

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	941
Land:	Myanmar
Kilde:	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED)
Titel:	Myanmar's military elections will not lead to peace or an improvement in the political crisis
Udgivet:	4. februar 2026
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	19. juni 2026

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Myanmar's military elections will not lead to peace or improvement in the political crisis

The scripted victory for the USDP solidifies the military's control under the guise of civilian rule and the political status quo five years since the coup.

4 February 2026 • 9-minute read



Military personnel are seen on the streets in Yangon, Burma, on 28 December 2025. Photo by Sirachai Arunrugstichai via Getty Images.

AUTHOR



Key takeaways

- Military counter-offensives and political repression foreshadowed Myanmar's elections, embedding violence into every stage of the process.
- Opposition groups increasingly sought to disrupt voting over the six weeks of the three-phase voting process as the military compelled the public to participate.
- The post-election regime lacks both the mechanisms and the political messaging to de-escalate conflicts or resolve the country's political crisis.

Five years after its attempted coup, the military has concluded its so-called national elections. Its proxy party — the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) — has won the majority of parliamentary seats and is on track to form a government. While a handful of other parties did win some seats, the elections were firmly designed to deliver this victory for the USDP and sustain military rule under a civilian-fronted guise. But no matter the reported election results, the military's initiative cannot solve or improve Myanmar's political crisis when the polls themselves are not being recognized by the majority of the [Myanmar](#) public as legitimate, free, fair, or in good faith.

The ruling military junta is eagerly seeking explicit endorsements of the elections. But any decisions taken by countries, regional blocs, and organizations to proactively accept or silently abide by the military elections, or to interact with the new military government that will be formed after the elections, would only serve to legitimize the military's illegal 2021 coup. They would also indirectly support coup leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing's justification for the coup — allegations of electoral fraud in the 2020 general elections, which impartial election observers claimed at the time “reflected the will of the people.”¹

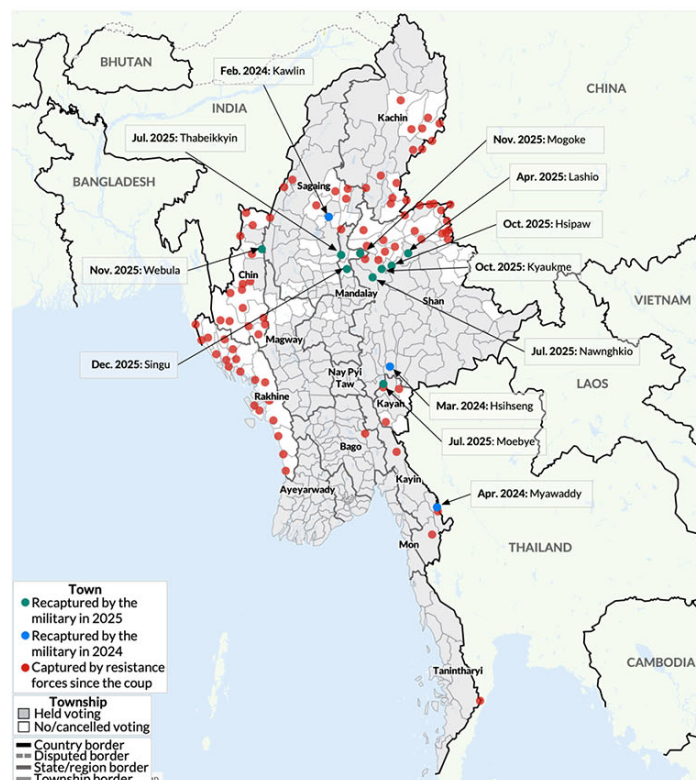
The military has been at pains to portray its national elections as a managed exit out of political crisis and conflict, and toward some kind of stability.² However, the elections were held in a climate of military offensives and active political repression, and resistance groups sought to disrupt them. The polls have done nothing to bridge the divide between the military and the hundreds of resistance groups that oppose its rule, a divide that has fuelled a conflict that has led to the killing of at least 93,300 people since 2021. These elections may be aimed at achieving recognition of a

civilian-fronted military regime and increasing its legitimacy at home and abroad, but they fail to signal a political solution to the conflict and impasse dividing the country, instead signaling a future of enduring instability and competing authorities across the nation.

Military counter-offensives set the stage for elections amid repression and armed opposition

The military's elections triggered new waves of violence and displacement as it escalated counter-offensives against resistance groups throughout the year. This began as soon as the military first hinted at elections in March 2025. As the military released more details on where, when, and how elections would be held, analysts interpreted its ongoing campaigns as efforts to recapture as much territory as possible from resistance groups prior to the elections.³ Despite having lost over 100 towns to resistance groups since 2021, the military maintained its intention to hold elections in 265 of the country's 330 townships, implying it would recapture dozens more towns. While the escalation in counter-offensive activity resulted in territorial gains exceeding those in 2024, they still fell well short of the military's election aims. Ahead of the first phase of polling on 28 December, it had managed to re-take only nine township centers from resistance groups (see map below).

Myanmar military accelerates counter-offensives ahead of the election



The military also introduced measures to enforce electoral compliance, including new election protection laws to intimidate prospective voters. These laws, approved by the military-appointed Union Election Commission (UEC), criminalized opposing or disturbing the elections and imposed sentences as severe as the death penalty on people found guilty. As a result of these laws, people were detained for flying flags, reacting to posts on social media, sending private phone messages, and resisting participation.⁴ On the back of these new laws, ACLED records a large uptick in military repression following the announcement of the election dates in August 2025.

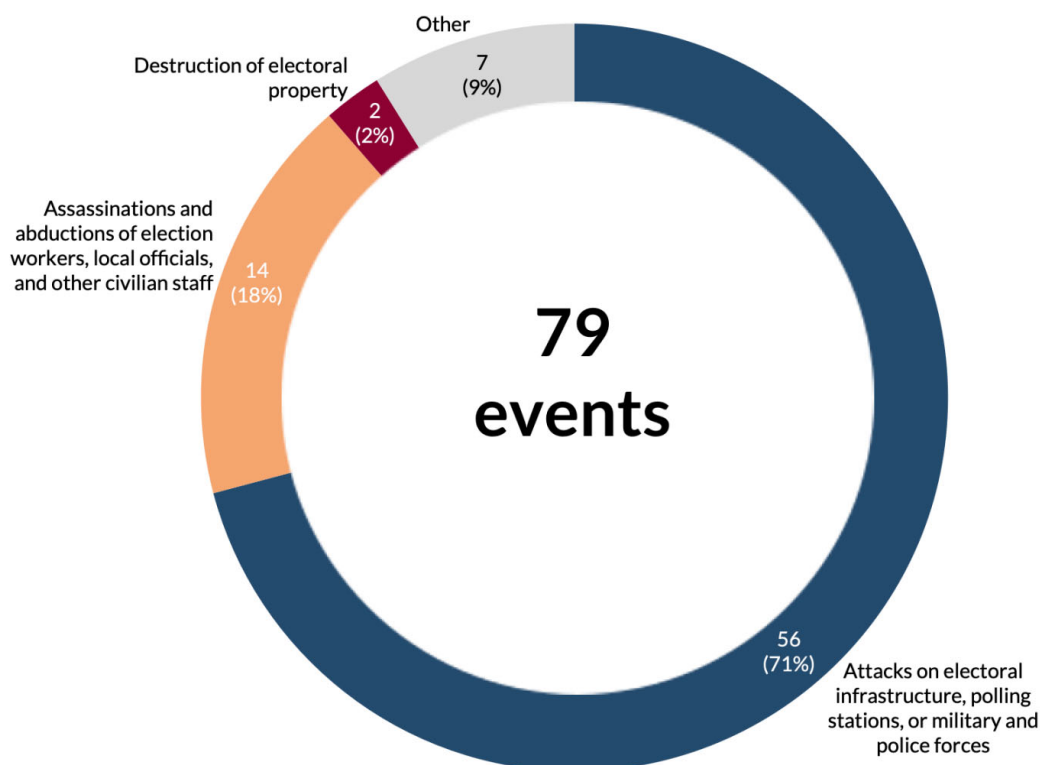
The military repressed not only the public but also election workers, party members, and vetted and registered candidates standing for election. The military did this even though it had severely restricted party registration, and the field of parties and candidates who were approved by the regime to participate in the elections lacked anything resembling competition. The political parties responsible for winning 90% of the seats in the largely free and fair elections in 2020 were either barred from participating or refused to participate in the military's 2025/2026 elections.⁵ At least two candidates and two political party members were detained or charged under the election protection law for, among other reasons, using the word "revolution" in campaign materials and for what the military alleged were links to the resistance.

When it came to compelling voters, the military deployed thousands of armed pro-military militia members, recent conscripts, and soldiers to secure polling sites. Voters repeatedly reported to independent domestic and foreign media that they had voted out of fear of repercussions.⁶ Regime officials, soldiers, and police intimidated voters by launching random checks, shutting down businesses to force employees to vote, and other means.

For their part, resistance groups sought to disrupt the elections around the country by targeting electoral officials and administration and party offices with drones, rockets, and firearms. Some attacks led to armed clashes. At least a dozen armed resistance groups claimed to have abducted village administrators helping to prepare for the polls. These attacks followed many resistance groups' official warnings that anyone working for or participating in the elections would face repercussions.⁷ On 21 December, the alternative National Unity Government (NUG) declared 25 members of the UEC to be "terrorists" and urged the public and resistance to cooperate in their efforts to capture them.⁸ Many resistance attacks disrupted polling or resulted in voting being cancelled, and were followed by statements opposing the elections. ACLED records 79 events in which resistance forces used various means to disrupt the elections between August 2025 and 25 January 2026 (see chart below), mostly by attacking polling sites and military forces overseeing them. This violence prevented voting from taking place in several planned locations, such as Momauk and Mansi townships in Kachin state.

Resistance groups partake in election-related violence

Election-related violence by resistance groups between
1 August 2025 and 25 January 2026



Instead of signalling a transition toward a political solution to Myanmar's conflict, these military elections have been plagued by repression and deadly violence. During the election period from 28 December to 25 January, ACLED records 210 civilian targeting events by the military, which led to at least 191 civilian fatalities. They are the deadliest elections since the previous military elections in 2010,⁹ which were orchestrated by a previous military regime to solidify the military's involvement in democratic politics under and through the military's then-recent 2008 constitution – the same constitution the current regime broke in order to carry out its coup.¹⁰

The post-election regime risks deepening the political crisis

While these military elections are hardly democratic or peaceful exercises, Beijing – the military regime's benefactor and major partner – is likely to push for regional recognition of the new military government by advancing the narrative that the new "elected" regime is the best chance for stability in the country going forward. However, there is nothing to suggest that the elections will lead to substantive change in political decision-making at the top levels, as it remains entirely in

the hands of the military, and no new political mechanisms are being introduced that could improve the political crisis.

Fundamentally, the elections do nothing to resolve the impasse between the military and those who oppose its rule, and there is nothing conciliatory on offer. The elections failed to even hint at any of the key objectives of resistance groups; holding them under the 2008 constitution only restates the military's domination over civilian and democratic politics, and entrenches the principle that national rule supersedes sub-national level decision-making.¹¹ It also guarantees impunity for the military's many war crimes.

The post-election regime is unlikely to stop demanding that post-coup resistance groups disarm or engage in dialogue beyond dictating ceasefire terms to ethnic armed organizations. The military's primary strategy will be to continue to lean on a supportive China to pressure border-based groups, such as the Kachin Independence Army and [the Arakan Army](#), into accepting ceasefires. Such ceasefires would only weaken and divide resistance to military rule, which relies on ties between powerful ethnic armed groups with territory and revenue and weaker armed groups operating as guerrillas in rural areas near military-controlled towns.

Yet, resistance groups have signalled they will continue their armed struggle even if the number of supportive ethnic armed organizations dwindles further. Recently, 19 smaller armed resistance groups operating independently from the NUG command in different parts of the country formed the Spring Revolution Alliance to pursue their objectives free of outside influence. This adaptation indicates ongoing conflict in which armed resistance groups will evolve to match the changing strategies of the military and its government.

The makeup of the new government is being determined purely by the military, with 2021 coup leader Min Aung Hlaing likely to retain effective control over the country's new government and military. With the enactment of the Union Consultative Council Law on 3 February, still weeks before convening parliament and the formation of government, the coup leader is likely to lead a five-member council to advise on national security, the rule of law, foreign affairs, peace, and legislation. The council has no oversight or accountability and could allow Min Aung Hlaing to retain control of the military while becoming president.¹² Newly elected civilian members of parliament will have no autonomy or ability to create meaningful change away from military priorities. USDP party leaders have expressed no intention of supporting reforms like those the military regime first introduced in 2011, which led to free and fair elections in 2015 and 2020. Instead, they have reiterated that the military must guide politics in Myanmar and warned that anyone who does not cooperate with the military will fail.¹³ While the new regime competes for domestic and international legitimacy, the military will continue its offensives to recapture territory it lost since its coup, aiming to run by-elections in seats it failed to hold elections in in

2025/2026. By extending martial law in resistance-controlled areas,¹⁴ the military has signalled that conflict will continue irrespective of any post-election regime and that political stability remains elusive.

Footnotes

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- 9 [Trevor Wilson, "The significance of Myanmar's 2010 election," New Mandala, 15 December 2010](#)
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- 13 [Channel News Independent, "If the new government cannot stand back-to-back with the military, it will collapse, says USDP Chairman," 4 December 2025](#)
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