



**Background paper**  
**on**  
**Myanmar military's plans to hold national elections**

**28 November 2025**

## Introduction

On 31 July 2025, four and a half years after it launched its coup, the Myanmar military announced the end of its unconstitutionally imposed state of emergency and its intention to hold elections within 6 months. Having already undertaken a perfunctory so-called “census” in 2024 to update voter lists in 2024,<sup>1</sup> the military indicated that the elections would be held in three phases covering 274 out of a total 330 townships: the first starting on 28 December in 102 townships, the second on 11 January in 100 townships, and the third phase at a date and townships yet to be determined. Notably, the military entirely excluded 56 townships under the control of anti-military armed groups from the process.

OHCHR is gravely concerned that the elections will take place in an environment in which the military is actively suppressing participation, excluding the major political parties and detaining their leadership, and curtailing the space for civil society and independent media. Institutions linked to the elections have lost all semblance of independence or functional transparency and are fully controlled by the military. Thus, military-controlled elections seem likely only to deepen violence, conflict and authoritarian rule, without any real prospect for advancing peace, development or a return to democratic, civilian rule.

This paper highlights key human rights concerns with this deeply flawed election process.

## Conflict

**Ongoing hostilities:** Since the coup, the military has unleashed systematic and widespread violence against the people of Myanmar, causing unprecedented human rights, humanitarian and protection crisis across the country. Armed conflict continues to affect large parts of the country. According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), at least 7,463 people have been verified killed, and about 4,100 additional deaths remain unverified. The military implicitly acknowledged the gravity of the situation when, immediately after formally ending the state of emergency, it re-imposed martial law in 63 townships across nine states and regions. On 31 October 2025, the military extended martial law in those townships for another 90 days, ensuring it remains in place during the election rollout.

There is no sign that neither the termination of the state of emergency nor the announcement of elections have resulted in efforts to de-escalated violence – as one would expect. Nationwide levels of fighting remain high and have increased in some areas, such as Kayah, Kayin, Kachin, Magway, Mandalay, Sagaing, Northern Shan, Rakhine and Chin where the military has launched new offensives since August. These intensified attacks seem intentioned to regain key contested areas where elections have been announced to take place. Airstrikes, shelling, arson, mass arrests and punitive raids targeting the civilian population in many instances continue, particularly along key highways and in strategic border areas. In doing so, the military attempts to cut revenue lifelines of anti-military armed groups and ensure access to hold elections in these territories.

**Impact on civilians:** Protection risks for civilians are rising as the military systematically pressures the population to vote, while many anti-military armed groups and EAOs openly oppose the election, with some threatening to punish those who take part. In conflict-affected areas, movement is severely constrained by active hostilities, airstrikes, military checkpoints, and displacement, making daily life increasingly

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<sup>1</sup> <https://dop.gov.mm/en/publication-category/2024-provisional-result>. 64 townships where data was missing or incomplete were all in areas that are either held by anti-military armed groups or were contested between different parties to a complex web of non-international armed conflicts.

difficult and electoral activities virtually impossible. At least 3.6 million internally displaced persons face additional barriers, including the lack of personal documentation justifying their presence in a township, making them vulnerable to coercion, particularly to pressure them to return to their residences to vote.

### **Restricted civic and political space**

***Lack of media freedom and access to information:*** Since the coup began, the military has effectively crushed civic space and independent reporting, having arrested 225 media workers, including 37 women, prosecuted and sentenced 93, and withdrawn licenses of 16 media outlets.<sup>2</sup> Nine journalists and media actors have been killed by the military and its affiliates.<sup>3</sup> In what has been dubbed the “great firewall of Myanmar”, the right of access to information has been curtailed by blacklisting - and making inaccessible - hundreds of internet sites, including leading social media sites, since the coup. Draconian restrictions on the use of Virtual Private Networks (VPNs), provided for by the “cybersecurity law”, entered into force on 30 July 2025, have significantly worsened access to information online. Long-term and temporary internet shutdowns have been a hallmark of military operations since February 2021. Over half of the 330 townships have been denied the right to receive and impart information, including during natural disasters such as the March 2025 earthquake. Some townships have remained without access to the internet or mobile data services for over 1453 days.<sup>4</sup>

***Repression and arbitrary arrests:*** Since the coup, the military has used vaguely defined penal code provisions and counter-terrorism legislation to arbitrarily detain and silence dissenting voices, including opposition politicians, journalists, trade unionists, and human rights activists. AAPP reports at least 29,967 arrests with 22,648 people still detained for political reasons, a figure that does not include the many hundreds of Rohingya believed to be detained by the Arakan Army in Rakhine State.

After unilaterally imposing a so-called “Election Protection Law” in late July, the military announced it arrested nearly 100 people under its provisions for allegedly disturbing security – including for actions as minor as liking social media posts critical of the election – and has charged many more, including senior figures from Ethnic Armed Organisations. The law’s chilling effect is clear: civilians report fear to express any opinion about the election.

***Crackdown on peaceful assemblies:*** Since the coup, the military has routinely suppressed peaceful assemblies through violence and intimidation, making them increasingly rare and risky. In an emblematic incident on 6 October 2025 during the Thadingyut festival, a Full Moon Buddhist celebration, a military paraglider attack killed at least 24 people in Chaung-U township, Sagaing, who were participating in a candlelight vigil, which was also a protest against the election.

***Surveillance:*** Since the coup, the military has progressively stepped-up mass surveillance of the population. This includes the activation of comprehensive new surveillance technology, the “Person Scrutinization and Monitoring System” (PSMS). This system reportedly uses artificial intelligence, facial recognition, CCTV surveillance, and a national database sourcing existing data from, among others, National Registration Identification Cards, SIM registration, and biometric data collected during the “census” in 2024 to identify dissidents. In July, the military announced that it had arrested over 1,600 people since the system’s rollout

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.icnl.org/post/report/assessing-detentions-of-journalists-in-myanmar>

<sup>3</sup> <https://humanrightsmyanmar.org/>

<sup>4</sup> As of June 2025, some townships have experienced up to 1453 days without internet connection. See <https://www.coar-global.org/weekly-analytics-hub>,

in April, highlighting its role in digital repression by identifying, tracking, and locating individuals for targeted scrutiny. Reports have also emerged of increased reliance on the PSMS at checkpoints.<sup>5</sup> This is particularly concerning as the military has also acquired, with the technology provided by foreign private network security companies and the help of local telecommunication companies, the ability to track network traffic and locate individuals through their cell IDs, further facilitating arrests. Civilians are rightfully concerned about the system's use to monitor them and their voting in the electoral context – as balloting will be done via electronic voting machines.

### **Military control over the election process**

***Lack of electoral choice:*** The lack of meaningful electoral choice for voters beyond the military-aligned Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) is increasingly obvious. Although 63 parties are registered to compete, 52 regionally and 11 nationally, only USDP candidates have reportedly been able to hold campaign activities in key cities. A major reason appears to be that only the USDP has security assistance plan for its candidates, while other parties struggle to recruit candidates in conflict areas due to heightened security concerns. The National League for Democracy (NLD), despite winning the 2020 election in a landslide, remains conspicuously absent from the electoral process after not re-registering in 2023 under the “Political Parties Registration Law”, unilaterally adopted by the military. Since the coup, credible sources have verified the arrest of 133 Members of Parliament, of whom 83 have been sentenced, one executed, and 62 are still detained, and of 2,340 members of the governments and political parties, chiefly the NLD.

***Lack of independent election management:*** Election management rests largely with the Union Election Commission (UEC), which is entirely aligned with the military after all 154 of its staff and members, including the Chairman and spokesperson, were arrested and replaced with loyalists to the coup leadership. In an emblematic example of its lack of independence, the UEC has excluded candidates -- such as Daw Thet Thet Khaing, Chairwoman of People's Pioneer Party (PPP) and a former NLD parliamentarian -- from candidate lists citing a new election law provisions. Complaints lodged with the UEC about candidate exclusions have reportedly been unsuccessful. Reports of irregularities in voters' lists have surfaced in multiple regions, but there is no evidence of UEC action. Sources fear that the military intends to exploit these irregularities, such as casting votes in the name of deceased or absent people, hence making UEC action unlikely. For constituencies where only one candidate has declared or qualified for the polls, the UEC has announced elections are unnecessary; the candidate will be automatically elected, further enabling the military to exploit the USDP's well-resourced national position enabling it to field candidates in nearly every constituency.

***Use of voting machines:*** Raising concerns about possible fraud and voter intimidation, the UEC has indicated its intention to rely on electronic voting machines. During demonstrations of the machines chosen by the UEC, there was reportedly no option to cast a blank vote or a spoiled ballot if the voter decided not to make a choice. Without such an option, voters would be deprived of a way to express dissent. Without credible, independent election supervision and given the vast expansion of surveillance technology by the military, use of electronic voting machines also raises legitimate concerns about ballot secrecy and potential reprisals against voters who do not choose USDP or other military-aligned parties.

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<sup>5</sup> See for example [Mon State sees tighter enforcement of PSMS surveillance system | IMNA](#)

***Controlled campaigning:*** On 18 October, the UEC announced a ban on campaign rallies and street processions, restricting candidates to give speeches at military-approved locations and times. Candidates on the stump are further required to submit all speeches and other material intended for broadcasting on state media in advance for review and approval between 28 October and 26 December – severely constraining the right to freedom of speech.

***Voter coercion:*** Reports have been received that the military has been trying to boost voter turnout by using both threats -- such as conscription of women -- and incentives -- such as exemption from military service or provision of humanitarian assistance. Such tactics raise concerns about cynical efforts to influence political behavior by threatening personal safety and security or encouraging voters to seek tradeoffs of fundamental rights and freedoms in exchange for basic livelihoods and services.

***Discrimination:*** Ethnic and religious minorities face structural barriers to participation in elections, most notably the 1982 Citizenship Law, which creates a hierarchy of citizenship based on ethnicity. Groups such as the Rohingya, Tamils, Gurkhas, and Chinese are excluded under this discriminatory legal framework from having full political rights, including their right to vote and to stand as candidates in elections. It is also unclear whether there will be any efforts made that facilitate electoral participation for displaced persons – a particular concern given the growing numbers of persons seriously injured and/or disabled, as a result, of the current armed conflict. Women and LGBTIQ+ persons also face barriers to their equal political participation rooted in gender roles and traditional biases promoted within some communities and by different political actors including the Myanmar military.

## **Conclusion**

Despite its announced termination of the state of emergency, the military has nevertheless expanded and initiated new waves of violence and maintained martial law declarations in large swathes of the country. The election environment is marked by continued arrests and detention of thousands of political opponents, voter intimidation, crushing restrictions on civic space and independent media, introduction of extensive electronic surveillance tools and deeply entrenched discrimination. Fundamental issues of insecurity and the lack of measures to protect civilians also raise questions as to the safety of voters who chose to participate. Far from being a process that could spearhead a political transition from crisis to stability and the restoration of democratic, civilian rule, this process seems nearly certain to further ingrain insecurity, fear and polarization throughout the country.