

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

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Myanmar: Dormant conflicts reignited in 2021

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On 1 February 2021, the military in Myanmar seized power as the elected National League for Democracy (NLD) government was set to begin its second term, having won the November 2020 general election. Alleging the NLD had engaged in electoral fraud, the military set about arresting NLD officials and other activists. The public response to the coup was to take to the streets in a rejection of a return to military rule. The military responded to the demonstrations with excessive force, killing hundreds of peaceful protesters. As military violence throughout the country increased, armed local defense forces emerged to protect communities. The coup has also set off a wave of renewed fighting in areas with ethnic armed groups. ACLED records an increase in all political violence and protest event types tracked in Myanmar during the first six months of 2021, surpassing the total event counts for all of 2020.

Demonstrations against the coup have been widespread and are ongoing. Throughout the month of February, demonstrators marched daily in cities, towns, and villages across the country. As the military and police began to crack down on demonstrations, using excessive force and killing peaceful protesters, demonstrators adapted by staging flash mob-style rallies. While these demonstrations have declined overall since February, dozens are still recorded each week.

The crackdown on demonstrations and the ongoing targeting of civilians by state forces have prompted many opposed to the coup to take up arms against the military (*for more, see ACLED's recent report: [Myanmar's Spring Revolution](#)*). On 5 May, the National Unity Government (NUG), composed of elected

lawmakers overthrown by the military, announced the formation of a 'People's Defense Force' (PDF) in anticipation of raising a new federal army ([Irrawaddy, 5 May 2021](#)). Many newly formed local defense forces have adopted the PDF name and indicated loyalty to the NUG, while other local defense forces have remained independent of the NUG. While much of the fighting between state forces and local defense groups has taken place in rural areas of Chin state and Sagaing region, as well as Kayah state, clashes have been recorded in urban areas as well, including in the second city of Mandalay.

There are varied responses from existing ethnic armed groups to the coup, with some supporting the anti-coup movement and others not. The United League of Arakan/Arakan Army (ULA/AA) — an ethnic Rakhine armed group that had battled the military for the past two years — has not clashed with the military since shortly after the November 2020 elections. They have resisted outreach from the NUG and have closer relations with the military since they were removed from its list of "terrorist" organizations in March ([Irrawaddy, 17 June 2021](#)). While Rakhine state remains free of clashes as the unilateral ceasefires noted at the beginning of the year appear to have held for now, no stable political solution to the conflict has been reached.

Meanwhile, both the Kachin Independence Organization/Kachin Independence Army (KIO/KIA) and the Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army (KNU/KNLA) have largely supported anti-coup actions, while still resisting calls to join the federal army envisioned by the NUG. Fighting between the military and KIO/KIA has restarted in Kachin state,

which had seen infrequent clashes since mid-2018. Battles between the military and KNU/KNLA in Kayin state have also sharply increased alongside military airstrikes in the region. As ACLED [noted](#) at the beginning of the year, clashes between the KNU/KNLA had already begun to increase prior to the coup amid a breakdown in monitoring mechanisms put in place under previous ceasefire agreements.

In Shan state, clashes between ethnic armed groups themselves have caused displacement. The Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army-South (RCSS/SSA-S) and the Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army-North (SSPP/SSA-N), both ethnic Shan armed groups, have clashed. Fighting has also been reported between the RCSS/SSA-S and the Palaung State Liberation Front/Ta'ang National Liberation Army (PSLF/TNLA), an ethnic Palaung armed group. Clashes between these ethnic armed groups had declined in 2020 but, as ACLED [observed](#) earlier in the year, appear to have reignited over ongoing territorial disputes. The conflict between rival ethnic Shan armed groups has prevented a united Shan response to the military coup.

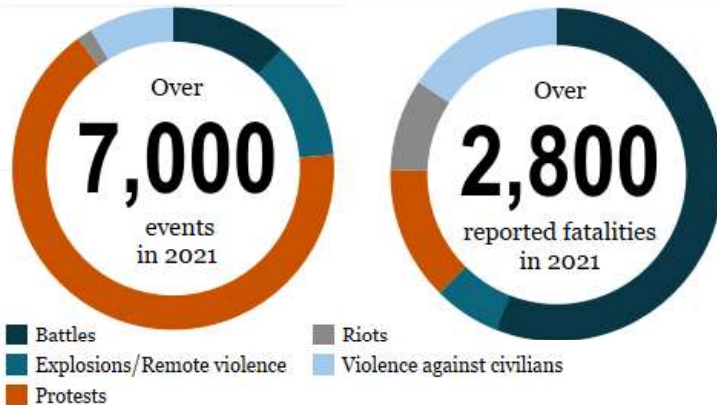
Amid a third wave of the coronavirus pandemic, political violence and protests are likely to continue. The military's deliberate targeting of health workers has undermined efforts to control the spread of the virus, and deaths from COVID-19 have begun to increase significantly amid oxygen shortages ([AP, 6 July 2021](#)). The impact of the coup on many sectors of Myanmar society can be seen in the military's response to the worsening pandemic. Resistance to the junta — both armed and unarmed — will persist, as much of the population remains firmly opposed to a return to military dictatorship.

FURTHER READING:

- [Myanmar's Spring Revolution](#)
- [2020 Elections in Myanmar: Political Violence and Demonstration Trends](#)
- [CDT Spotlight: COVID-19 & Conflict in Myanmar](#)
- [Coronavirus Cover: Myanmar Civilians Under Fire](#)

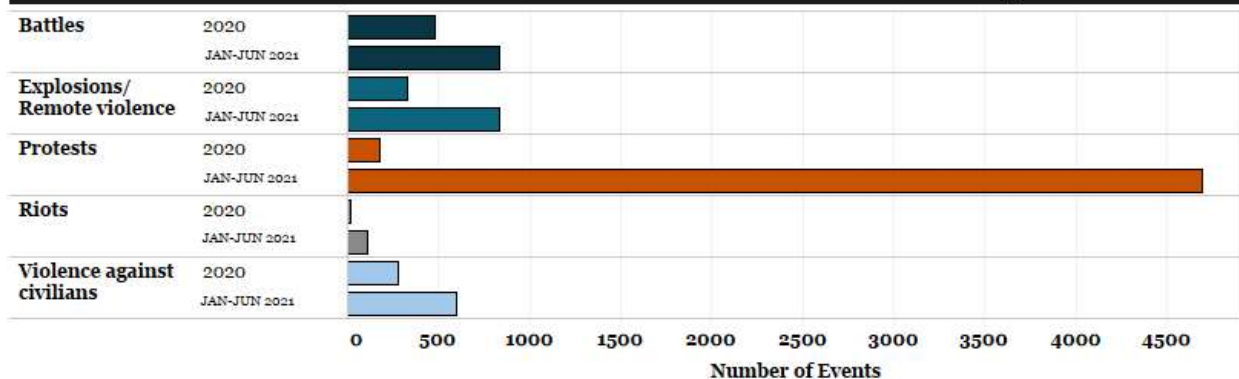
MYANMAR

Dormant Conflicts Reignited in 2021



On 1 February 2021, the military in Myanmar seized power as the elected National League for Democracy (NLD) government was set to begin its second term, having won the November 2020 general election. Alleging the NLD had engaged in electoral fraud, the military then set about arresting NLD officials and other activists. The public response to the coup was to take to the streets in a rejection of a return to military rule. The military responded to the demonstrations with excessive force, killing hundreds of peaceful protesters.

Political Violence and Protest Events in 2021 Surpass 2020



Battles Spread Across the Country

The crackdown on demonstrations and the ongoing targeting of civilians by state forces have led those opposed to the coup to take up arms against the military. Local defense forces have emerged throughout the country with the goal of defending local communities. The coup also set off a wave of renewed fighting in areas with ethnic armed groups. The number of battles in 2021 already exceeds the total number recorded in 2020 as fighting has spread across the country.

