



THE ROLE OF AIPA IN MEDIATING ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN MYANMAR AFTER THE 2021 COUP: A NORMATIVE CONSTRUCTIVIST PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This study analyses the strategic role of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) in resolving ethnic tensions in Myanmar after the February 2021 coup, to evaluate the impact of parliamentary diplomacy on the establishment of regional standards. The employed methodology is qualitative literature research, examining source documents such as AIPA decisions from the 42nd to 44th General Assemblies (2021–2023), alongside secondary literature using content analysis within a constructivist normative framework. The findings indicate that AIPA effectively launched the establishment of norms by articulating concepts of inclusivity and human rights in the General Assembly communiqué and securing extensive parliamentary backing for the Five-Point Consensus. The norm cascade stage was evident when the national parliaments of Indonesia and Malaysia repudiated the Myanmar military junta and interacted with the National Unity Government. The March 2023 fact-finding mission and the creation of an ad hoc monitoring committee helped people follow the rules better. It was hard to do because AIPA resolutions are not binding, and political commitments in each country differ. These results show that AIPA is a "norm entrepreneur" and that parliamentary diplomacy needs better compliance mechanisms to have an effect on real policy.

Keywords: AIPA, Myanmar ethnic conflict, normative constructivism, parliamentary diplomacy, regional norm formation

Introduction

This essay examines the strategic role of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) in resolving ethnic conflicts and political issues in Myanmar following the 2021 military coup. The study primarily investigates the relevance of AIPA's parliamentary diplomacy processes and methodologies in resolving complex ethnopolitical conflicts, and how this role may be analyzed through the lens of normative constructivism. This study underscores AIPA as a non-state entity with considerable capacity to influence regional norms, enhance democratic



legitimacy, and integrate civil society perspectives into more inclusive regional policy discussions.

On February 1, 2021, the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) staged a coup against the democratically elected government led by Aung San Suu Kyi. This was a major turning point in the development of Myanmar's democracy, which had been making progress over the past ten years. The coup led to a strong backlash from civil society through the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), which saw harsh and violent reprisals from military authorities. Reports from civil society organizations and international human rights observatories show that over 4,000 civilians had experienced violence as of 2023 (Skidmore 2023). The coup has exacerbated persistent ethnic conflicts in the Kachin, Chin, and Karen regions, where armed factions such as the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), and the Chin National Front (CNF) have conducted coordinated attacks alongside the People's Defense Forces (PDF), which include civilian militias, thus forming a more cohesive resistance coalition (Kamal and Fujimatsu 2024).

The growing conflict has caused not only direct violence against people, but also a lot of people to leave their homes and move to countries like Bangladesh, India, and Thailand. The Rohingya ethnic group is still the most at risk because they are discriminated against and face violence in their daily lives, and they don't have citizenship protection. Amnesty International and local human rights organizations have reported many serious violations, such as shelling civilian areas, arbitrary detentions, and mass executions targeting ethnic minority groups, including women and children. More and more people are starting to doubt ASEAN's ability to be a regional group that works for peace and stability. This is because ASEAN hasn't been able to carry out the Five-Point Consensus, it sticks to non-intervention, and it doesn't have a way to punish countries that don't follow the rules. This has created a diplomatic vacuum that makes it harder for ASEAN to respond to the situation in Myanmar (Pogodda, Richmond, and Visoka 2023).

AIPA doesn't have the same level of executive power as the ASEAN Summit, but it does have moral authority because it represents the parliaments of member countries and has a more flexible structure for dealing with complicated issues. After the coup, some AIPA resolutions have adopted a more progressive stance than official ASEAN statements, particularly emphasizing the importance of open dialogue and the protection of minority groups (Trang, 2022). This position exemplifies the essence of parliamentary diplomacy, defined by diplomatic approaches grounded in representative legitimacy and commitment to democratic ideals. From a normative constructivist perspective, AIPA establishes regional norms that promote political engagement, human rights, and transnational solidarity (Rüland, 2009).

AIPA, the singular legislative body in Southeast Asia, warrants further scrutiny of its role as a normative agent linking civil society to regional policy formulation. AIPA demonstrates superior deliberative capacity compared to ASEAN because of its open and inclusive inter-parliamentary forum, in contrast to ASEAN's hierarchical and bureaucratic structure. This approach facilitates the evaluation of AIPA's role in mitigating the political vacuum left by ASEAN's executive diplomacy, while promoting regional integration grounded in universal principles. AIPA amplifies moral and symbolic pressure on authoritarian regimes

that infringe on human rights through joint resolutions and declaration forums among legislators, thereby functioning as an essential instrument in establishing regional norms grounded in popular representation (Adiputri, 2024).

AIPA's role should also be seen as part of an experiment in making Southeast Asia's political system more democratic. AIPA shows how hard it is for ASEAN to gain legitimacy in the region, which includes both democratic and authoritarian states. AIPA supports a flexible, participatory parliamentary system that lets regional policy include things like social justice, protecting minorities, and political freedom. In the end, AIPA's parliamentary diplomacy may be seen as an attempt to create a new basis of legitimacy for ASEAN integration, which has been very elite and technical so far (Ridwan et al., 2022).

This paper contributes to the academic discourse on ASEAN studies, which has predominantly focused on state diplomacy and the role of executive actors. This study emphasizes the importance of legislative actors in expressing values and shaping regional norms, with AIPA as the central subject of analysis. The normative constructivism framework is employed as the primary theoretical lens, illustrating how social interactions within AIPA may foster collective identity and value-based political legitimacy (Lenz et al., 2019). Yildiz (2024) underscores that organizations such as AIPA can significantly influence the regional integration process, encompassing procedural, normative, and deliberative dimensions.

Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink's normative constructivism theory proposes that the dynamics of the international system are affected not only by power calculations and material interests but also by values, norms, and moral legitimacy. Norms are prescriptive expectations for behaviors deemed appropriate within a political society, and their presence not only guides behavior but also shapes actors' identities. As a result, norms are not only external constraints; they also shape internal social frameworks that influence how people understand and respond to global or regional issues (Minnella et al., 2024).

Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) developed the concept of the norm life cycle, comprising three stages: norm emergence, norm cascade, and norm internalization. During the developing stage, normative actors (norm entrepreneurs) propose norms, promote new values, and establish moral discourses to facilitate group adoption. The cascade stage occurs when norms receive widespread support and are adopted by other nations or institutions through imitation and reputational influence. Internalization is the process of incorporating norms into a community's legal, policy, and political culture. The three processes emphasize that norm development is a socio-political process that requires ethical validity rather than just instrumental rationality.

This normative constructivism method is particularly useful in understanding AIPA's role as a normative agent in Southeast Asia. AIPA uses statements, resolutions, and deliberative forums to promote democratic values, protect minority groups, and encourage everyone to take part in the ASEAN regional discourse. This is a time when new norms are being created, and AIPA is working to get people to understand how important value-based governance is. As more member states' parliaments support these norms, the norm cascade process can make them stronger until they are finally included in regional policies (Jones, 2024).

You can best judge AIPA's role by how well it can make and spread new norms through representative channels. AIPA's parliamentary resolutions,

legislative forums, and public discussions help make universal values stronger. AIPA is both a part of the government and a place for people to talk about and symbolize norms. This position is becoming more important because ASEAN's leaders have limited the agreement and don't want to get involved (Pelaudeix, 2023). Literature gaps emphasize the need for this method. Bhattarai and Bista (2024) contend that research on regional norms persists in prioritizing nation-state interactions over non-executive institutions such as AIPA. Yildiz (2024) analyzes AIPA's function in regional integration, neglecting its normative consequences in the Myanmar conflict. Ramcharan (2025) emphasizes AICHR as an ASEAN human rights organization, while excluding AIPA as a representative. This study addresses deficiencies in the literature, both theoretical and empirical. It elucidates how regional legislative institutions such as AIPA may facilitate normative change and resolve ethnic conflicts through a normative constructivist framework.

Method

This qualitative study utilizes library research to identify and analyze relevant sources and secondary documents. This method was selected to elucidate normative dynamics and political discourse influencing parliamentary diplomacy and the evolution of regional norms, which cannot be quantified. This study relied on ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) remarks, member state parliamentary delegation reports, and AIPA Annual General Assembly documents. We also used ASEAN policy documents on political consensus and minority rights in Southeast Asia, as well as scholarly publications on parliamentary diplomacy and international norms.

We utilized constructivist normative analysis to evaluate the data. Content analysis examined the structure, narrative, and messages of AIPA and ASEAN official declarations, resolutions, and diplomatic documents. This methodology augments researchers' comprehension of human rights, inclusion, and unity within the region. Normative analysis was applied to elucidate constructivist mechanisms in the regional context, particularly norm emergence, cascade, and internalization. This methodology assessed AIPA's normative function in fostering democracy, political participation, and the safeguarding of ethnic communities amid stagnant ASEAN diplomacy.

Findings and Discussion

The diplomatic function of AIPA in mediating ethnic conflicts in Myanmar

The ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) was established in 1977 as a regional legislative entity operating within the ASEAN framework. It predominantly consists of executive powers (Yildiz, 2024). Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) contextualize AIPA within normative constructivism as a norm entrepreneur, signifying its role in introducing concepts of democracy, human rights, and political inclusion into regional discourse (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). AIPA consists of 10 parliaments, each represented by a maximum of 15 delegates from each member state, amounting to over 300 legislators. This gives AIPA representative legitimacy and a space for open dialogue without being limited by ASEAN's principle of absolute non-intervention (Rüland, 2009).

Since the coup in Myanmar on February 1, 2021, which killed more than 4,000 civilians and forced tens of thousands to flee their homes (Skidmore 2023),

AIPA is the only regional legislative body that explicitly highlights human rights violations and minority rights. Through its General Assembly, AIPA has formulated resolutions at the 42nd GA (August 2021), 43rd GA (September 2022), and 44th GA (October 2023) to demand an end to violence, the restoration of elected parliaments, and the protection of ethnic minorities ASEAN Inter Parliamentary Assembly, 2024). This process exemplifies the norm emergence phase within the norm cycle, wherein new values are disseminated through official forums, joint declarations, and parliamentary statements, thereby fostering regional acceptance of parliamentary intervention in the Myanmar humanitarian crisis AIPA, 2025; Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998).

The 42nd AIPA General Assembly, held in Brunei from August 23 to 25, 2021, was the first step toward adopting rules. Representatives from ten countries signed a Joint Communiqué that stressed the importance of human rights, the rule of law, and the full participation of ethnic minorities in the dialogue process (AIPA, 2021). The AIPA statement is more direct than the ASEAN Summit statement, which usually doesn't name specific groups. At the 43rd Session (Phnom Penh, September 2022) and the 44th Session (Jakarta, October 2023), AIPA expressed concern about the slow implementation of the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus and called for dialogue among different ethnic groups (Jones, 2024). ACHR data as of August 17, 2021, reported 999 deaths and 5,712 arrests by the junta, including 107 members of parliament (ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights, 2021), which became the basis for AIPA's moral entrepreneurship. Internal mechanisms, such as the AIPA Caucus and Fact-Finding Missions, strengthen the norm-formulation process, emphasizing that legislators do not merely produce rhetoric but concrete norms that trigger moral pressure (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998).

After AIPA introduced the norms, they spread quickly as other groups adopted and shared them. At the 43rd GA, 82% of delegates fully supported enforcing the Five-Point Consensus, showing that the ASEAN parliamentary consensus was growing (AIPA, 2024). This unity was clear when the Indonesian Parliament and the Malaysian House of Representatives made similar statements rejecting the junta's legitimacy and recognizing the NUG as an alternative dialogue partner. The 2023 Democracy Index backs this moral pressure up by ranking Myanmar 9th out of 10 ASEAN countries, with a score of 4.01/10, down 0.25 points since 2021. This shows that democracy is getting worse and that parliamentary reform is needed (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2023). The International Crisis Group (2025) says that symbolic pressure from parliament is often easier for people to talk about than executive statements (International Crisis Group, 2024). AIPA has used real-world examples, like the rise in the number of refugees from 401,000 in 2018 to 450,000 in 2022 (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2020), to make a strong case for changing national and collective ASEAN policies.

AIPA doesn't just talk about papers. In March 2023, delegations from Indonesia and Malaysia went to refugee camps on the Thai border for the Karen and Rohingya ethnic groups. The team, which included 12 legislators from five countries, interviewed 250 refugees and EAO representatives and then reported their findings, which included humanitarian issues and the need for open dialogue, to the General Assembly (AIPA, 2023). Because of their suggestion, an AIPA Ad Hoc Committee for Monitoring the Myanmar Conflict was set up. This sped up the norm cascade phase toward internalization. Ridwan et al. (2022) stress that this kind

of field diplomacy strengthens AIPA's moral legitimacy by showing the importance of field action and real-world evidence instead of just words. This step links the norms introduced with actual practice, strengthening the foundation for adopting norms at the national legislative level.

Following the General Assembly, AIPA issued joint statements laden with moral weight. At the 44th GA, AIPA called for “the involvement of all stakeholders in inclusive dialogue” and urged an end to the junta's violence against civilians, which, as of January 2023, had killed 2,900 people and detained 17,572 according to OHCHR (Chusnaini, 2023; Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 2023). The Myanmar junta did not even attend the forum, giving even stronger moral legitimacy to the AIPA statement. The International Crisis Group (2024) says that symbolic legislative pressure often leads to better dialogue than executive pressure. In the norm cascade, AIPA joint statements cause reputational conformity, which pushes member states to change their foreign policies to keep ASEAN's image as a democratic region.

To implement the norms more thoroughly (norm internalization), AIPA established a Task Force on the Myanmar Crisis, which brought together ASEAN parliaments and NUG representatives to formulate recommendations to end violence, release political prisoners, and restore ethnic pluralistic democracy (Chusnaini, 2023). At the same time, the internal Human Rights Committee worked with the AICHR to produce periodic reports on violations of minority rights. Ramcharan calls this initiative Track 1.5, connecting the parliaments of Thailand, Malaysia, and the Myanmar diaspora, which recommended strengthening the citizenship status of the Rohingya (Ramcharan, 2025). The ASEAN Parliamentarians Humanitarian Fund is an example of both symbolic diplomacy and real humanitarian action. It combines official statements with real help (UNHCR, 2023).

AIPA also connects national parliaments with groups around the world. For example, through Commission I of the House of Representatives, Indonesia regularly integrates AIPA recommendations into foreign policy debates (Adiputri, 2024). Meanwhile, cooperation with the IPU and UNHCR has enriched perspectives on human security in the aftermath of the coup. However, AIPA's power is limited by ASEAN's principle of non-intervention and the absence of a binding legal authority. At the same time, minimal participation from Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia has weakened the pro-democracy voice (Yildiz, 2024). Without a systematic follow-up mechanism, recommendations are just diplomatic gestures that don't lead to real change (Pogodda et al., 2023). Therefore, the sustainability of AIPA parliamentary diplomacy relies on the continuous adoption of resolutions, the enhancement of monitoring capabilities, and the deeper integration of civil society organizations. If principles of peace and inclusivity are effectively integrated into national legislative identities, AIPA may serve as a model for parliamentary diplomacy in other regions, reinforcing the foundations of value-based governance and representation.

Since the military coup in Myanmar in 2021, AIPA has become a mediator in ethnic conflicts. However, its role is still more about setting rules and making decisions than actually carrying them out. During the 42nd to 44th General Assemblies, AIPA made important decisions that reaffirmed its support for the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus, recognized the National Unity Government (NUG) as a legitimate partner, and called for an end to violence against minority groups, such as the Rohingya and Karen. AIPA has a multi-level governance strategy that includes national parliaments and civil society groups in making and enforcing

these rules. Sending fact-finding missions, creating the Task Force on the Myanmar Crisis, and forming an internal Human Rights Committee are all part of this. AIPA has shown that parliamentary diplomacy can effectively deal with ethnic disputes through an inclusive, values-driven approach, even though there are limits because of non-intervention principles and opposition from the junta. AIPA participates and actively spearheads the development of the regional normative framework for a peaceful resolution in Myanmar.

Norm construction and challenges to effectiveness: A normative constructivist perspective

As explained in the previous section, AIPA's role as an alternative mediator also faces various challenges, particularly regarding the effectiveness of its involvement in resolving ethnic conflicts in Myanmar. This is a significant challenge, even though the military coup that took place in Myanmar on February 1, 2021, marked a dramatic turning point in the country's journey toward democracy and human rights.

Normative constructivism does not automatically generate norms; norms are formed through a social process initiated by normative actors or norm entrepreneurs (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). The ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) is the only legislative body within ASEAN that includes more than 300 lawmakers from 10 countries. It has become an important part of putting issues of ethnic inclusivity and respect for human rights at the top of the regional agenda (AIPA, 2021; Rüländ, 2009).. This has been thoroughly explained in the previous section, where we can say that AIPA has succeeded in creating cooperations between parliamentary advocacy and domestic political interests in democratic member countries, in line with Chalmers' opinion which states that the internalization of norms requires consolidation between external pressure and the convergence of national elite interests, which can also be interpreted to mean that the norms established through AIPA have been well internalized (Chalmers, 2024)

Although the internalization phase shows progress, AIPA's effectiveness still faces institutional limitations. As a non-executive institution, AIPA can only issue resolutions of a recommendatory nature without binding legal sanctions (Rüländ & Bechle, 2014). ASEAN's principle of non-intervention also weakens AIPA's capacity to encourage member countries, so even if progressive resolutions are adopted, their implementation depends heavily on national political will (Pogodda et al., 2023). The absence of Myanmar and Laos delegations at the 44th General Assembly (2023) reflects structural resistance, with delegation attendance rates falling to 70% (AIPA, 2024). Numerous studies indicate that norms remain merely symbolic in the absence of compliance mechanisms (Costa & Brack, 2020; Kobayashi & Krause, 2025; Rüländ & Carrapatoso, 2015). Furthermore, domestic fragmentation, exemplified by divergent political orientations among parliamentary factions, contributes to inconsistencies in the adoption of norms, highlighting the necessity for a more systematic monitoring and follow-up system to prevent AIPA resolutions from devolving into mere rhetoric.

AIPA's legitimacy as a normative actor stems mainly from its representation in the national parliament, unlike the executive branch's legitimacy, which is based on formal power (Howe, 2021). During the 44th General Assembly, over 80% of delegates endorsed the notion of public engagement, including the Myanmar

diaspora, in conflict resolution discussions. In contrast, junta delegates were absent, enhancing the resolution's moral authority (AIPA, 2024). The collaboration between the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and Human Rights Watch led to the establishment of the ASEAN Parliamentary Indicators for Democratic Inclusion initiative, which will serve as metrics for the annual assessment of norm implementation (Costa & Brack, 2020). However, limited representation occurs in countries with strict executive control, such as Cambodia and Laos, where parliaments have limited bandwidth for normative issues. Manea (2015) demonstrates that numerous regional parliamentary resolutions are merely ceremonial, devoid of sanctions or institutional pressure, and that the AIPA must establish advocacy channels directly connected to CSOs to enhance the acceptance of norms.

From a normative constructivist standpoint, the norm cycle (emergence–cascade–internalization) provides an evaluative framework for assessing AIPA's performance. In the emerging phase, AIPA successfully established the principle of ethnicity. Inclusion. During the cascade phase, most democratic ASEAN countries also accepted this story. In the internalization phase, channels for humanitarian action and domestic policies based on AIPA suggestions were set up. However, institutional problems, such as the lack of law enforcement agencies and political disunity at home, make this normative process even more complicated. Jetschke & Rüländ argue that norms risk losing relevance without decoupling rhetoric from practice (Rüländ, 2009). Therefore, AIPA must continue facilitating interaction between parliament, the executive, and civil society to ensure that constructed norms are not merely rhetorical backdrops but are realized in concrete policies.

In the long term, AIPA has the potential to become an effective normative institutional prototype for other Global South regions if parliamentary diplomacy continues to be enriched through the Track 1.5 approach, as applied in the Asia–Europe Meeting (ASEM), and integrated into the ASEAN legal framework through the ASEAN Charter Review (Rüländ & Carrapatoso, 2015). Consequently, establishing norms influenced by AIPA transcends mere symbolism, becoming embedded in institutional and policy frameworks, fostering a people-centered regionalism more attuned to political and social dynamics. This triumph will signify a paradigm shift in ASEAN from an executive technocratic approach to a regional governance model grounded in values and representation of the populace.

Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) has become a prominent normative entity in resolving ethnic tensions in Myanmar since the 2021 military coup. AIPA has significantly contributed to the establishment and promotion of regional standards focused on inclusivity, human rights, and democratic participation through its parliamentary diplomacy. AIPA has actively contributed to the emergence and cascade of norms within the framework of normative constructivism by adopting resolutions during the 42nd to 44th General Assemblies, conducting fact-finding missions, and establishing institutional mechanisms such as ad hoc committees and task forces. These initiatives show that AIPA can be a "norm entrepreneur," which means it can shape regional discourse in ways that go beyond the limits of traditional state-centric diplomacy.

The results, however, show that AIPA still has trouble doing its job well because of structural and institutional issues. The fact that its resolutions are not legally binding, ASEAN's principle of non-intervention, and the fact that member countries have different levels of political commitment all make it harder for norms to go from being followed to being fully accepted. The absence or limited involvement of specific member states, coupled with domestic political instability, undermines the consistency and enforcement of these rules. Consequently, several AIPA activities are predominantly symbolic, devoid of tangible policy execution and quantifiable effects in Myanmar.

This paper asserts that AIPA has considerable potential to improve regional governance through value-based parliamentary diplomacy, despite existing challenges. To enhance its effectiveness, AIPA must reinforce compliance mechanisms, deepen its collaboration with civil society and international entities, and ensure systematic implementation of its resolutions. In the long run, establishing inclusive, human rights-based norms within ASEAN's broader framework could elevate AIPA's role as a more significant participant in regional conflict resolution. This development will enhance ASEAN's legitimacy and foster a more people-centric and norm-based paradigm of regional integration in Southeast Asia.

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