



2021 Review

As another year ends, this review of The Asia Foundation's Conflict and Fragility Program reflects on our achievements and lessons learned. The evolving landscape of conflict, political violence, and tensions across Asia persists. We continue to closely monitor, adjust, and adapt to new and ongoing challenges including the Covid-19 pandemic, the military takeover in Myanmar, and the situation in Afghanistan. Our work is driven and made possible by our strong and diverse partnerships across The Asia Foundation and with local organizations and individuals.

Overall fatalities through conflict have declined across most of Asia over the past decade. But several emerging trends are of critical concern. Our recently released report, *The State of Conflict and Violence in Asia 2021: Identity-based Conflict and Extremism*, highlights increased levels of identity-based violence associated with polarizing politics and authoritarian leadership. Compounding elements include democratic backsliding and the ease with which influential online media can be manipulated. More positive trends identified in the report include greater concern over the impending impacts of climate change and rising commitment to tackling gender-based violence.

Looking ahead to the next year, we remain committed to working with our country offices on a broad range of intersecting issues including borderland conflict dynamics, conflict assessments and trends, and the impact of online social media. We continue to seek creative and innovative approaches to our research and capacity building efforts, and we hope our work will be beneficial and of interest to you.

Should you have any questions or suggestions, please do not hesitate to reach out to us.

All the best,
The Conflict and Fragility Team

IN THIS EDITION

PUBLICATIONS AND EVENTS

IN NUMBERS

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

State of Conflict and Violence in Asia 2021

X-Border Local Research Network

Resiliency Initiative

Midweek Conflict Sessions

PUBLICATIONS AND EVENTS

JAN

Newsletter- [Peripheral Vision: Views from the Borderlands – Fall 2020](#)

MAR

Briefing paper- [Cross-Border Trade in the Southern Philippines Amidst Covid-19](#)

JUL

Podcast: [Political Unrest Unsettles Myanmar's Borderlands](#)
 Report- [Transitions in the Borderlands: Cross-border Mobility, Communities and Market Systems Along Pakistan's Frontier with Afghanistan](#) by Verso Consulting
 Report- [On the Edge and in Between: Community and Policy Responses to Shocks in the Borderland Regions of Afghanistan](#) by ACSOR

SEPT

Midweek Conflict Sessions training series for TAF staff

NOV

DevPolicy blog: [New terrain, old problems: identity-based conflict and extremism in Asia, 2021](#)
 Resiliency Initiative regional online training on social media for CSOs

FEB

Briefing paper- [Emerging Marketplace Dynamics in the Rohingya Refugee Camps of Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh](#)
 Policy brief- [Community Perspectives on Access to Civil Justice after Cross-Border Displacement: The needs of Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh](#)

JUN

Newsletter- [Peripheral Vision: Views from the Borderlands – Spring 2021](#)
 Policy Brief- [Perceptions of Rohingya Refugees: Marriage and Social Justice After Cross-Border Displacement](#)
 Policy Brief- [Views of Rohingya Refugees: Engagement and Experiences with Humanitarian Agencies in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh](#)
 Virtual Event – Advancing Peace on the Barren Soil of Strife
 Launch of Resiliency Initiative website

AUG

Myanmar Regional Forum set up to support policy debate and engagement on Myanmar's current crisis

OCT

Report- [Covid-19 and Complex Conflicts: The Pandemic in Myanmar's Unsettled Regions](#)
 Launch of [The State of Conflict and Violence in Asia, 2021: Identity-based Conflict and Extremism](#) report
 Podcast: [The State of Conflict and Violence in Asia](#)

DEC

Blog- [What the Taliban's Rise to Power Means for the Mobility of Afghans](#)
 Newsletter- [Peripheral Vision: Views from the Borderlands – Fall 2021](#)

IN NUMBERS



19 publications

including briefing papers and non-public reports



5 research countries

Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines



22 policy briefing meetings with policymakers



12 online webinars and trainings

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

“*I always say there are three C’s—collaborate, collaborate, collaborate... We need to do exactly what happened after World War II: bring a lot of people to the table and say, ‘This is destroying all of us....What new structures do we need to put in place?’*”

- **Maria Ressa**, renowned Filipina journalist and Nobel Peace Prize recipient, in an interview for one of the report’s keynote essays.

State of
Conflict and
Violence in
Asia 2021



With thanks to all the support received from contributors across the region and the world, we were excited to launch The Asia Foundation’s State of Conflict and Violence in Asia report in October. This second edition explores recent events and patterns of events through regional assessments and country-specific overviews, in particular addressing contemporary concerns over political polarization and identity-based tensions. Following the introductory chapter, three keynote essays, featuring regional experts, offer closer assessments of recent conflict trends. Ten concise country summaries then present greater detail. Data is drawn from a range of primary and secondary sources, including country-level and regional datasets on violence and conflict, academic analyses, reporting on contemporary events, and other research conducted by The Asia Foundation. Accompanying the report is an [InAsia podcast and blog](#) with Adam Burke and Sarah Oh weighing in on the state of conflict and the growing perils of social media; as well

as the recording of the virtual launch featuring commentaries by Adam Burke, Sidney Jones, and Sofia Shakil. All report and related resources can be found at <https://stateofconflictinasia.org>

X-Border Local Research Network

Background: As part of the Cross-Border Conflict: Evidence, Policy and Trends (XCEPT) program, the X-Border Local Research Network is a partnership between The Asia Foundation, the Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center and the Rift Valley Institute. The program conducts research in border regions of fragile and conflict-affected states in Asia, the Middle East and Africa. For the Asia components, our regional conflict team works with country offices in the Philippines, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Pakistan.



The X-Border project continued to deliver a stream of published research. In Bangladesh, we published two further policy briefs through our partnership with Brac University's Center for Peace and Justice, [Views of Rohingya Refugees: Engagement and Experiences with Humanitarian Agencies in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh](#) and [Perceptions of Rohingya Refugees: Marriage and Social Justice After Cross-Border Displacement](#). Outreach and dissemination of these papers led to fruitful conversations with a range of donors and service delivery actors working in the camps at Cox's Bazar and

inform our ongoing work in the area despite a deterioration in security and governance conditions and a shrinking operational space for humanitarian and development organizations.

Our two other geographical focus areas, Myanmar and the Afghanistan/Pakistan border area, have been affected by significant political upheaval in the last six months, developing into protracted economic, security and humanitarian crises. In July we launched two reports by our partners in Afghanistan and Pakistan, [Transitions in the Borderlands: Cross-border Mobility, Communities and Market Systems Along Pakistan's Frontier with](#)



[Afghanistan](#) by Verso Consulting and [On the Edge and in Between: Community and Policy Responses to Shocks in the Borderland Regions of Afghanistan – A Qualitative Research Study](#) by ACSOR. Shortly thereafter the withdrawal of NATO troops and ensuing Taliban takeover prompted a pivot toward a more rapid and responsive research approach, investigating ongoing developments along the Afghanistan/Pakistan border concerning the flow of people and goods, as well as broader governance and security issues. Our research approaches have also been adapted to new realities as we prepare to publish a report on transnational trading points and border communities along Myanmar's north-east border with China.

Our bulletin *Peripheral Vision* published its [first issue](#) of the year in June and [second issue](#) in December. We are also preparing to publish the X-Border network's first joint research report covering border settlements and trade across South and Southeast Asia, the Middle East, North Africa and the Horn of Africa. Finally, a research report from our southern Philippines field site will be published in the coming months, tackling the rice trade and local tensions.



Resiliency Initiative- Building Stronger Communities

The Resiliency Initiative project supports local civil society and community organizations across the Asia-Pacific in developing their social media skills to promote tolerance, tackle prejudice, and counter extremism.



The first phase focused on developing capacity for over 60 local civil society and grassroots organizations through a series of online training workshops. Building on this, we have launched a website and social media portal which provides guidance resources including articles, worksheets, videos, and community stories on how to use social media effectively. The website is available in English with translations in Thai, Bengali, and Urdu. Learn more and access all materials at <https://resiliencyinitiative.org/>

The second phase has recently begun and will build on these achievements to strengthen and expand the network while exploring in depth topics and themes such as tackling misinformation and hate speech. A series of four online training modules on social media was organized for over 20 CSOs. Stay tuned via [The Resiliency Initiative social media page](#) to keep updated on developments.

Midweek Conflict Sessions- In-House Conflict Training

Based on interest from colleagues across The Asia Foundation country offices working on programs addressing conflict, we organized a series of four internal online training workshops which became known as the Midweek Conflict Sessions. Held between September and November, the Sessions aimed at building practical programming skills on peacebuilding, violence reduction and conflict prevention covering a wide range of applications. Through guest speakers sharing programming experiences, interactive exercises, and small group off-session activities, they also provided opportunities to exchange experiences and build links among colleagues across country offices.

The first two sessions – Conflict Fundamentals and Gender and Social Inclusion, and Community Tensions and Social Cohesion – were held for a smaller group while the last two sessions – Sub-National Conflict and Post-Conflict Transition, and Social Media and Conflict – were open to a wider audience. Feedback from participants showed interest in further opportunities for knowledge sharing and we will seek to organize useful activities in future.



For more information, contact us at: peaceandstability@asiafoundation.org

The Regional Conflict & Fragility Program from The Asia Foundation focuses on issues related to violent conflict and fragile governance in Asia. We support local efforts to improve engagement between government and citizens; strengthen peacebuilding efforts and transitional institutions; and strengthen informal institutions that provide justice, stability, and services where the state has limited reach and/or legitimacy.