

Human Rights Situation in Myanmar during the Election Process

Update

December 2025

Background

Conflict-related insecurity and human rights violations continue to permeate the environment in which military-controlled electioneering and early voting are being conducted. With the first phase culminating on 28 December, the military continues to conduct offensives to regain territories -- slated for polls in either phase one or two of voting -- that persistently impact civilians. Fundamental civil and political rights are further undermined as the military instrumentalizes laws to criminalize dissent and severely restrict access to information. Civilians in military-controlled areas are facing persistent pressures to vote facing a combination of incentives and threats to ensure their participation. Military officials are conducting mandatory demonstrations of electronic voting machines, as well as telling voters that they will be able to get humanitarian aid or administrative services if they agree to vote. Groups targeted so far include students, many of whom are first-time voters, internally displaced persons (IDPs), political prisoners, and Myanmar nationals abroad. Building on its initial briefing paper of 28 November 2025,[1] in this update the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) provides examples of human rights concerns that have arisen in the context of the military-controlled elections.

Violence, insecurity, and protection of civilian concerns

Escalation of violence in strategic areas nationwide

By the end of November, at least (7,503) people, including pro-democracy activists and civilians, have been killed by the military and pro-military groups, since the launch of the February 2021 coup.–During November 2025, a minimum of 88 civilians have been killed in attacks by the military[2]. Recent ceasefire agreements between the military and ethnic armed groups in northern Shan have not brought peace as the military continues to launch attacks and operations in those locations creating insecurity. Conflict has noticeably flared up in specific parts of the country, especially in central and southeastern Myanmar, Chin, and Rakhine states. Hotspots for military activity strikingly align with strategic sections of Asian Highways 1, 2, and 14, running through central Myanmar, northern Shan, and Kayin. These roads are vital transport and logistical corridors, which are crucial for the military to control transport of election material and personnel to major urban centers and to try to prevent disruption by anti-military groups. (For more detail, see box: "Conflict updates by region").

Threats against and bombings targeting Internally displaced people (IDPs)

On 7 and 12 November, in Mandalay region, schools sheltering IDPs from the Madaya Township (phase 2) were bombed in Singu Township (no election), killing at least nine. A local source told OHCHR: *"Even if [the military] wants to do elections, it would be hard. Because there are no people [in Madaya]. That is why [the military] are telling the IDPs to come back."* The same source added: *"They are saying to the IDPs: you guys come back to the town. If you do not come back, we will continue to bomb you."* In Loikaw (Kayah, phase 1) OHCHR confirmed that displaced residents were warned that their homes would be sealed off if they did not return before the polls, forcing residents to choose between unsafe and involuntary returns or the risk of losing access to their homes.

Freedom of movement

[1] https://bangkok.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/2025-12/OHCHRMyanmar-Background-paper-on-military-elections-Nov25.pdf

[2] By the end of November, at least (7,503) people, including pro-democracy activists and civilians, have been killed by the military and pro-military groups, since the launch of the February 2021 coup.

Checkpoints have multiplied and become more onerous along major highways. Civilians travelling approximately 160 km between Loikaw (Kayah, phase 1) and Taunggyi (Shan, phase 1) reportedly face up to 10 military and EAO checkpoints and are required to pay up to 50,000 kyats in total (5,000 at each stop) amounting to over 20 percent of a monthly minimum wage in Myanmar. A local source told OHCHR that there were 17 military-run checkpoints between Mandalay and Taunggyi (256km). In addition to national registration cards, recommendation letters, and Unique Identification Number (UID) cards with biometric data are often required to pass. Citing election security measures, the military has reportedly also expanded the use of the Person Scrutinization and Monitoring System (PSMS), at entrances and exits of cities, enabling the identification, tracking and locating of dissidents through the combination of CCTV cameras, the use of biometric data and other personal data harvested by the military, and artificial intelligence.

Election actors targeted by resistance groups

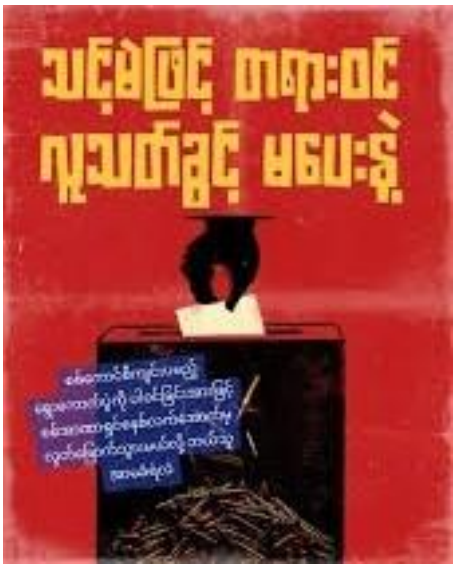
The approaching election heightens the acute risks to civilians of being caught between the military and resistance forces, facing conflicting threats regarding their participation in the upcoming polls. On 16 November, nine female teachers from Kyaikto (Mon, phase 1) were reportedly abducted when travelling to attend a polling station officer training and released with warnings from resistance forces. On 18 and 19 November, in Yangon, the self-declared 'Yangon Army' bombed administration offices in Hlegu and North Okkalapa townships (phase 1), injuring several election staff and declaring its intent to keep attacking election organizers.

Restricted civic and political space

Surge in use of "Election Protection Law"

The military has strategically used charges under the Election Protection Law, including against prominent figures in Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs), such as the Karen National Union and the Arakan Army, bringing the number of persons charged to over 200 by the end of November.[3] According to Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), as of 4 December, 117 people have been arrested under the Election Protection Law, including 87 individuals yet to be identified. Many have been arrested for exercising their right to freedom of expression. Prominent figures, including film director Mike Tee, actor Kyaw Win Htut and comedian Ohn Daing, were arrested and convicted to 7 years each for undermining public trust by criticizing a pro-election propaganda film. While the minimum sentence under the law is of three years, the harshest punishment reported so far was given to three youths in Hlaingthaya Township, Yangon Region, with sentences between 42 and 49 years of imprisonment for hanging up anti-election posters depicting the shape of a bullet on a black ballot box. Further, the military threatened to arrest anyone taking part in silent strikes on 10 December. These protests were part of Human Rights Day commemorations when many people stayed off the streets and kept businesses closed in opposition of the military-imposed election.

[3] Irrawaddy reports at least 260 by 26 November; DVB reports at least 196 as of 28 November.





Lack of media freedom and access to information

Consistent with its past repression against the media, on 10 November, military-aligned prosecutors charged the Assistance Association for Myanmar-based Independent Journalists (AAMIJ), an exiled independent media outlet reporting on Myanmar, under the election protection law for an investigative report linking an electoral candidate to drug trafficking.[4] Two online news channels, Hlaing Info Telegram Channel and the Telegram channel of Khit Thit News Media were reportedly also charged under the law.[5]

Internet restrictions

Freedom of expression is further limited as internet shutdowns and media censorship continue to restrict access to election-related information among others. In major cities such as Yangon, Mandalay and Mawlamyine, internet speed has reportedly dropped sharply in recent weeks, from 20-30 Mbps to under 5 Mbps. As of September, 22 townships had experienced disrupted communication networks since 2021 to date.[6] As of December 2025, over a third of Myanmar's 330 townships were experiencing internet restrictions, with Myaung Township, Sagaing region, being the longest under continuous shutdown totaling 1453 days without mobile data or internet services.[7]

Military control over the election process

Amnesty

On 26 November, a military run broadcaster announced that 3,085 political prisoners would be granted an amnesty and 5,580 others would have charges dropped under specific provisions commonly used against those opposing military rule, thus affecting a total of 8,665 political prisoners. These measures were granted "to ensure that all eligible voters do not lose their right to vote and can cast their votes freely and fairly in the upcoming multi-party democratic general election." Yet, in line with prior practice, this amnesty appears

[4] Myanmar junta hits AAMIJ News with election law charges, holds journalist in prison - Committee to Protect Journalists
[5] https://www.myanmarinternet.info/post/sham_election_law_and_freedom_of_expression-1
[6] Athan, *Only in Myanmar – made by Junta; Consequences of the Telecommunication Blackout*, November 2025, Only-in-Myanmar-1.pdf, p. 5.
[7] https://coar-global.org/weekly-analytics-hub

to have only benefited a small number of political prisoners. One important reason is that the military has usually charged political prisoners under multiple criminal provisions, which means that if charges under one provision are dropped, other charges remain or new politically motivated charges are brought, thus preventing prisoner releases or leading to their immediate re-arrest upon release. Thus, as of 28 November, Political Prisoners Network Myanmar (PPNM) reported only 268 political prisoners being released from 11 prisons as of 1 December, highlighting the very limited scope of the amnesty. As of 10 December, 22,673 individuals remain in detention out of over 30,000 arrested arbitrarily for political opposition to the 2021 coup. Thus, the amnesty – rather than marking a true step in a political transition – suggests that the military is using public announcements of pardons as political theatre in the context of the elections.

Pressure to vote

In Lashio, Shan State (phase 1), reports indicate Yeah that residents were summoned for mandatory demonstrations on electronic voting. Students in various locations, such as Mon, Yangon, and Shan, have reported being under pressure to vote in advance. A student from Mon State University reported that students were handed out letters requiring them to provide proof of advance voting when they enrolled in their courses. Youth in Chaungzon Township, Mon State, raised concerns that voting would become a requirement for the processing of administrative documents such as IDs, passports or household registrations.

Elderly people or those unable to travel have reportedly also been compelled to vote, with the military going from door-to-door to gather ballots.

In Loikaw Prison (Kayah, phase 1), reports have alleged 700 detainees, including political prisoners, have been coerced into advance voting. Similar reports emerged about advance voting in Insein prison, Yangon (phase one). OHCHR received reports that detainees who received amnesty on 26 November and were subsequently released from Insein prison after having cast their ballots in prison on 25 November. It is unclear if early voting was a pre-condition for receiving the amnesty.

Military authorities in Mandalay and Sagaing have been coercing IDPs into signing voting pledges and casting advance ballots under the implicit threat of losing access to humanitarian aid or shelter if they refuse to vote. Military officials have claimed these voting pledges and other actions are necessary to protect voting rights. Under international human rights law, coercion of voters is inconsistent with their right to participation, while the right of freedom of expression includes being able to refuse to or boycott the vote.

Myanmar nationals overseas

Agents of the Myanmar military are attempting to exert pressure on expatriates to participate in the polls. Many migrants have said they fear retaliation, such as not being allowed to renew their passports, visas, or work permits if they do not appear supportive of the military authorities. At Temporary Passport Issuance Centers in Ranong and Samut Sakhone Provinces, workers seeking to obtain or renew passports were instructed to wear green shirts associated with the military and its associated party and sign unexplained consent forms with implied consequences for refusal, such as delayed processing or denial of documents. In South Korea, Myanmar workers have reported receiving phone calls urging them to vote, as the military has conditioned passport renewal upon completing “Form 15” for advance voting.

Conclusion

In Myanmar, only weeks from the culmination of the first phase of military-controlled elections on 28 December, conflict continues at alarming levels. Concerns for the safety of civilians are increasing as many anti-military groups have vowed to disrupt the election. Moreover, the Myanmar military is

deploying a range of tactics to maximize its control over the process, arresting people expressing critical opinions about the election and pressuring civilians to participate in the polls, flouting their international human rights law obligations. The recent amnesty – in line with previous similar measures – led to very limited releases of political prisoners. In its current form and shape, this electoral process thus seems certain to further ingrain insecurity, fear and polarization throughout the country instead of ushering in a period of true transition and reconciliation.

Conflict Update

Armed Conflict continued to impact on human rights in areas where the elections are planned during one of the three phases.

North-east: In northern Shan, fighting surged in recent months along the Mandalay–Muse highway (Asian Highway 14), with Nawnghkio (phase one), Kyaukme (phase three), and Hsipaw town (phase three) retaken by the military after airstrikes, artillery fire and sweeping ground operations that burned villages and displaced civilians. Lashio (phase one) remains unstable despite its handover in April, and military-MNDAA clashes including shelling resumed in November. Local sources note that the area remains highly militarized and insecure for potential voters. In Kachin, fighting surged in Hpakant (phase three), as the military pushed into jade-mining villages, where eleven civilians were reportedly killed in early November.

Central: In Mandalay, Mogok (no election), a strategic gem-mining town, endured relentless airstrikes before the China-brokered ceasefire between the TNLA and military on 29 October. By late November, the TNLA handed over the town to the military, leaving civilians facing pervasive insecurity. The TNLA's retreat removes the most substantial barrier to military advances, significantly shifting conflict dynamics in Northern Mandalay in the military's favor. With Mogok secured, the military is accelerating pre-election territorial consolidation in surrounding townships, including Madaya (phase two) and Thabeikkyin (phase three). In Sagaing, along the Schwebo–Mandalay highway (Asian Highway 2), military operations have displaced thousands. Wetlet, Taze, and Khin-U (no election) faced airstrikes, raids and village burning. In Magway, between 10,000 and 35,000 people fled villages in southern Pauk (no election) and neighboring Seikphyu (phase two). One interviewee told OHCHR: *"Because of the election they are forcing people to come back to town. Areas around the town they want to take back before the election."*

Southeast: In the Southeast, strategically-located townships such as Tanintharyi Township (phase two), Tanintharyi region, along with Myawaddy (phase one) and Kawkareik (phase three) townships, Kayin State, continue to experience among the highest levels of security incidents nationwide due to their strategic locations.[8] In Kayin, scam centers in Myawaddy Township have emerged as a new hotspot, as the military wants to be seen as cracking down on illicit activities in order to improve its image internationally. In Kayah, the military continues its offensive, pushing southwards from Loikaw to control strategic highways between Thailand and Naypidaw and major cities along the way, where elections are planned in phase one (Loikaw) and phase two (Demoso and Hpruso).

North-west. In Chin, airstrikes and ground operations intensified in Tedim and Hakha (phase one) with escalated armed hostilities along the Kalay–Tedim and Hakha-Falam roads, as the military seeks to secure control before the election. Civilians from at least 20 villages along these roads have fled for safety, with

[8] https://coar-global.org/weekly-analytics-hub

several civilian casualties and civilian infrastructure reported damaged due to airstrikes in multiple townships in November.

In Rakhine, attacks continued to intensify in Kyaukphyu (phase one), Rathedaung, Kyauktaw, Pauktaw, and Ponnagyun (no election), resulting in at least 23 verified civilian deaths, the destruction of homes, schools, and clinics, and widespread displacement, including of at least 2000 Kyaukphyu residents from 17 villages in November. Local sources reported that on 28 November, at least seven civilians were killed in military airstrikes in Kyauktaw. Military airstrikes intensified in December, as illustrated by an attack that targeted the public hospital in Mrauk U township, on the evening of 10 December. Multiple sources indicated a fighter jet dropped two 500-pound bombs targeting the township General Hospital, damaging some buildings; 33 civilians, including 17 women and at least one child, were reportedly killed, and at least 76 others were injured with many remaining in critical condition. The following day, on 11 December, military reportedly conducted another airstrike in Kyaukphyu township (phase one), killing at least eight civilians, injuring 10 others and destroying a dozen civilian homes.

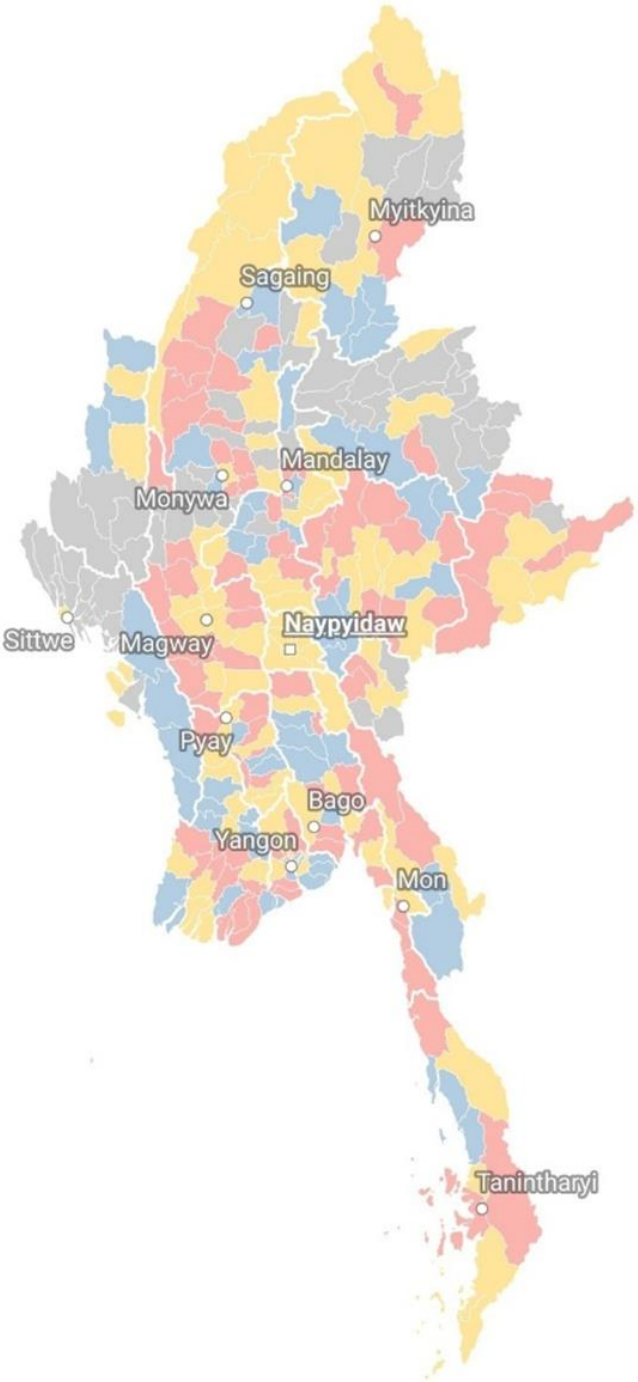
Meanwhile, Rohingya departures by sea have surged, with 20 boats reportedly leaving Rakhine since September due to forced recruitment and a general sense of hopelessness. In early November, one boat capsized off Malaysia, killing at least 36, while the Myanmar navy on 20 November intercepted two others off Sittwe (phase one), arresting at least 500 people, half of them allegedly children.

Townships slated for elections by the military by phase

The map shows the townships participating in the first, second, and third phases of the planned general election and the townships where election will not be held.

Election phase

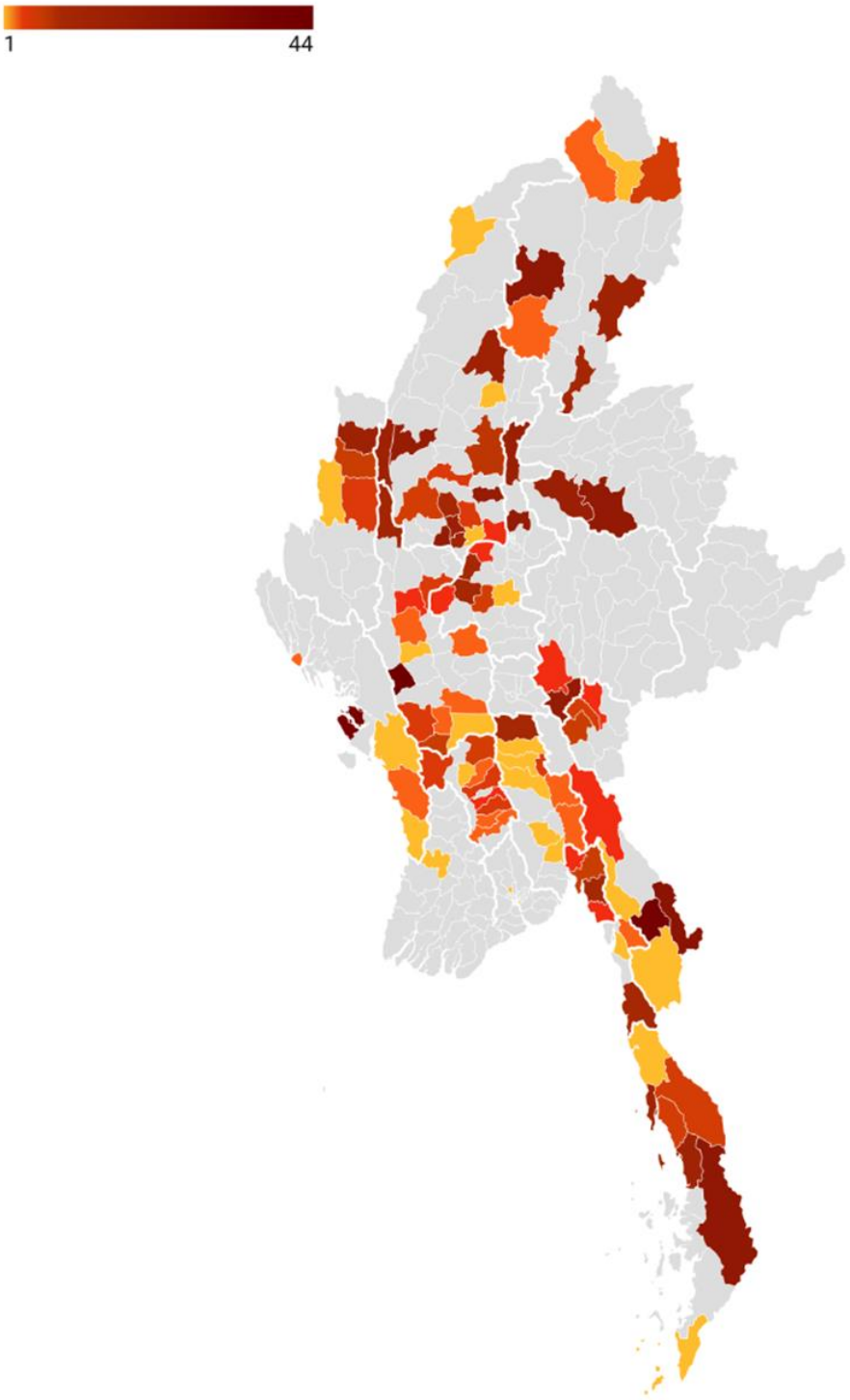
First phase of the election | Second phase of the election | Third phase of the election | No election



Map data: USAID • Created with Datawrapper

Conflict-related violence in townships slated for elections, October and November 2025

The map shows violent incidents in townships participating in the first, second and third phases of the planned general election.



Map data: USAID • Created with Datawrapper