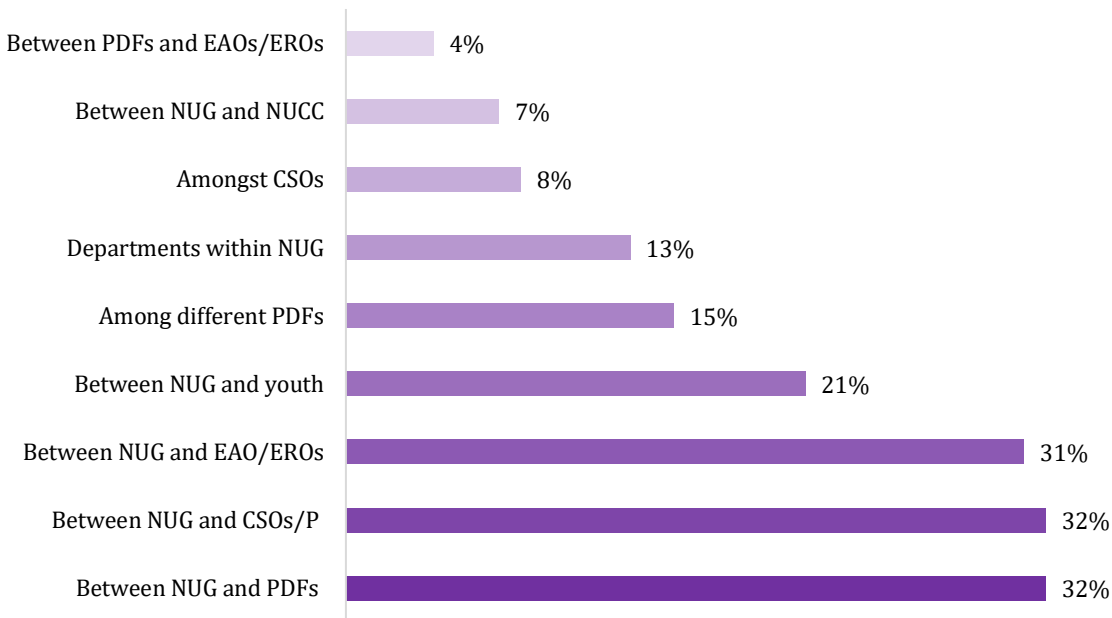


Figure 19: Areas Where Coordination was Perceived as Weakest (n=131)

#### 4.6. Youth Perceptions: Explaining Weak Coordination amongst Key Actors

The interviews delved deeper into what youth saw as the reasons for this weak coordination among revolutionary actors and key leaders. This was attributed to several factors, including the presence of numerous armed groups, the absence of effective communication mechanisms, a lack of trust, ideological differences among key leaders, and the tendency of politicians on the ground to prioritize personal rank and influence.

##### 4.6.1. Large Number of Armed-Resistance Groups

One reason for poor coordination among the major players in the revolution identified by youth was the large number of local defense groups, which makes it difficult for the NUG to mobilize and establish a chain of command. The absence of a "chain of command" and poor coordination have led to unnecessary armed conflicts among armed resistance groups in some parts of Myanmar. This has further contributed to a perception of fragmentation of actors on the ground.

A female CDM doctor remarked:

*I think local defense groups are too many in number and they are everywhere, so it would be hard to mobilize these groups and build a chain of command by the NUG. But I think the NUG should try to act and talk with them.* ”

A male PDF member from Sagaing also added:

*There are many PDFs in our region, but the unity between PDFs is weak among the leaders. If we can become one, we will be stronger in both weapons and strength in the battle against the military. The more united we are, the closer we are to ending the military.* ””

#### 4.6.2. Lack of effective communication mechanisms

The absence of effective communication channels was identified as a contributing factor to weak coordination, especially amongst the NUG-affiliated PDFs. This led to misunderstandings among revolutionary groups concerning their legitimacy, levels of trust, funding allocation, following of orders, and performing other public administration tasks in upper Myanmar. Moreover, youth participants noted that the lack of communication resulted in a loss of control among armed groups and created a complicated reporting mechanism, making it difficult to carry out resistance activities.

A female respondent from the Sagaing region stated:

*The main challenges are communication and misunderstanding. We have to use the horizontal communication channel.” (in a discussion about centralized communication systems)* ””

A young PDF soldier from a liberated area, disabled by a landmine accident, said:

*In my experience, lack of transparency and proper communication channels between young and old (leaders) is the main problem. Leaders (i.e., NUG leaders) are very weak in providing guidance and explaining future plans to young people (i.e., PDFs) after completing training (for example).* ””

#### 4.6.3. Lack of trust

A lack of trust was also identified as the leading cause of poor coordination among different revolutionary groups (including NUG and EAO), which leads to weakened unity and hinders cooperation and coordination. The youth suggested that the NUG should put more effort into collaborating with EAOs and seeking common ground in order to resolve these challenges and establish a country with political space for all actors.

A Kachin female respondent, leading a strike group, pointed to the importance of mutual trust in cooperation between the ethnic minorities and Bamar:

*The issue of mutual trust has been a big component among ethnic groups, Bamar political leaders, and other self-interest-oriented people that has limited them from working together.* ””

A 34 year-old Bamar male from Yangon, also emphasized the importance of trust and mutual agreement among actors:

*It is difficult to build trust between different groups (i.e., NLD, ethnic minorities) where they are blaming each other. I believe if they have a mutual agreement; they can work together without blaming each other in this revolution to bring about a successful outcome. ””*

Surprisingly, in some parts of Burma's majority regions, lack of trust was also pointed out as one of the key reasons for conflicts among different armed resistance groups. For example, a female supporter in the Sagaing region reflected:

*Lack of trust is the main obstacle in this revolution. We saw news about PDFs shooting each other in upper Myanmar because of a lack of trust, a communication gap, and misunderstandings. It is important to narrow the communication gap and reduce misunderstanding among PDFs to build trust. ””*

#### **4.6.4. Differences in political ideologies and discussion among key leaders**

Another factor that weakens cooperation is differences in political ideology and policy strategies for cooperation. Youth highlighted the importance of dialogue and finding common ground among key actors. In fact, the absence of a common agreement and dialogue among these groups, particularly between the NUG and EAOs, is seen as a significant weakness in strengthening cooperation. Although some EAOs, such as the AA, remained neutral in the revolution, the young people suggested that the NUG should devote more energy to building trust and strengthening cooperation with those EAOs not yet involved in the revolution in order to establish a better country.

A Bamar male activist from Yangon said:

*There is a lack of discussion between EAOs and NUG to discuss their different political ideologies, which is the main obstacle in this revolution. Because no one can implement their political ideology alone, we need to collaborate together to build a better country. ””*

A Karen male respondent also added:

*We need to abolish the military junta without depending on our political parties. The strong agreement between EAOs and NUG is very important. I am not very satisfied with their current cooperation. I don't know if they have any arrangements, but they should show the public if they have any. Now the public has... vague [understanding] about what the future holds. ””*

### 4.3.5. Political Opportunism

Last but not least, some respondents reflected that certain political actors were more interested in grabbing seats and political positions rather than working collaboratively with other revolutionary groups. In some cases, it seemed there was a blame game among different groups, which further hampered the coordination efforts. Furthermore, there were concerns that not all members of the NUG were putting their full effort into the revolution, leading to a lack of decisive action.

A female logistic supporter from the Sagaing region states that:

*The NUG-Ministry of Defense has issued instructions to collaborate among revolutionary groups (e.g., rebel groups, political groups, and administration groups), but some political actors are interested in grabbing seats/positions. Some of their defense groups are given arms, but they don't really fight back against the military. The real fighters are different groups organized by the community.*

Based on the above discussion with youth in the KII interview, this study explored a wider youth perception of the three biggest challenges faced by the key players in strengthening their cooperation. The findings showed similar underlying causes for the weakness of cooperation to those in the KII interviews. A total of 131 respondents answered this question, which asked respondents to select the top two challenges to effective coordination. The majority stated that lack of effective communication channels among key stakeholders (64%) and a lack of trust among key players (63%) were the two most significant challenges to cooperation (see Figure 20). The lack of cooperative policies and procedures, including the constraints of the Federal Charter, came in at 44%, followed by different approaches and political ideologies in the movement at 43%. In general, the findings from both the KII and survey indicated common challenges of a lack of communication channels, trust, and cooperation strategies among key actors.

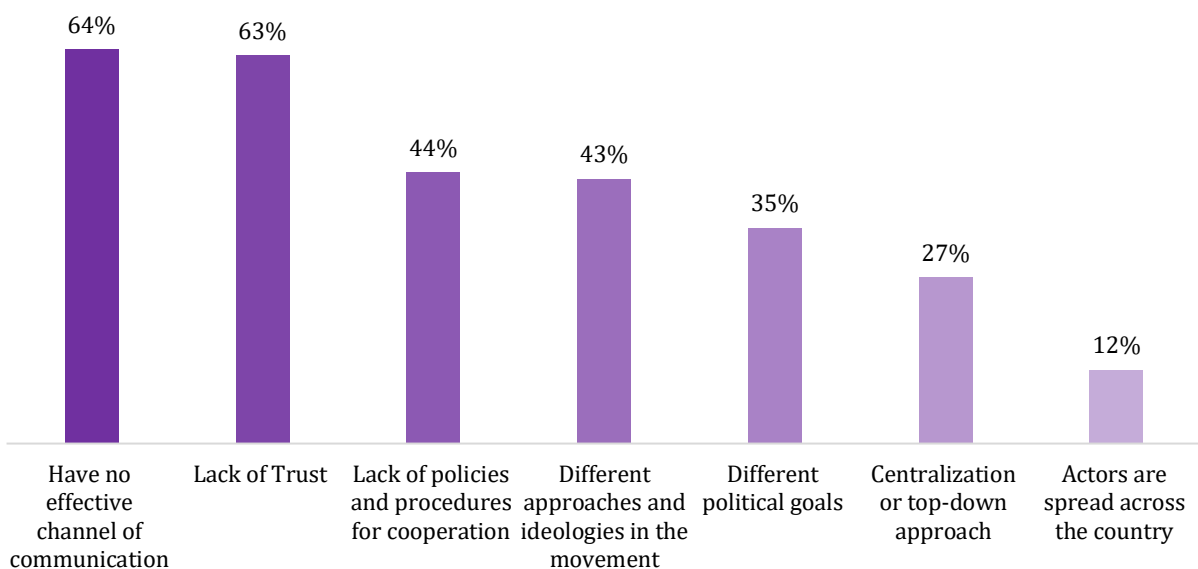


Figure 20: Challenges Faced by Key Actors in Coordination (n = 131)

In sum, youth from diverse backgrounds actively participated in the revolution. Despite the presence of a few challenges in the form of differences in ideology, experience, skills, lack of trust, communication, and language barriers, the youth were able to quickly overcome these challenges with the common goal of fighting the military. Media and information technology helped to improve attitudes such as acceptance of people from different backgrounds, political knowledge, and gender awareness among the general public, including youth. As a result, young people can easily build stronger, more inclusive movements.

On the other hand, youth perceive insufficient cooperation and coordination among key leaders due to differences in political ideology, lack of trust, lack of communication mechanisms among resistance armed groups, and lack of cooperative policies among key actors. Among various key revolutionary actors, the NUG is seen as weak in cooperating with other revolutionary actors, especially the EAOs. Overwhelmingly, youth reflected that the success of the Spring Revolution depended on the solidarity and increased cooperation of all key players.

## Section 5 : Leadership

This section seeks to explore the relation of youth to leadership, including youth perceptions of the leadership structures of the current resistance movement, the current status of youth in the resistance movement, the level of engagement they have with established actors, and the barriers to leadership they continue to face. To understand the level of youth leadership in the resistance movement, the study attempted to understand the status of youth in the resistance movement, their level of engagement with other stakeholders, and the extent of influence they had on pro-democracy and resistance groups.

For the youth of Myanmar who joined the resistance movement in the aftermath of the 2021 coup, leadership entailed a variety of aspects. Youth searched for leaders who could reflect their thoughts and viewpoints, show courage and integrity, be accountable and transparent, mobilize communities at the grassroots level, and provide a clear vision and strategic plan for the future.<sup>23</sup> They wanted leaders who could create and sustain social movements, inspire and motivate people, and negotiate the country's complex political landscape.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, youth in the resistance movement wanted more inclusive and representative leadership that reflects Myanmar's diversity and could effectively solve the country's difficulties in the aftermath of the coup.<sup>25</sup>

More importantly, youth have unquestionably made a contribution to the resistance effort by participating in unarmed, armed, and pro-democracy institutions by their extensive involvement and creative methods of organizing, yet the extent of their impact is still debatable.<sup>26</sup> On the one hand, there was a widespread notion that youth involvement was the driving force behind the revolution and has made the resistance more inclusive and collaborative. On the other, many respondents said that youth's ability to influence the resistance movement was constrained, particularly as a result of ingrained sociocultural norms and political divisions. The following part will go into greater detail on the youth's roles, status, and influence on the resistance movement.

### 5.1. Key Actors in the Revolution

Understanding youth's perceptions of the major stakeholders and leadership structures within the current resistance movement is vital. Their distinct viewpoints on key actors can provide insightful information about their political views and convictions, accommodate the needs and concerns of youth, and design policies that are more responsive. In order to understand youth's perceptions of current and future leadership roles in Myanmar, this research, in both qualitative KIIs and quantitative surveys, asked about youth's perceptions of the three major stakeholders who play the most crucial roles in the country's future. Unsurprisingly, given the military's atrocious offensive war against civilians, young people viewed armed groups/armed actors as the most important actors in current and future Myanmar. A key driver of the shift to more armed forms of resistance was the military's consistently harsh crackdowns against unarmed protests; resulting in a significant portion of young activists feeling that armed resistance was a necessary and justified response to the SAC's disproportionate violence.

A total of 129 respondents (94%) answered the question: “Which are the top three key actors in this Revolution?”; with EAOs (76%), PDFs (59%), and NUG/NUCC (56%) being selected as their top three important roles with the highest level (see Figure 21). In addition, 32% of respondents also chose other local defense forces, including the Chinland Defense Force (CDF), Karenni National Defense Force (KNDF), and Bamar People’s Liberation Army, and 24% of respondents chose pro-Democratic parties (such as the National League for Democracy).

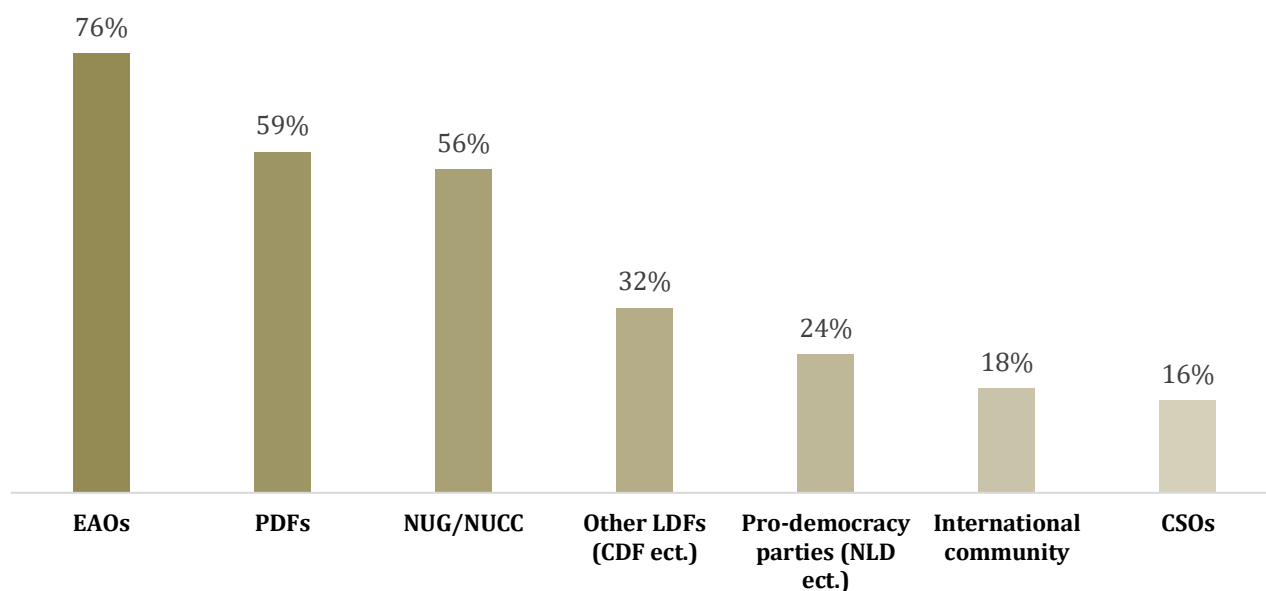


Figure 21: Top Three Actors Who Play the Most Important Role in the Future of Myanmar  
 NOTE: PDFs (59%) are NUG’s allied PDFs. (n=127)

Following this question, the survey also asked the respondents to explain why they chose these actors. Generally, there were five main reasons why young people selected these particular actors:

**Cooperation to overthrow the military**

Three out of five top chosen actors are armed organizations and pro-democracy groups, as youth believed and expected to see the increase of these de facto (EAOs and PDFs) and de jure (NUG and NUCC) actors’ cooperation in order to defeat the military. Youth also expected that there would be more coordination between existing EAOs and emerging armed groups in the future.

**Greater experience with federalism**

EAOs were chosen as the top choice because respondents consider them to have stronger experience and understanding of federalism given they have been striving for this for more than 70 years. A 23 year-old male from Chin State, who is a CDF member, also expressed that “EAOs are the key

players in this resistance movement as they can guide the public on important issues, such as how to implement strategies and how to initiate public administration, etc.

### Public Support

It was reported that EAOs, local PDF/other local defense groups, and NUG/NUCC have public support for this revolution. Young people see that public support is key for all leadership actors in the revolution and for sustaining the current revolution.

### Sacrifice/Involvement

Young people acknowledge the sacrifices of revolutionary groups, even their lives, and the involvement of EAOs, PDFs/LDFs and NUG/NUCC in this revolution. Thus, they expect these actors to be the main leaders in the future country of Myanmar.

### Trust

Finally, young people also reported that they trust the key actors they have selected. These groups have been working hard to demolish the military dictatorship with every possible means. Therefore, young people believed that these actors could change the future of Myanmar in a positive way.

Despite having different reasons for each of the respondents they chose, the majority of respondents emphasized the importance of collective actions and inclusiveness of every stakeholder, from the individual level, generally referring to citizens, celebrities, and youth, to the national level of political parties, armed groups, NUG, NUCC, and CRPH. An IDP committee member from the Sagaing region said:

*Every actor, who is believed to be responsible on the ground, is important and they are the main player to move this revolution forward. ”*

Even though youth considered the NUG as a current leader and frontliner (taung-lhan-yae tap-u (တောင်လှန်ရေးတပ်ဦး): in which “taung-lhan-yae” means “revolution” and “tap-u” means “frontline worker or person”) of the resistance movement, youth also expected the need for strong leadership to bring everyone together and build strong engagement with key stakeholders from each layer of society, such as student groups, farmer groups, and worker groups. A 25 year-old Bamar male youth from Yangon said:

*We have many groups such as left wing, right wing, strike groups, student groups, etc. we need to collaborate more and improve engagement among different groups. ”*

More importantly, the survey also asked respondents to identify any groups or individuals who are important to the future of Myanmar but are not currently involved in the revolution. The lack of participation from some EAO groups, namely UWSA, SSPP, and AA, was cited by the majority as evidence that they are not involved in this revolution. In addition, some respondents mentioned that the international community and international associations, including United Nations institutions, had failed to provide support in the political turmoil in Myanmar.

## 5.2. Youth in Leadership Roles

While young people have taken part in every revolutionary activity, the survey also checked their perception of the sufficiency of youth representation in leadership bodies, the extent to which youth had been involved in the revolution, and the obstacles that have prevented young people from fully participating in the leadership bodies. These questions were also motivated by a review of the literature which revealed similar concerns raised by other observers about youth representation.

**Based on KIIs discussions, it is observed that the role of youth leadership has been significant at the grassroots level, where young people have taken an active role in organizing anti-coup movement activities and forming local governance in the absence of a functioning government.** For example, most anti-coup activities, such as protests, strikes, and campaigns, both domestically and internationally, are youth-led activities that are organic and self-initiated without the direct involvement and suggestion of the elder generation. Youth have shown remarkable leadership skills and resilience in the face of various restrictions and the risk of being arrested and killed by the military; inspiring and mobilizing many others to keep joining the movement. A 23 year-old female youth from Karen shared her roles in anti-coup movements at her community as follows:

*I organized anti-coup protests in our township earlier in the coup. I also worked as a media person to report our activities. After I moved to a liberated area, I am still working as a reporter and collecting local news, human rights abuses, etc. Currently, I also help the PDF in media sectors such as online campaigns as I am now in a liberated area. ”*

More importantly, youth leadership is remarkable in conflict affected regions providing essential public services in the absence of a functioning government. Youth have initiated local governance and public services, including education and healthcare, by setting up makeshift schools and medical clinics, and providing basic necessities to those in need. These actions earned them the admiration and respect of their communities and highlighted the importance of youth leadership in this revolution at the grassroots level.

**In their leadership, youth have been more cooperative and dedicated to collaborating with Myanmar's wide range of opposition players.** Respective youth-led organizations work in conjunction with organizations like the NUG, NUCC, CRPH, and other CSOs to benefit from their knowledge and resources.<sup>27</sup> This helped them further their own goals and initiatives. This is especially true in the context

of armed resistance, as established EAOs and youth-run PDFs or LDFs frequently collaborated to further both their own and the movement's overall objectives.<sup>28</sup> Youth may have more influence within military operations due to the collaborative character of the armed resistance and the EAOs reliance on youth capital, notably their strategic and technological approach to militarized resistance. Some EAOs, like the KNU, were known to collaborate with young LDFs and formulate offensive plans against the junta. Youth have therefore pushed for more cooperation among armed actors and increased the armed resistance as a result, whether they are in the ranks of the EAO or serving as leaders of LDFs or PDFs.<sup>29</sup>

**By increasing leaders from non-Bamar ethnic groups and placing a political emphasis on ethnic inclusion, youth have also improved the resistance movement's diversity.** According to a respondent, youth leaders have shifted public opinion against military incursions into non-Bamar ethnic areas and have even influenced Bamar-majority communities to become more sympathetic and aware of current and historical atrocities committed against ethnic minorities. Before the coup, civilians in Myanmar had comparatively few opinions on ethnicity, as a male youth from the Rohingya community explained to researchers.

*Before the coup, civilians in Myanmar had relatively limited views on ethnicity. They also despise Rohingyas. After the coup, the wider public gains political awareness and a better understanding of the struggles and suffering of Myanmar's minority ethnic groups. And this revolution unites many communities, making them more unified than ever, without prejudice towards ethnic minority groups, and they respect and value one another.* ””

Additionally, the revolution united many communities, fostering their cohesion and reducing discrimination against ethnic minority groups. Youth leaders have changed the public's perception of intolerance, particularly in districts with a Burmese majority. Young people's political perspectives on ethnic autonomy have also had an impact on representation in the NUCC. The NUCC now has more diversity than previous government entities in Myanmar and has more recently campaigned for pro-ethnic minority policies in the federal charter, whether or not this can be directly linked to youth activism.<sup>30</sup> Ei Thinzar Maung , Ester Ze Naw and Wai Moe Naing, young activists who rose to prominence in the first nonviolent protests, are examples of how the resistance has embraced ethnic inclusion in its leadership.<sup>31</sup> Although it is unclear how this has affected the broader political agenda in favor of democracy, it does give rise to some optimism that the federal charter's youth-driven policies, which are more inclusive and rights-based, will be broadly embraced.<sup>32</sup>

**Youth stand as the bridge between the public on the ground and established groups and leaders such as NUG, NUCC, and other political parties.** The public, especially in the war-affected areas, has been suffering a lot from the SAC troops' human rights violations on the ground, and they could not catch up with the ongoing political process. On the other hand, the direct communication between the NUG and the

public is fairly weak and less transparent. In this situation, many young people stand as the bridge to bring information by taking actions and roles in different departments of NUGs and groups. One informant noted that horizontal communication channels were important to strengthen communication and avoid misunderstandings.

**Despite the NUG’s attempts to be more inclusive by appointing youth to top positions, many youth activists still felt that their voices were not adequately represented,** This they felt to be demonstrated by the fact that the average age of senior leadership is over 70 years old and promotes an outdated political agenda that remains too Bamar-dominated.<sup>33</sup> They were simultaneously concerned that the NLD’s previous inclination to compromise might lead to a similar trajectory. The younger generation wished to see a bigger ideological shift in the movement rather than a reconstitution of the NLD.<sup>34</sup> Some youth activists held more radical and progressive notions of governance, which are not reflected in the NUG’s political stance and dialogues.

A female respondent from Karenni State also highlighted her perception of youth's role at the leadership level:

*In reality, youth are the ones who sacrifice their lives, however, only senior leaders take political decisions at the high level. Even at present, the role of youth is still ignored in certain institutions, and we have concerns that this will continue in the process of building our nation. ”*

Further, a female respondent from Kachin State also added that:

*We still need to promote the role of youth in higher positions in social and political fields because young people are excluded from any higher political position. ”*

This research survey demonstrated a consistent finding that there was still inadequate representation of youth in leadership roles. According to the survey findings, 35% of respondents considered the level of youth representation in leadership bodies (including NUG/NUCC, NUG departments, and EAOs) to be moderate. In contrast, almost 21% of respondents rated the level of youth representation as insufficient, with another 21% considering it to be very insufficient (See Figure 22).

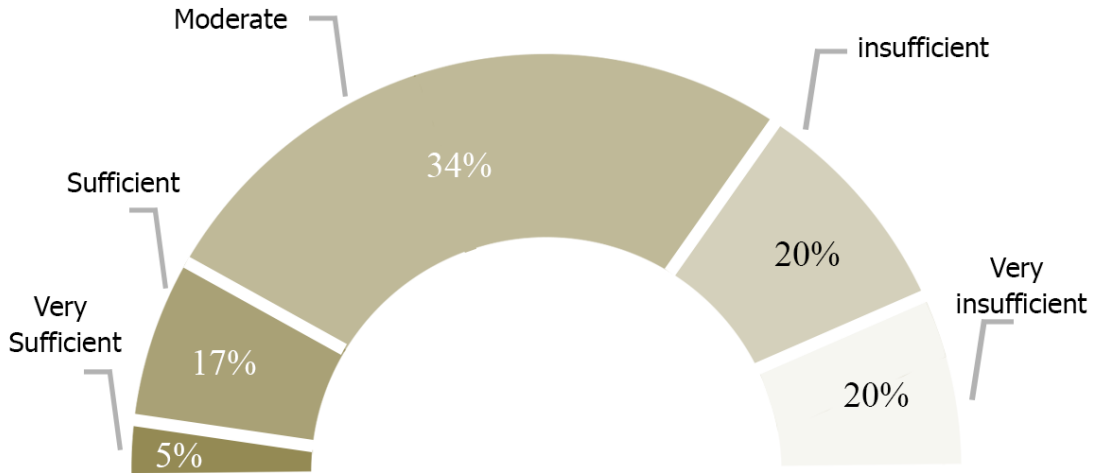


Figure 22: Perceptions of Youth Representation in the Leadership Bodies (n=131)

Nonetheless, the NUG has deliberately tried to be more inclusive by appointing youth to top positions, including Ei Thinzar Maung (Deputy Minister of Women, Children, and Youth’s Affairs), Khun Bedu (Deputy Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation), Maw Htun Aung (Deputy Minister of Energy and Electricity), and Ja Htoi Pan (Deputy Minister of Education).<sup>35</sup> Additionally, there is a growing number of youth delegates in ethnic states’ consultative councils—notably, the Kachin Political Interim Committee Team and Karenni Consultative Council.<sup>36</sup> Both the younger and older generations “contribute in their own ways,” and youth are given spaces in the NUG, NUCC, and various strike committees.

### 5.3. Impediments to Youth Participation in Leadership Roles

According to the survey, which asked respondents to choose the main reason they felt youth were underrepresented in leadership, 27% of respondents chose the reason that a lack of a platform for youth to be involved in leadership was the main obstacle for youth participation in leadership. Another 26% chose older people’s underestimation of youth. Only 1% chose a lack of will to cooperate as the main obstacle for youth to participate in leadership (see Figure 23). While many reported a lack of a platform for youth to participate in leadership bodies, our interview findings indicated that youth leadership was more evident on the ground, with youth being the main driver of the revolution.

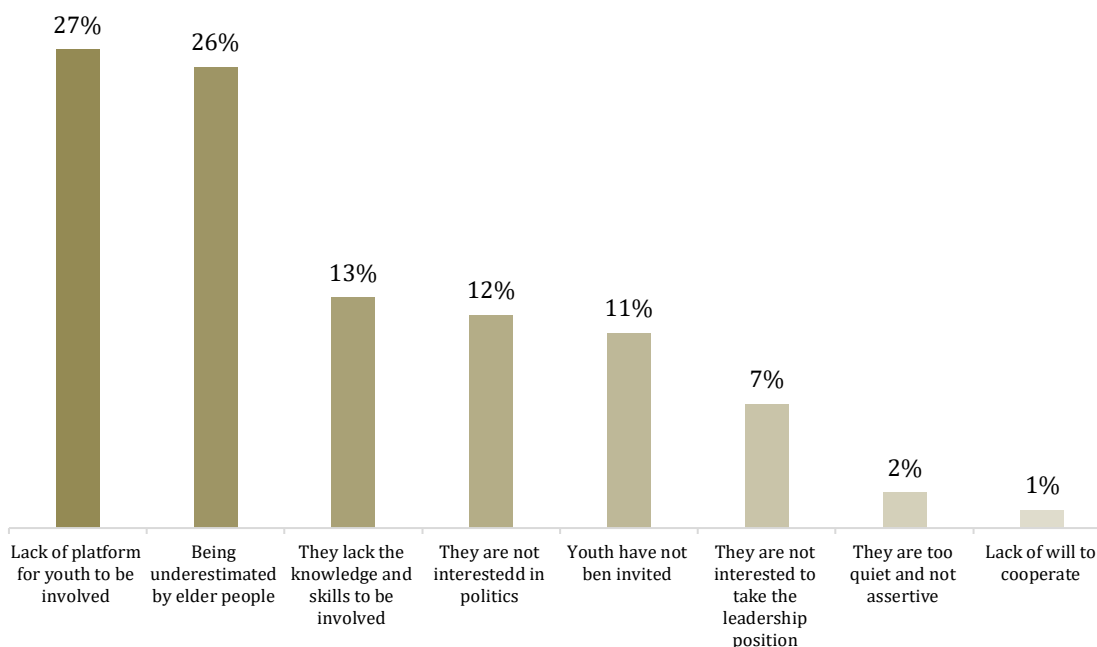


Figure 23: Main Obstacles for Youth to Participate in Leadership Bodies (n=131)

Another barrier to youth leadership is cultural norms and ageism in Myanmar. **Youth struggle with sociological and administrative barriers to creating legitimate resistance entities because of social assumptions about their age as well as their relative inexperience and lack of connections.** Political actors and many overseas donors are hesitant to work with newly formed, unrecognized groups on the ground.<sup>37</sup> This hesitancy hinders youth's ability to work with and access resources from across the globe because they have only recently become leaders in civil society and unarmed resistance organizations.

Language barriers, lack of citizenship documentation, and a lack of horizontal networks are additional challenges faced by non-Bamar ethnic youth organizations, particularly those from ethnic minorities that the SAC does not recognize. Many young people from rural, non-Bamar ethnic areas frequently lack the English or other Burmese language skills necessary to communicate with other national and international organizations. Such youth organizations find it challenging to collaborate with other activist organizations and regional players as a result of these circumstances. A male youth media reporter from Karen State, highlighted the importance of addressing language barriers to improve communication and historical resentments in building trust among different nationalities as follows:

*I think there are some challenges to build trust with people from different nationalities. For example, ethnic people have very low trust on Bamar people because of historical resentments. Also, language is the main obstacle for me when communicating with villagers and local groups ”*

A CDM from Chin State, who is also a reporter also expressed similar challenges faced in terms of language barriers and communication problems emphasizing:

*Different language, policies, and strategies are the main challenges for building unity. ””*

A male educator from Yangon shared his experience:

*I found that there is no word or name about ethnic nationality in every textbook. If I am ethnic, I have to think if this textbook is related to us. So how could these ethnic children learn about something that is not about themselves? Also, there are some remote places where people don't speak or understand Burmese language. How can they learn from textbooks written in Burmese? This is my personal learning. ””*

Lack of citizenship documentation was a real challenge for many young people, creating financial instability and social isolation, in addition to the hindrance that language barriers posed. The issue of legal citizenship exclusion and language barriers faced by many ethnic youth in rural, non-Bamar ethnic regions of Myanmar should be explored further.

Additionally, the general public also tends to view youth as less capable than their older activist counterparts. It has been reported that older generations used to underestimate youth leadership programs and lack confidence in their leadership abilities. A female Mon ethnic interviewee stated that:

*From my experiences, at the beginning, it was a bit hard for the older generation and younger generation to work together because of their ideological differences. It took the youth a lot of sacrifices to prove that young people are capable of taking on and leading this revolution. They can only now recognize young people's creative and innovative approaches soon after the coup. ””*

Although experience and authority are important attributes for leaders and resistance activists, this belief seems to pose a major social barrier to youth influence in the movement. Though many respondents noted the importance of youth activist involvement and leadership in resistance activities, societal perceptions of youth may impede their ability to hold positions of influence and authority.

A Bamar male PDF member from Sagaing Region explained:

*Youth were not given space in many sectors before, only the old generation made decisions and took a leading role. There are many new young leaders in this revolution. We have Gen Z groups, and a lot of revolutionary groups are also youth led groups. The young people are better at cooperation, more patient, and more consistent, thus, they can quickly perform most of the activities successfully. ”*

**Political polarization and a lack of youth representation continue to limit youth’s ability to influence governance.** Even though young people have been selected for leadership roles, these appointments are limited. Less than 10% of the leadership roles of NUG and CRPH, two of the resistance's most powerful political groups, are actually under 35.<sup>38</sup> Young people, especially those who belong to persecuted minority groups like the ethnic Rohingya and those in the LGBTQ community, worry that their voices will not be heard due to underrepresentation in important pro-democracy political formations.<sup>39</sup>

Although there are still obstacles in the movement that prevent youth from having leadership and influence, such as challenges with gaining legitimacy, connecting with networks, gaining access to funding, cultural norms and perspectives, and political divisions, overall, youth still have room to influence the resistance. This is largely due to their efforts and methods of resistance. The emphasis on decentralization and a collective movement among young people has encouraged more cooperation among resistance players. Their emphasis on inclusion has also resulted in widespread engagement and collaboration across ethnic, gender, generational, and religious boundaries.

## Section 6 : Aspirations

As discussed in the earlier section, the youth have been at the forefront of the anti-coup movement, driving various forms of activity, including strikes, online campaigns, defense, and local governance in their respective regions. The involvement of young people in the revolution has been huge, and they have become the face of the struggle for democracy in the country. In this section, this research explores the motivation behind youth participation in the anti-coup movement and their political aspirations. This research seeks to understand their vision for a future country, the political goals they hope to achieve through their activism and their understanding of federalism.

### 6.1. Ultimate Goals of the Revolution: Youth Perspectives

As this research developed, one common response received from participants in KIIs was that taking the military regime down was the ultimate objective for participating in the current anti-coup movement. To uncover a broader aspiration that youth sought, we asked the following question (in both KIIs and the survey): *"The main goal of the revolution seems to be to get rid of the military junta, apart from this, what do you think the other goals of this revolution are?"*

Answers given in the KIIs were the establishment of a federal democratic union that ensures justice and equal rights for all, self-autonomy for ethnic minorities, and human rights. A Bamar female medical doctor who had to leave her family due to CDM participation, responded:

*The first is to bring down this Myanmar military, and the next is to establish a federal democracy that ensures the rights and autonomy of the minority ethnic peoples. And also a country that has the freedom of religion for every community. ””*

Another Bamar male participant from Yangon said:

*The first expectation is to overthrow the military dictatorship. Second, to establish the Federal Democracy Country. Given greater diversity in ethnicity, etc., our country cannot be ruled through centralization... We should go with federal democracy, where each citizen is treated equally regardless of their race, religion, and ethnicity. ””*

Some respondents sought more fundamental solutions to addressing the crisis in Myanmar. For example, a male participant from Magwe who was proactively involved in the CDM movement and fundraising activities expressed his aspiration for the revolution to end any form of dictatorship:

*One of the most important goals is not to have any authoritarian regimes, even at the local/township levels or in any field of work—also, a country with no corruption and a federal democracy that could bring proper development. Meanwhile, although I have no great understanding of federal democracy, I would like to see this system for this country, as I think it will be suitable. ””*

Supporting this answer, a 23 year-old young LGBTQ participant and PDF member responded:

*To end the dictatorship, which means not only military dictatorship but any dictatorship. If the military falls and NUG takes over the government's role but practices dictatorship, I will still revolt against the government. I expect my country not to have any kind of dictator. ””*

Bamar male youth, who was a political activist from Yangon reflected:

*Before, we often thought about federalism. After the coup, some groups thought more about federalism. Even today, there is no clear system that everyone agrees on and understands. There is some discussion about the Federal Charter in NUCC, but some have withdrawn. Every actor needs to come together and talk clearly about the system most suited to us. ””*

Others gave more fundamental answers about human security. A female respondent, who is also a Rohingya minority from Rakhine State said:

*I want to see our country have zero racial discrimination in every sector, such as education, health, etc. Also, I want to see a future country with strong social cohesion. When I was in fifth grade, I was treated differently at school. In the 2017 crisis, many Rohingya could not go to school. We have been living with anxiety, fear, and worries every day. We don't want to feel those anymore in the future, and I want to see a country that creates a safe environment for everyone. ””*

**The survey showed that the notion of “Federal Democracy” (however defined) had gained real traction amongst the youth as a rallying objective.** Our survey asked youth respondents to select a maximum of three answers that they would consider to be the ultimate goals of the revolution (see Figure 24). Among the 128 responses, the establishment of a federal democratic union ranked as the highest answer with 65%. The second highest option selected was the removal of the military from a political leadership role, at 58%. Justice and the rule of law followed at 50%. Participants in the survey also preferred drafting a new constitution (35%), rather than reforming the 2008 military-drafted constitution (16%).

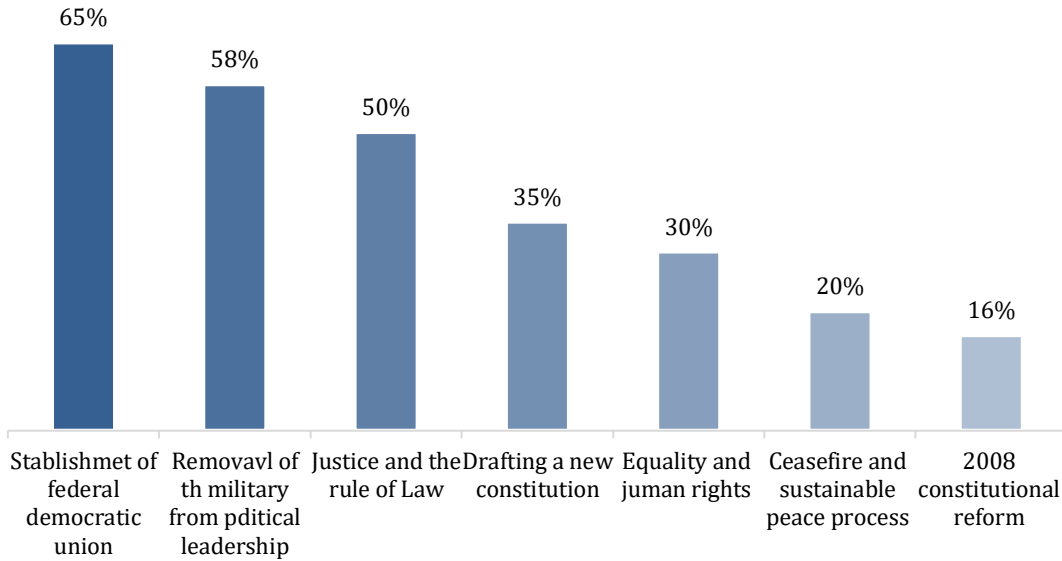


Figure 24: Respondents' Views of the Main Goals of the Revolution (n=128)

## 6.2. Youth Understandings of Federalism

Since many youth respondents regarded the establishment of a federal democratic union as the ultimate goal of the current revolution, our survey looked to understand what they thought of as composing this federal democracy.

The research first asked a simple rating question by asking to what extent they disagree or agree with the statement that a federal democratic system would be a solution to the crisis. As the findings suggested, the majority of youth stated their strong agreement on adopting a federal system for addressing the country's political problems. (See Figure 25)

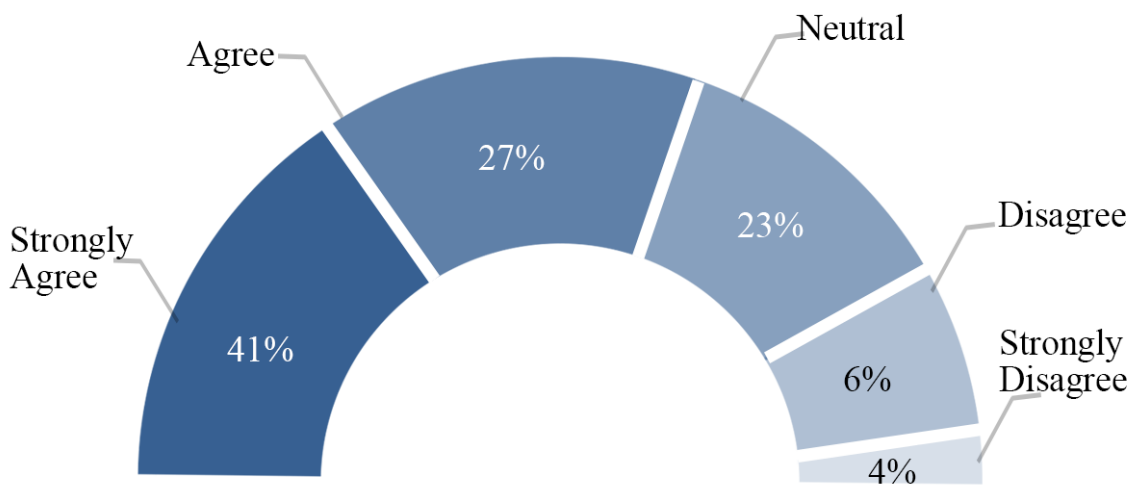


Figure 25: Responses to the Question "To what extent do you agree (or disagree) that a federal system would become a solution for this revolution?" (n=127)

Further, this research tested respondents’ general knowledge of the characteristics of a federal democratic system by asking them to select three options out of a given set of answers (see Figure 26). In their responses, the majority of youth selected self-governance (87%), equal power sharing among states (58%), and decentralization of the governance system (58%). Less featured were respect for human rights (33%) and independent revenue and resource management (with 25%). Based on this finding, young people's basic understanding of federalism appears to have improved, with some respondents indicating the need for a political awareness training program during the KII interviews. A Bamar male interviewee, a student activist from Yangon remarked:

*Political advocacy among young people to participate more in politics is important. NUG youth ministry should collaborate with youth organizations, youth-led committees and organize political training for young people.* ”

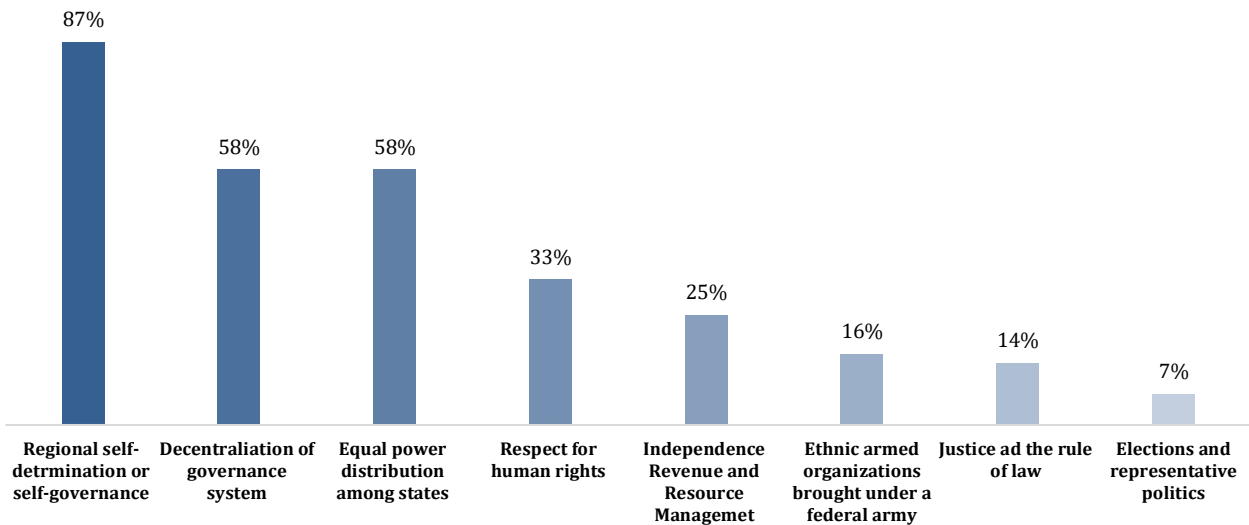


Figure 26: Respondents’ Understanding of a Federal Democratic System (n=125)

### 6.3. Desirable Social Values

This research, prompted by prior acknowledgement in the KIIs that attitudes and values in Myanmar had changed since the coup, sought to understand what kind of social values youth aspired towards in a new Myanmar. Most participants discussed the values of equality, diversity, and human rights during the KIIs. They believed that society should respect basic human rights and accept the value of pluralism and diversity. Most also expressed the importance of political education for the community—i.e., awareness of federal democracy, political and legal systems, and other political ideologies—in order to resist propaganda and false narratives.

A male Karen PDF member asserted:

*We need to spread awareness about respecting different societies and their values right now. As we live in a multicultural society, we need to respect ethnic people and their desires. For example, Karenni people want to be called Karenni instead of Kayah. As such, the rest of the people should respect and treat them the way they want.* ””

A 20 year-old Bamar student from Sagaing noted:

*Equality is important and needs to spread not only among the top revolution groups but also among the public.* ””

A female Chin youth from Sagaing region added that:

*Many people now understand the feelings of ethnic people and minority groups like the Rohingya. Before, they even stood together with Daw Aung San Su Kyi to defend the [military's] Rohingya genocide. As they now demand federalism as ethnic people, I request that they continuously demand and stand for federalism. And also to spread this value more to the public.* ””

Our survey followed this up by asking respondents what the two most important values were that they considered should be spread in society (see Figure 27).

Equality and inclusion came out as the most critical value, selected by 55% of participants. Second most important was political knowledge and awareness at 47%, comprising knowledge of federalism, democratic norms, values, and governance. This tied in with KII interviewees who consistently reiterated the importance of a society adequately understanding its own political context. A female participant who is currently serving in a PDF force in a liberated area remarked:

*Political awareness, such as [about] the political system, needs to spread more among the public.* ””

Additionally, youth in the survey expressed their desire for peace and development (30%) and the acceptance of ethnic and religious diversity (29%).

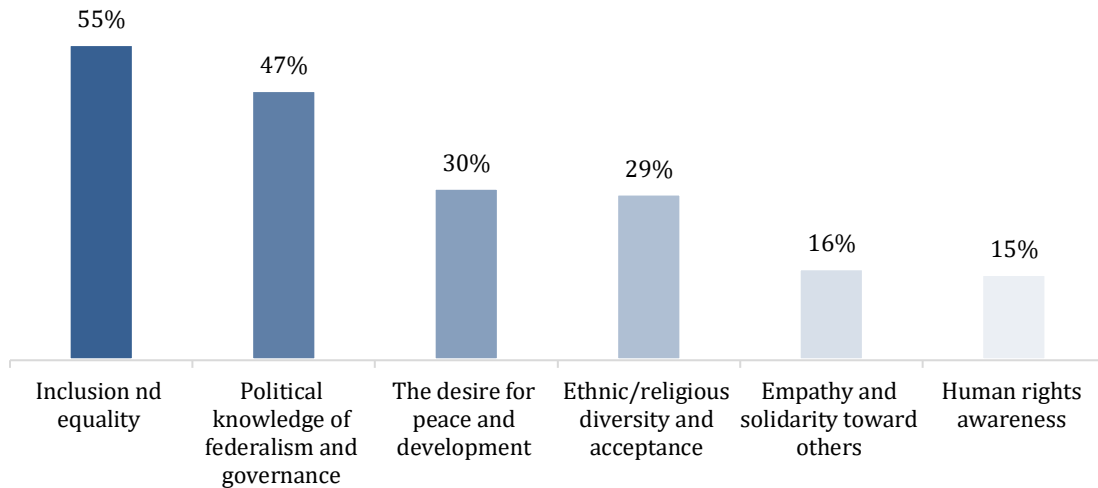


Figure 27: Respondents' Take on the Two Most Important Values that should be Spread Through the Revolution (n=126)

#### 6.4. Solutions to the crisis?

The survey also tested youth's sentiments on what solutions they thought would most effectively resolve the political crisis (see Figure 28). The largest group (34%) believed that a military defeat of the junta by resistance forces was the best solution, if any, to the political crisis. Notably, the results showed very little faith in the success of political dialogue between the military junta and the NUG (7%). Very few youth thought that a ceasefire agreement between the SAC and armed groups would be able to solve the crisis (3%). Other survey respondents believed in a more inclusive political dialogue between the military junta, NUG, and EAOs (20%), some form of international intervention (16%), or resistance forces establishing their separate autonomous systems (16%). The findings reveal that youth are divided on what they think is the best and most effective solution to the crisis, with the largest group – those who see military defeat of the junta as the best solution – only being a third.

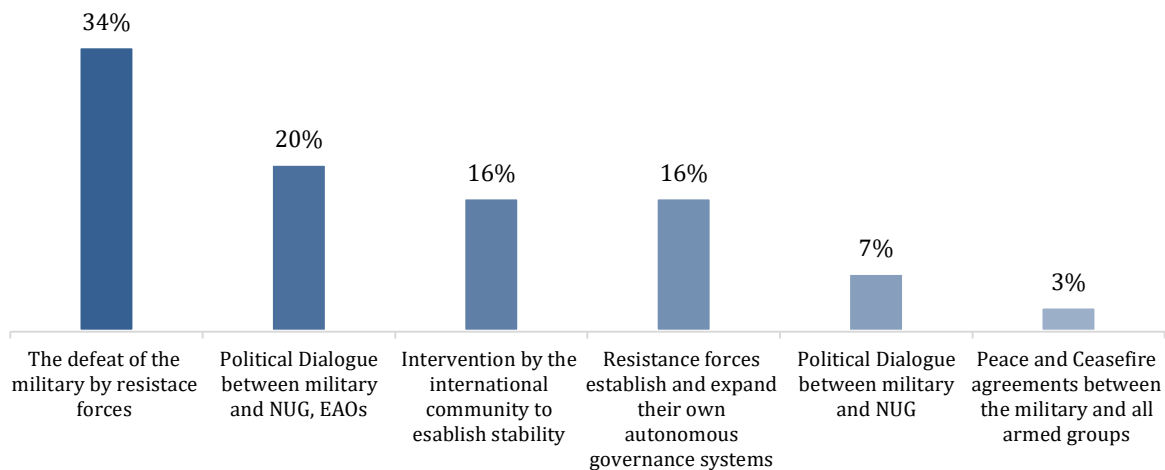


Figure 28: Respondents' Views on the Most Effective Solution to the Crisis (n=124)

## 6.5. Youth Expectations of the Outcome of the Revolution

Finally, the study examined respondents' assessments of the direction the revolution was taking. In the KIIs, respondents were asked to assess whether the current revolution was heading towards the type of country they wanted to establish. A majority of the KII participants were positive. A male youth from Yangon pointed out the progress made in military terms:

*I see this revolution is going, and we can see a lot of progress despite many weaknesses. We can challenge the military, fight back, and threaten them. This is one step forward in this revolution. ””*

Others were slightly cautious about the challenges to unity in the revolution. A male Karen participant responded:

*We are moving forward to the destination we want. However, we need to be very careful around every corner because we have a lot of ethnic actors involved. We need to learn from our history. ””*

Some respondents were skeptical about unity, even though they believed that the revolution would succeed. A 20 year-old participant from Chin State responded:

*We have no unity now. Without unity, the journey will take a long time. I feel like we are united by words only, but not united in practical terms... we are going to our goal, but very slowly. ””*

An LGBTQ PDF member said that progress depended on leadership:

*It will depend on the revolution leaders; if they keep going and moving to our destination, we can finally reach our destination. I can't say much, but I believe the activities I am doing now contribute to the pathway of revolution. ””*

In the survey, respondents were asked about what they estimated to be the final outcome of the revolution, with half (50%) responding that it would result in the eventual defeat of the military junta and the establishment of a new country (see Figure 29). Others believed that the military junta would be removed but the country would remain divided (21%), or that the country would remain divided between the military

junta and opposition forces (11%). Fewer respondents believed that the country would either collapse and become a failed state (7%) or that the military government would take full power and control (6%).

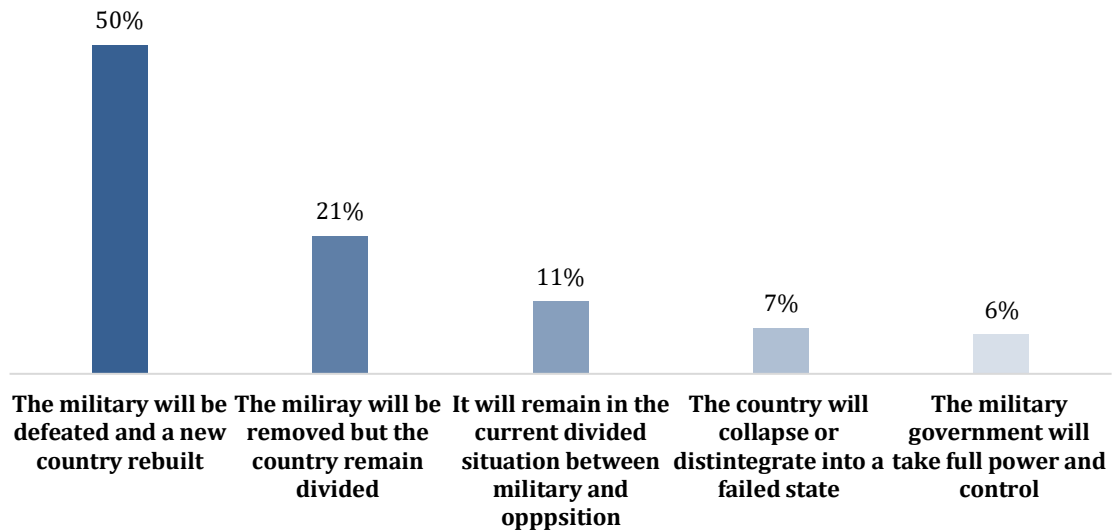


Figure 29: Respondents' Estimation of the Outcome of the Revolution (n=125)

### 6.6. How Should the NUG Improve Coordination?

Our survey also asked respondents how they wished the NUG should improve collaboration with other stakeholders, allowing them two choices from a total of 7 options (See Figure 30). Not surprisingly, half of respondents answered that the NUG should build trust with ethnic minority groups (56%), and provide more financial and logistical support to PDFs (48%). Others called for improving the communication and coordination with CSOs, strike groups (39%). A smaller group (32%) believed that the NUG should engage with EAOs that are not yet involved in the revolutionary movement (e.g. UWSA, SSPP, AA, etc.).

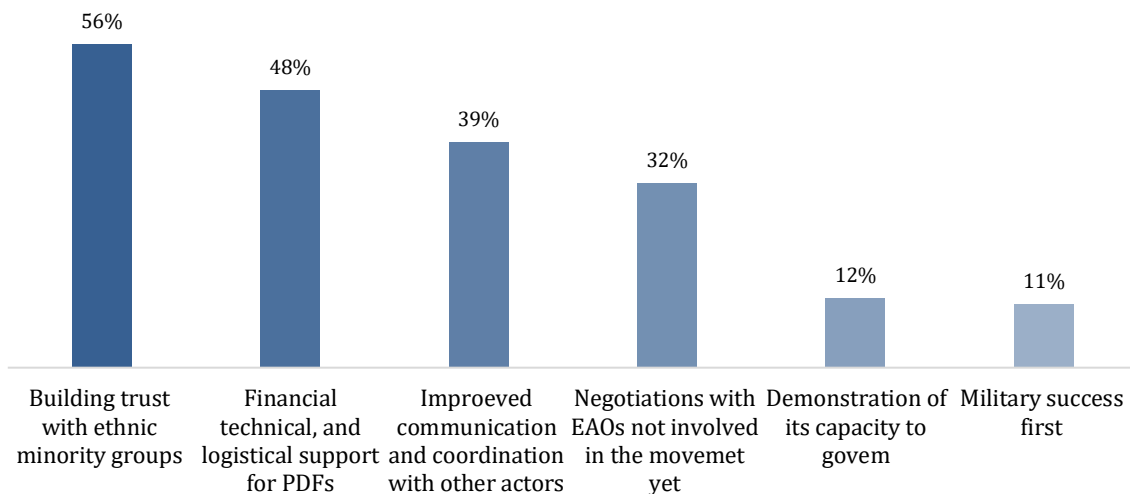


Figure 30: Respondents' Choices of Strategies for Improving NUG Coordination (n=131)

## 6.7. Policies and Approaches (The Type of Country) Youth Hope to See

During the focus group discussion and interview sections, participants were asked to state their opinions on important factors that would make the revolution successful. Most respondents emphasized the role of public participation and unity among stakeholders as the keys to materializing the movement. They believed that an **improvement in leadership transparency when making decisions and proactive communication with the public** would lead to the people having a clearer vision of the revolution's goals and ultimately unity between the public and stakeholders. In other words, they want the public to be informed about the progress of the revolution.

Interviewees also described the importance of material and logistical supplies for the NUG and PDFs across the county; some focused on adequately supplying weapons to the different PDF groups actively fighting against the military junta's forces. Meanwhile, respondents also suggest a need for all PDF forces to come under an effective chain of command or a necessary situation for NUG to try to establish an organized single command structure since it has to fight with a solid military organization. Finally, the research respondents also view the aspect of international recognition of NUG as one of the essential factors that will enhance the revolution's success.

A female respondent from Sagaing explained:

*Public participation is key to the success of this revolution. If all the people from different sectors should come together and foster our solidarity, it will be faster to see a successful result. Next, the right people in the right place are also important. And engagement among all stakeholders is important. Also, weapons are important because the revolution needed more arms to support groups that are essential as the revolution takes longer; we will need funding””*

The study also explored young people's personal visions for their future country. Youth generally stated that they envisioned a country where basic human rights such as speech, expression, thought, and justice were respected. Additionally, youth expressed that they wanted to see a peaceful and stable country without war or discrimination, where they can have self-determination and play a role in higher positions in social and political fields.

A 35 year-old male youth from Karen State said:

*My biggest desire is to build a better and more peaceful country without having any wars. We (youth) should try to provide a good education to our next generations.””*

Others expressed that good jobs and educational opportunities should be a priority policy after the revolution, especially for youth who joined the revolution and were disabled by armed resistance. Young people also dream of a country where young people can live out their youth without sacrificing their freedom and opportunities of recreation and personal growth. A 34 year-old youth from Yangon said:

*I saw young people in other countries doing fun things, traveling, studying, dancing, and so on. In our country, young people have to sacrifice their freedom, spend their time in the jungle. They lost their opportunities to have fun, make friends, and learn. I want young people to see enjoy their youth life in the future country ””*

Finally, the survey research sought the three most important policies to youth beyond this immediate revolution. The youth respondents in the survey highlighted that the top priorities for youth was a better education policies and education system (75%). The next priorities were job opportunities (49%), and rehabilitation centers for victims (48%), followed by creation of platforms for youth participation in decision making (41%) and non-discrimination laws on ethnicity and gender (18%) (see Figure 31).

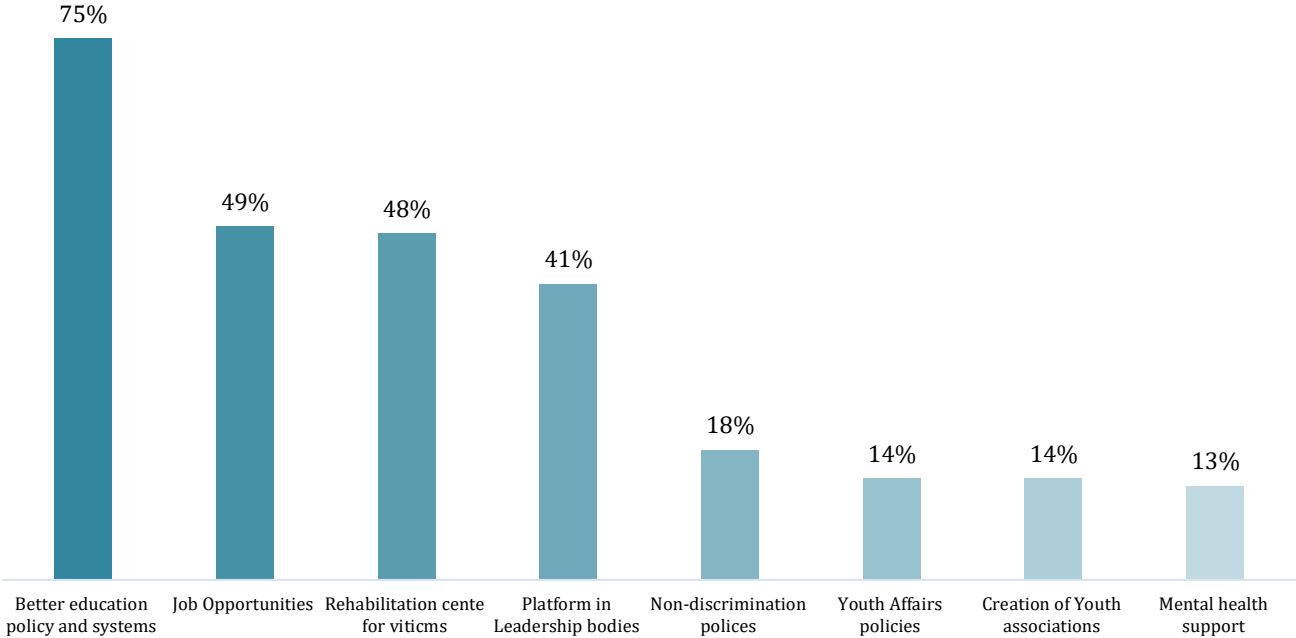


Figure 31: “Policy Strategies Most Important to Youth” (n=130)

## Section 7 : Concluding Observations and Recommendations

### 7.1. The Potential of Youth in Myanmar

This study makes the following findings on the role of youth in the Revolution, consistent with other parallel research reports and media writing.

- ✓ **Youth are the main driving force of grassroots revolutionary activity**, and much of the anti-coup movement, from strikes to the formation of local governments. Youth have taken an active role in organizing anti-coup movement activities and forming local governance.
- ✓ In their leadership roles, **youth have been more cooperative and dedicated to collaborating** with Myanmar's wide range of resistance players. Despite facing some challenges, youth are open-minded, can easily resolve such issues and are willing to build positive cooperation toward a common goal. They did not see their diversity as a significant barrier to them working together. Most of the youth-led activities were successful due to their consistency, self-reliance, and strong commitment to their responsibilities.
- ✓ Youth's **use of social media and digital technology** has allowed them to amplify their message and exert influence across movements.
- ✓ Youth have demonstrated a **strong commitment to inclusivity**, empowering non-Bamar ethnic leaders and placing a political emphasis on ethnic inclusion. Youth stand as the bridge between the public on the ground and established groups and leaders such as NUG, NUCC, and other political parties.
- ✓ However, given societal beliefs around their age, as well as their relative lack of experience and connections, **youth face societal and administrative obstacles to establishing legitimate resistance entities**. Political divisions and lack of youth representation also shrink young activists' capacity for decision-making in governance.
- ✓ Youth have a **strong desire to be involved in decision-making processes** that affect their lives and their country's future. Despite more youth taking roles in NUG and NUCC entities regardless of concerns over representation and ideological shifts, youth still perceive that their role is insufficient in leadership level.

## 7.2. Varieties of Youth Aspirations

- Youth felt that **political knowledge/awareness, trust, and coordination were key values** most important to the Revolution. Youth respondents also discussed the values of equality, diversity, and human rights during the KIIs. They believed that society should respect basic human rights and accept the value of pluralism and diversity. Most also expressed the importance of political education for the community—i.e., awareness of federal democracy, political and legal systems, and other political ideologies—in order to improve their political knowledge, reduce the gap of differences in political ideology, foster their unity among different actors, and to resist propaganda and false narratives of the military.
- Youth wanted to see a **peaceful and stable country** without war or any form of discrimination. They wanted to enjoy their young lives without sacrificing their freedom and opportunities for recreation and personal growth.
- Youth believed that **federal democracy** is a viable solution for this political crisis and the best chance at ensuring human rights, justice, equality for all, and autonomy for ethnic minorities.
- Key policy priorities demanded by youth include **access to quality education, job opportunities, platforms for youth participation in decision making, non-discrimination policies, rehabilitation centers for victims** for injured persons due to conflicts, and mental health support for youth in Myanmar.

## 7.3. Recommendations for the NUG Ministry of Women, Youth, and Children's Affairs

The study leads us to suggest the creation of platforms for the strengthening of ties between the relevant NUG ministry - the Ministry of Women, Youth, and Childrens' Affairs (NUG-MWYCA)—and Myanmar youth across the country.

- **Develop policies that recognize the importance of youth participation:** The first step is for NUG-MWYCA to officially recognize the importance of youth participation in leadership bodies of all NUG's departments, potentially through policy, regulations, or legal frameworks from NUG-MWYCA.
- **Monitor and evaluate progress:** NUG and NUCC should monitor and evaluate progress towards increasing youth participation in leadership bodies such as its ministries, departments and committees. It is also important to ensure inclusive participation from diverse backgrounds, such as women, LGBTQ, minorities, and people with disabilities. This will help to improve inclusive decision-making cultures and the acceptance of diversity among youth. More importantly, the NUG can identify challenges and gaps and inform future interventions through such monitoring programs.
- **Engage youth leaders and organizations:** NUG-MWYCA can establish channels and create space and platforms to engage meaningfully with youth leaders and organizations across the country to understand their perspectives and priorities. This engagement can be in the form of consultations, meetings, and dialogues, or taken up by groups of appointed youth counselors under the NUG-MWYCA. This will help NUG-MWYCA understand the needs, priorities, and aspirations of young people during and beyond the revolution period.

#### 7.4. Recommendations for Leaderships of the Revolution

Our study also produced the following set of recommendations to support unity and coordination between key leaders from the different stakeholders in the revolution, and young people:

- **Encourage youth to participate in decision-making processes** that affect their lives, such as policies related to education, employment, and social welfare. Governments, political parties, EAOs, and organizations should actively seek out and encourage youth participation in leadership positions, and create policies to ensure that youth are represented in decision-making bodies.
- **Organize or support political education or awareness-raising programs** on political systems for youth, such as federalism, which can narrow the knowledge gap on political systems and facilitate trust-building by providing an understanding of the root causes of historical resentment. Disseminating these values and information to a broader audience can help bridge the ideological divide among youth from different backgrounds, creating a more cohesive and unified movement.
- **Establish more transparent and effective communication mechanisms** with clear channels to reduce information gaps and misunderstandings among revolutionary actors, particularly between the NUG and its allied PDF and support groups.
- **Communicate clear guidelines and policy strategies** to maintain public participation and sustain public support and momentum for the revolution.
- **Initiate concrete dialogue among key leaders, particularly between NUG and EAOs**, to build solidarity, trust, and overcome differences in ideologies. Such dialogue can also help gain trust and increase motivation among young people to perform revolutionary activities.

## 7.5. Recommendations for Further Study

**Youth security in Myanmar and beyond Myanmar:** Studies that look at the specific security challenges that young people confront once they leave Myanmar, despite the fact that many have attempted or succeeded in doing so, are few and far between. Due to student or tourist visas, many people have been able to travel; however, when these visas expire, they become susceptible to being sent back. Additionally, it is challenging for young people in Myanmar, particularly non-Bamar young people, to obtain or renew passports and other legal documents required for residence abroad. The role of citizenship (and its lack), documentation, and legal personhood, should be explored in relation to youth migration and human security in the post-coup setting.

**Youth Roles in Local Politics:** The NUCC and other political organizations like the Kachin Political Interim Committee were mentioned by respondents in more general statements about their representation as strike leader, but there is limited data on the involvement of youth and the tasks they carry out in these roles, especially in local grassroots organizations and political committees. Such studies at the local levels might offer new insights into how youth can better participate at the national or regional levels. Alternatively, they might also show how fostering youth participation at local levels is a necessary precursor to youth leadership at higher levels.

**Effects of Conflict on Young People in Myanmar:** Some respondents observed that the protracted conflict has negative effects on young people, both activists and civilians, including forced labor, substance misuse, and mental health problems. In addition, youth who have left their hometowns and families in search of safety, education, and employment opportunities, have migrated to neighboring countries like Thailand and India, where they face new social barriers such as language, culture, and financial precarity. Their vulnerable immigration status in these countries limits their access to education and healthcare. The socio-economic conditions and mental health struggles of youth who leave or remain are an important area for future study.

## 8. Reference:

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