Myanmar’s Digital Transition

Identifying areas that would benefit from digital literacy education

**Research Questions**

Internet access in Myanmar has dramatically increased in the past decade. In 2010, 0.25 percent of the population used the Internet, which was among the lowest rates in the world. In 2016, the percentage of Internet users jumped to 25.07 percent. However, the country has struggled to cope with the various challenges of embracing new technologies. The most prominent example is the use of Facebook to spread hate speech, misinformation, and rumors about the Rohingya population in Rakhine state. Violence and displacement have increased in recent years and pose challenges for Myanmar's democratic transition.

This project explores spatial questions related to Internet usage and political violence. The key assumption is that the Internet, particularly the usage of Facebook, has contributed to political violence through the mobilization of mobs and extremism. I plan to identify the areas that are particularly in need of greater digital literacy education by answering the following spatial questions:

1. Where are the most suitable areas for a digital literacy campaign in Myanmar?
2. Which areas have the highest information and communication technology access rates in Myanmar?
3. What locations have experienced the greatest increase in violence and conflict?

**Methodology**

This analysis identifies several factors that are important to finding suitable towns for policymakers and practitioners to carry out a digital literacy campaign. Each variable was reclassified and ranked from 1 (least suitable) to 5 (most suitable). For example, towns with high access to the Internet were given a 5 because those areas would benefit most from a digital literacy campaign, while towns with low access to the Internet were given a 1. The scores were then added to form three separate indices - ICT access, vulnerability, and risk of conflict - which helped determine the most suitable areas.

The three indices were then added together to form a final suitability index. In the suitability index, ICT access was weighted 35%, vulnerability was weighted 35%, and risk of conflict was weighted 30%. The suitability of towns for a digital literacy campaign was then ranked from least suitable to most suitable, which can be seen in the large map of Myanmar.

**Findings**

Most of the areas that would benefit from efforts to improve digital literacy are located in Yangon, the country's largest city and former capital. Due to the city's large population and high access to ICTs, towns in this area are well-positioned to strengthen their own ability to use and engage with ICTs.

Outside of Yangon, several townships in Shan state and Mandalay (the country's second largest city) might also be suitable areas for promoting digital literacy. Shan state is characterized by high levels of ethnic conflict, but Internet access and mobile phone ownership is surprisingly high for these rural areas. On the other hand, Mandalay is another urban area that has similar characteristics as Yangon.

**Next Steps and Limitations**

This analysis would benefit from improved data collection in Myanmar. The 2014 census was the first one conducted since the 1983 census. In addition, the poverty index data was collected for 2011 and the conflict data is limited to 2010 to 2018. While this analysis is intended as an initial effort into determining where time and resources might be prioritized toward promoting digital literacy, future studies might consider adding additional variables or incorporating updated data sources. Finally, this analysis does not answer why certain areas have greater access to ICTs or experienced changes in levels of violence. Future research should attempt to answer these related questions such as focusing on the direct causal relationship between Internet access and political violence.

**Data and Image Sources**

Myanmar Information Management Unit, Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (2018), Myanmar Ministry of Immigration and Population (2014), World Food Programme (2011), ESLR, and Wikimedia Commons

**Projection and Coordinate System Information**

WGS 1984 UTM Zone 46N

**Cartographer**

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**Class**

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