**Title: A decade of fledging democracy: well-being trajectory in Myanmar in 2014-2024**

**Background**

Global conflict is escalating, with over 100 countries engaged in some form of external conflict in the past 5 years, affecting 1 in 8 individuals. Conflict disrupts peace and has significant economic, health, and psychological implications that transcend borders.

Conventional psychological research on well-being is typically conducted in Western countries during relatively peaceful times. This peacetime bias suggests that current psychological knowledge may not capture the full spectrum of human experience and may not generalize to conflict and wartime settings. As an example, the “happiness pie chart” model suggests that life circumstances play a very limited role in individual well-being, and well-being is primarily a function of genetic predispositions and personal effort. Based on this popular theoretical model, it would lead to a counter-intuitive hypothesis that large-scale war and conflict may have a minimal impact on people’s well-being.

Set against this historical and theoretical backdrop, we will investigate the short and long-term consequences of conflict on population well-being in the Myanmar Civil War, using data involving over 2.7 million global citizens and three international databases of peace and conflict.

Afghanistan

* Afghanistan experienced the lowest life satisfaction score in recorded history.

Ukraine

* Ukrainians experienced the fifth steepest life satisfaction decline worldwide in 2022 yet remained remarkably hopeful about their life. However, volatile international policies (e.g., international support military aid), combined with growing domestic stress and resentment (e.g., mandatory conscription of men), create uncertainties that could alter the course of conflict and impact population well-being.

Myanmar

* my co-authored work published in *The Lancet Regional Health – Southeast Asia,* in which we estimated that a third of Myanma adults had post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, or depression in 2021*.*

**History of Myanmar: a fledgling democracy in struggle**

Myanmar remains engulfed in extreme violence since the military coup d'état on February 1st 2021, during which over 1,500 non-state resistance groups have risen to combat the military junta. In response, the junta has resorted to indiscriminate attacks and restricted civilian access to essential resources, leading to one-third of the population relying on humanitarian assistance. Civilians in this country share a similar uncertain future with no clear conflict resolution in sight. The proposed research extends my research program, focusing on the psycho-behavioral consequences of major population events.

Given the growing severity, evolving geopolitical concerns, and escalating international scope of these conflicts, the proposed research will draw on data before and during the conflicts and 12,800 Burmese participants to

1. document the trends of subjective well-being (SWB) in Myanmar as well as neighboring countries in the past decade,
2. segments of the Burmese population most impacted by the coup de tat and subsequent civil war, and
3. estimate the changes in SWB attributable to the conflicts using multi-level models

**Methods**

Nationally representative data will be drawn from the Gallup World Poll (GWP), which annually surveys an average of 1,000 adults from each of 150 countries and territories since 2005. We will contextualize the well-being trajectories in Myanmar with international data. SWB will be measured using a standardized item asking about the quality of life on a continuous scale from *the worst possible life* to *the best possible life*. Country-level well-being data will be matched with the annual *Global Peace Index* and *Fragile State Index* which offer country-level peacefulness and vulnerability indicators, and the *Armed Conflict Location & Event Data* will provide sub-country geo-located conflict events that point to the most embattled regions. This integration will enable a dynamic assessment of peace and conflict. We will further conduct analyses stratified by age, gender, socioeconomic status, fundamental needs (e.g., food and shelter), and political attitudes from GWP to identify characteristics contributing to well-being disparity within the population.

**Variables (years of available data)**

**Main Outcomes – Evaluative well-being**

*Life Satisfaction.* Subjective evaluation of life currently, on a continuous scale from *the worst possible life* (0) to *the best possible life (10).*

*Hope.* Subjective evaluation of life five years from now, on a continuous scale from *the worst possible life* (0) to *the best possible life (10).*

**Secondary Outcomes – Affective well-being**

*Smile or laugh.* Whether respondents smiled or laughed a lot yesterday.

*Enjoyment.* Whether respondents experienced enjoyment during a lot of the day yesterday.

*Worry.* Whether respondents experienced worry during a lot of the day yesterday.

*Sadness.* Whether respondents experienced sadness during a lot of the day yesterday.

*Anger.* Whether respondents experienced anger during a lot of the day yesterday.

*Stress.* Whether respondents experienced stress during a lot of the day yesterday.

**Sociodemographic variables**

*Age [WP1220] (2012-2024):*

*Marital Status [WP1223] (2012–2024):*

*Education Level [WP3117] (2012–2024):*

*Income Quintile [INCOME\_5] (2012–2024):*

*Household income in international dollars [INCOME\_2] (2012–2024):*

*Religion [WP1233/WP1233 Recoded] (2012–2024)*

* *Rationale: As a Buddhism-majority country, Myanmar has a track record of persecuting and endangering the Muslim minorities.*

### *Urbanicity [WP14](2012-2024):* Do you live in a rural area or on a farm, a small town or village, a large city, or suburb of a large city?

**Living necessities**

*Shelter [WP43]* (2012–2024): Have there been times in the past 12 months when you did not have enough money to provide adequate shelter or housing for you and your family?

*Food [WP40]* (2012–2024): Have there been times in the past 12 months when you did not have enough money to buy food that you or your family needed?

**Political variables**

*Approval of head of state [WP13125] (2014-2020):* Do you approve or disapprove of the way the leader/head/President of this country is handling his/her job as leader/head/President?

*Confidence in national government [WP139] (2014-2024)*: In this country, do you have confidence in each of the following, or not? How about national government?

*Confidence in honesty of elections [WP144] (2014-2024):* In this country, do you have confidence in each of the following, or not? How about honesty of elections?

*Approval of national leadership [WP150] (2014-2024):* Do you approve or disapprove of the job performance of the leadership of this country?

*Confidence in local policy force in city of area [WP112] (2014-2024):* In the city or area where you live, do you have confidence in the local police force, or not?

*Confidence in the military [WP137] (2015-2020):* In this country, do you have confidence in each of the following, or not? How about the military?

*Confidence in judicial system [WP138] (2012-2024):* In this country, do you have confidence in each of the following, or not? How about judicial system and courts?

**Corruptions**

*Perception of corruption in businesses [WP145] (2012-2024)*: Is corruption widespread within business located in this country or not?

*Perception of corruption in country [WP146] (2014-2024):* Is corruption widespread throughout the government in this country, or not?

**Prosocial Behaviors**

*Donating money [WP108] (2012-2024):* Have you done any of the following in the past month? How about donated money to a charity?

*Volunteering [WP109] (2012-2024):* Have you done any of the following in the past month? How about volunteered your time to an organization?

*Helping strangers [WP110] (2012-2024):* Have you done any of the following in the past month? How about helped a stranger or someone you didn't know who needed help?

**Civil Society**

*Intention to move to another country [WP1325]:* Ideally, if you had the opportunity, would you like to move PERMANENTLY to another country, or would you prefer to continue living in this country?

* Like to move to another country\* Like to continue living in this country\* (DK)\* (Refused)\*

*Satisfaction with freedom to choose [WP134]:* In this country, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your freedom to choose what you do with your life?

**Country-level Factors**

*Total number of conflicts by region.* It includes conflicts from state-based violence, non-state violence, and one-sided violence. Data are provided by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program.

*Total number of deaths from conflicts by region.* It includes death resulted from state-based violence, non-state violence, and one-sided violence. Data provided by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program.