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Myanmar: Repressive tactics intensify before junta-imposed elections

Preparations for this weekend's first round of junta-imposed elections in Myanmar have resulted in unlawful attacks that may amount to war crimes as well as a drastic increase in arbitrary detentions and further crackdowns on freedom of expression, Amnesty International said today.

The military's [passage in July](#) of the Law on the Protection of Multiparty Democratic General Elections criminalizes speaking out or inciting violence against the election or election workers. Jail sentences under the law range from three years to a maximum of life imprisonment or even the death penalty.

"This junta-organized election contrasts starkly with Myanmar's nationwide democratic elections in 2015 and 2020. Whereas 2015 was a period of hope, promising peace and respect for human rights, the current era is one of hopelessness, where war crimes, arrests and surveillance are a feature of daily life," said Joe Freeman, Amnesty International's Myanmar Researcher.

"Many in Myanmar are opposed to this election because they fear it will leave the same people who have been unlawfully killing Myanmar civilians for five years in a position of entrenched power, outside the bounds of accountability and justice that they must face."

Election law weaponized by military rulers

The junta has claimed its election law is designed to protect workers, equipment and the election process itself. But in the weeks leading up to the first round of voting on 28 December, the junta has weaponized it to intensify repressive tactics, homing in on criticism of any kind, even social media reactions, messages and posts.

In the months since the law was passed, at least 229 people have been charged under the law for "attempting to sabotage election processes," according to military-controlled media. Those detained [include](#) artists and people putting up anti-election stickers.

In September, a man in Myanmar's Shan State was sentenced to seven years with hard labour for criticizing the election. In early December, a man was arrested near Yangon [for a Facebook message](#) condemning the vote, while another was arrested for damaging an election billboard. There [are also reports](#) of people in camps for Internally Displaced Persons being pressured to vote under threat of losing aid.

Out of a total of 330 townships nationwide, there are an estimated 56 under martial law throughout the country where no voting will take place, according to [the UN human rights office](#). The winner of the previous elections in 2015 and in 2020, the National League for Democracy, has been dissolved and its leaders Aung San Suu Kyi, Win Myint and others remain detained.

In 2025, air strikes in Myanmar are on track to reach record levels compared to any year since the 2021 coup. In areas of armed conflict, where the junta is trying to gain control of places so as to hold voting there, attacks [have also risen](#) since the election date announcement. The UN [said this month](#) that these attacks "seem intentioned to regain key contested areas where elections have been announced to take place".

In one such attack, [Amnesty International documented](#) a deadly manned paraglider bombing at a festival in central Myanmar, where people had also gathered to publicly demonstrate against the election. Civilians including children were killed after the motorized paragliders dropped mortars in

the middle of a crowd. On 10 December, the military [bombed a hospital](#) held by the ethnic resistance organization, the Arakan Army, in Rakhine State's Mrauk-U township. This continued a pattern of attacking hospitals, schools and other civilian infrastructure throughout the country since the coup.

Amnesty International calls on the international community to focus on the human rights abuses that are a feature of this election process and to prioritize accountability in Myanmar. It should refocus its attention on suspending jet fuel shipments to the country and on bringing suspected perpetrators to justice. Amnesty International also urges the International Criminal Court (ICC) to proceed with arrest warrants for Min Aung Hlaing, the senior general who is positioning himself to emerge as civilian leader after this election, as well as other Myanmar junta officials under the ICC's investigation.

Background

After seizing power in a coup almost five years ago, the Myanmar junta – presently known as the State Security and Peace Commission – is now attempting to entrench its rule through the ballot box, with a first round of voting on 28 December, followed by additional rounds starting in January.

The staggered voting process is a result of the coup itself, as the military's attempt to take full power on 1 February 2021 was met with nationwide resistance, leaving large parts of the country under the control of armed groups and pro-democracy forces. The military has killed at least 7,000 civilians since the coup. The true figure is likely much higher.

Increased hostilities between the Myanmar military and armed resistance groups have meant that many Rohingya and other marginalized groups have been caught in the crossfire, further eroding their rights.