

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	355
Land:	Myanmar
Kilde:	Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED)
Titel:	Myanmar's Spring Revolution
Udgivet:	22. juli 2021
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	25. august 2021

Myanmar's Spring Revolution

 acleddata.com/2021/07/22/myanmars-spring-revolution/

July 22, 2021

The Myanmar military's decision to seize power on 1 February 2021 triggered a wave of resistance across the country. By the end of June, over 4,700 anti-coup demonstration events were reported in Myanmar.¹The ACLED data analyzed and shown in this report run through 30 June 2021. Data are updated weekly on Tuesdays and are current up to the previous Friday. ACLED is a 'living dataset,' meaning that published events are updated weekly with the latest information, as it becomes available. As the media landscape in Myanmar has changed as the military has targeted journalists and the independent media, ACLED continues to review and adjust its sourcing of local, national, and international media to better capture all forms of political disorder. The military has responded with a campaign of violence and mass arrests. Despite the crackdown, anti-coup activists have continued to demonstrate, and some have armed themselves in self-defense. The military coup has also re-ignited conflicts in areas of the borderlands that had until recently been on the wane. As calls for international action increase, diaspora communities have organized and joined demonstrations across the globe in solidarity with those inside the country. This report examines the political disorder in Myanmar brought about by the military junta and analyzes the resistance — both armed and unarmed — to the coup.

Pro-Military Demonstrations Before the Coup

Despite rumors of a military coup in January 2021, it was not clear until the early morning of 1 February that the military would go forward with upending the political environment they created more than a decade ago to maintain power. The 2008 constitution, passed during a rigged referendum in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, guaranteed the military 25% of the seats in parliament. The rigged elections in 2010 further allowed them to consolidate the political field to their advantage. Still, the overwhelming popularity of the opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, resulted in the formation of an NLD government after the 2015 elections.

In the lead-up to the November 2020 general elections, the military began planting seeds of doubt around the upcoming elections, knowing the NLD was headed for another victory. In August 2020, the leader of the military coup, Min Aung Hlaing, held a meeting with several pro-military and opportunist political parties to raise doubts about the Union Election Commission, whose members were appointed by the NLD ([Irrawaddy, 15 August 2020](#)).

Shortly after the November 2020 election, which the NLD decisively won, there was an increase in demonstrations by supporters of the military claiming election fraud. These demonstrations were often organized by the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). ACLED records at least 45 such demonstration events between the 8 November election and the coup on 1 February 2021. The demonstrations

became more violent in the weeks right before the coup, and, immediately after the coup, pro-military demonstrators were seen intimidating and attacking anti-coup protesters. Reports circulated of demonstrators being paid 5,000 kyat (\$3 USD) to participate in pro-military demonstrations, a common tactic used by the military in the past to manufacture support ([Myanmar Now, 27 February 2021](#)).

On 1 February 2021, the military seized power, detaining President U Win Myint, State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, members of the NLD, and other activists. While announcing that elections would be held again in a year, the military has since acted to install itself in power for the long term. Nonetheless, widespread public opposition to the coup has undermined the military's plans, with a range of different communities engaging in various forms of resistance to prevent the coup from succeeding.

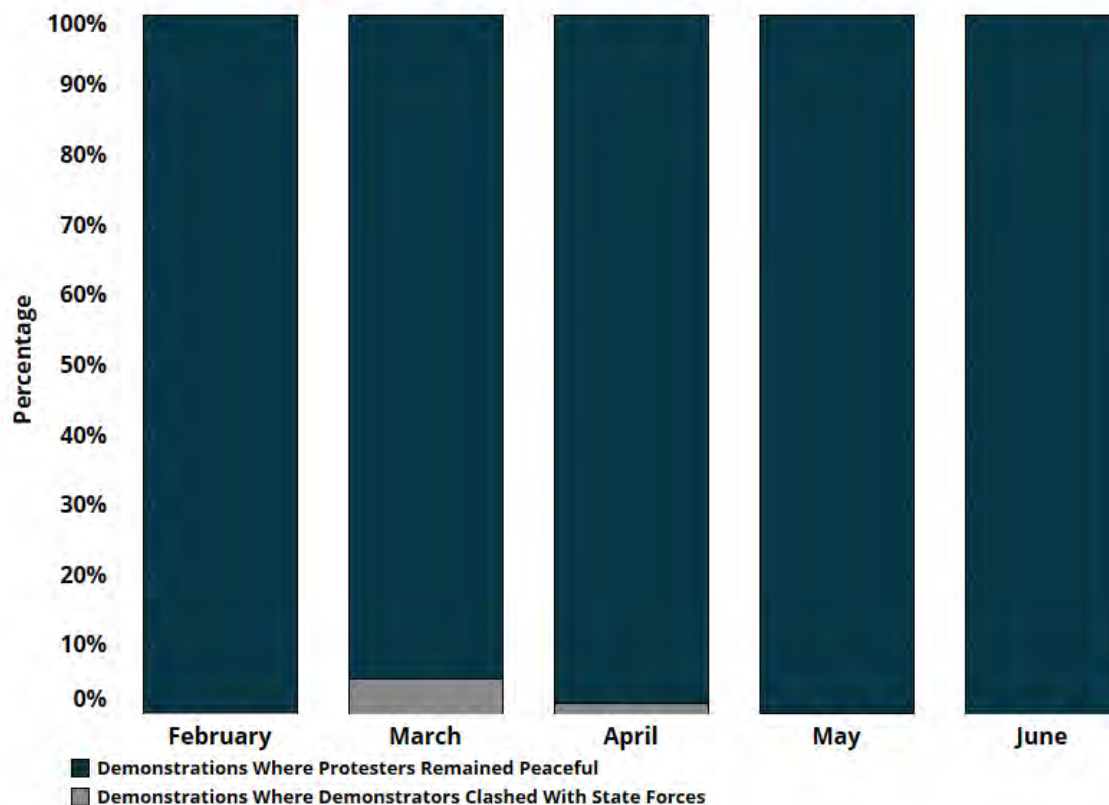
Peaceful Anti-Coup Protests Met with Excessive Force

Resistance to the military coup started as people around the country began banging pots and pans outside their homes every night to express their dissatisfaction with the coup. Health workers, who had been leading the NLD's coronavirus vaccination efforts, and civil servants began gathering and flashing the Hunger Games inspired three-finger salute. The first street protests were recorded in Mandalay on 4 February, led by a young doctor ([Reuters, 4 February 2021](#)). Protests in Yangon and around the country soon followed.

The large-scale protests were joined by a wide section of society. A deep sense of unity in opposition to the coup emerged. In several cases where the military tried to arrest protesters, people surrounded authorities or gathered in front of places where people were detained to demand their release. Many of the young protesters — proudly identifying as Gen Z — were cheered on and supported by their parents, many of whom lived through the 1988 nationwide uprising against one-party rule, which was crushed by the military ([BBC, 13 July 2021](#)). At the same time, a Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) began with civil servants refusing to work, further undermining the military's ability to consolidate power.

The vast majority of anti-coup demonstration events since 1 February — 98% — have been peaceful on the part of the protesters (*see figure below*). Nevertheless, the military has used excessive force against demonstrators, often training their guns and shooting live rounds directly at demonstrators' heads ([Reuters, 26 March 2021](#)), suggesting that the intention of the military's response has been to kill, not to disperse.

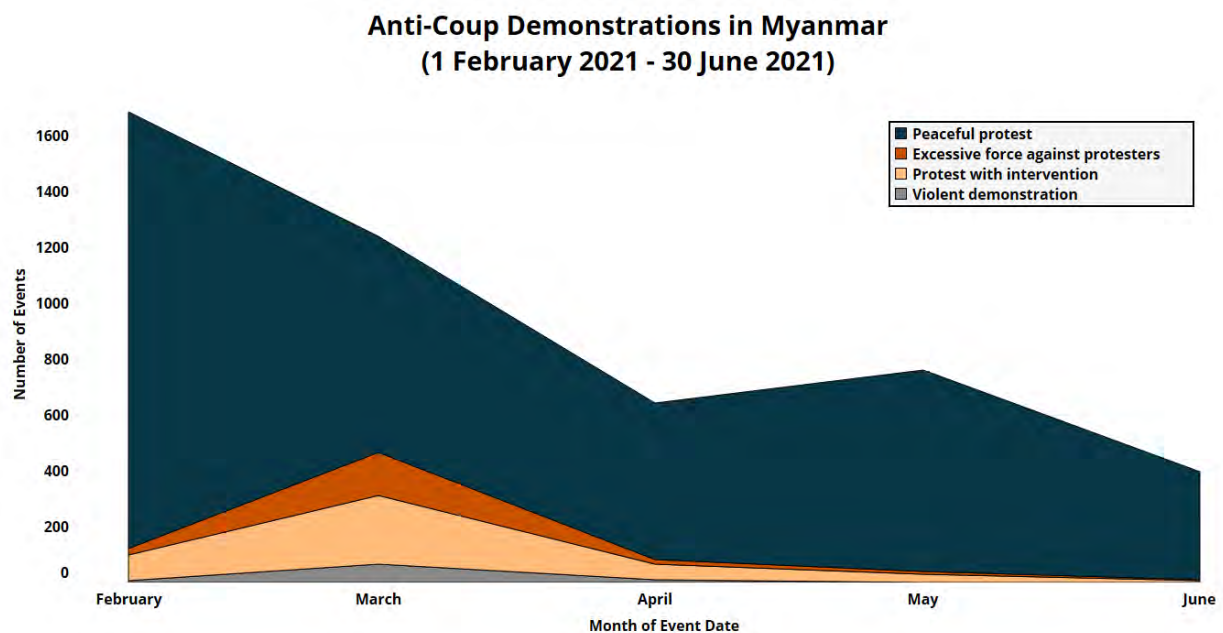
Anti-Coup Demonstrations in Myanmar (1 February 2021 - 30 June 2021)



In cases where demonstrators have responded to the violence of the military and police (i.e. the 2% of demonstrations, noted above), they were often only able to retaliate by throwing stones, using crude weapons, or by throwing back tear gas canisters. Demonstrators built barricades in an effort to slow the military and to provide protection against the live rounds being used. The response of the military and police to these demonstrations has been similarly excessive. Many of those killed in such demonstrations were not involved in any violent activity when killed.

In response to the violence of the military, demonstrators have adopted new tactics. To avoid bloodshed, ‘peopleless protests’ have been held across the country with people arranging various objects on the streets and other public places in protest formation.² Peopleless protests are not coded as ‘Protests’ according to ACLED methodology, which only codes protests when at least three people are physically present. When reports indicate such ‘peopleless protests’, they are coded as ‘Strategic developments’ in the data. ‘Strategic developments’ are not tracked systematically in the way that political violence and demonstrations are tracked (*for more, see [this methodology primer](#)*). After a dip in street demonstrations following the crackdown, the number of demonstration events began to rise again slightly in May, with protesters adopting ‘guerilla strike’ tactics (*see figure below*). These flash-mob style protests have allowed protesters to gather and move quickly down the street before dispersing. Whereas the protesters’ initial response to the military violence was to try to hold their

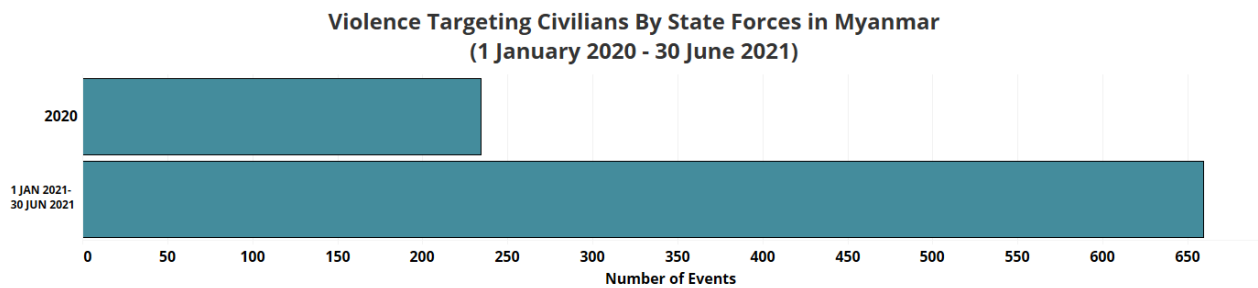
positions in the streets, this change of tactic aims to avoid the deadly military violence that followed more stationary protests. Still, activists have been detained during and shortly after these flash-mob protests.



As the military junta tries to quell street protests and to force people back to work and school, the ability of the public to keep protesting and to refuse to return to work and school will be key to whether the momentum of the movement sustains. In particular, the ability of those who joined the CDM to support themselves and their families will drive the level of participation in the movement. Many who have decided to return to work have expressed deep regret that their economic circumstances no longer allow them to participate in the movement ([Frontier Myanmar, 3 June 2021](#)). While the number of demonstration events has declined since February, dozens more events continue to be recorded each week.

Violence Targeting Civilians By State Forces Increases

Outside of demonstrations, the military junta has also targeted civilians. ACLED records a steep rise in violence targeting civilians by the military and police since the start of the coup, with the number of events in 2021 already well surpassing those recorded in 2020 (see *figure below*). NLD officials and other citizens who have been arrested have been tortured and killed while in military or police custody. Their bodies have been returned to their families, many times with their organs removed and bodies sewn up ([AP, 26 May 2021](#)). The military has threatened family members trying to bury their dead and, in several cases, seized their loved ones' dead bodies, demanding ransoms for their return ([CNN, 12 April 2021](#)). Many civilians who have not died have been maimed for life, losing limbs and eyesight ([Myanmar Now, 1 July 2021](#)).



Response of Ethnic Armed Organizations to the Coup

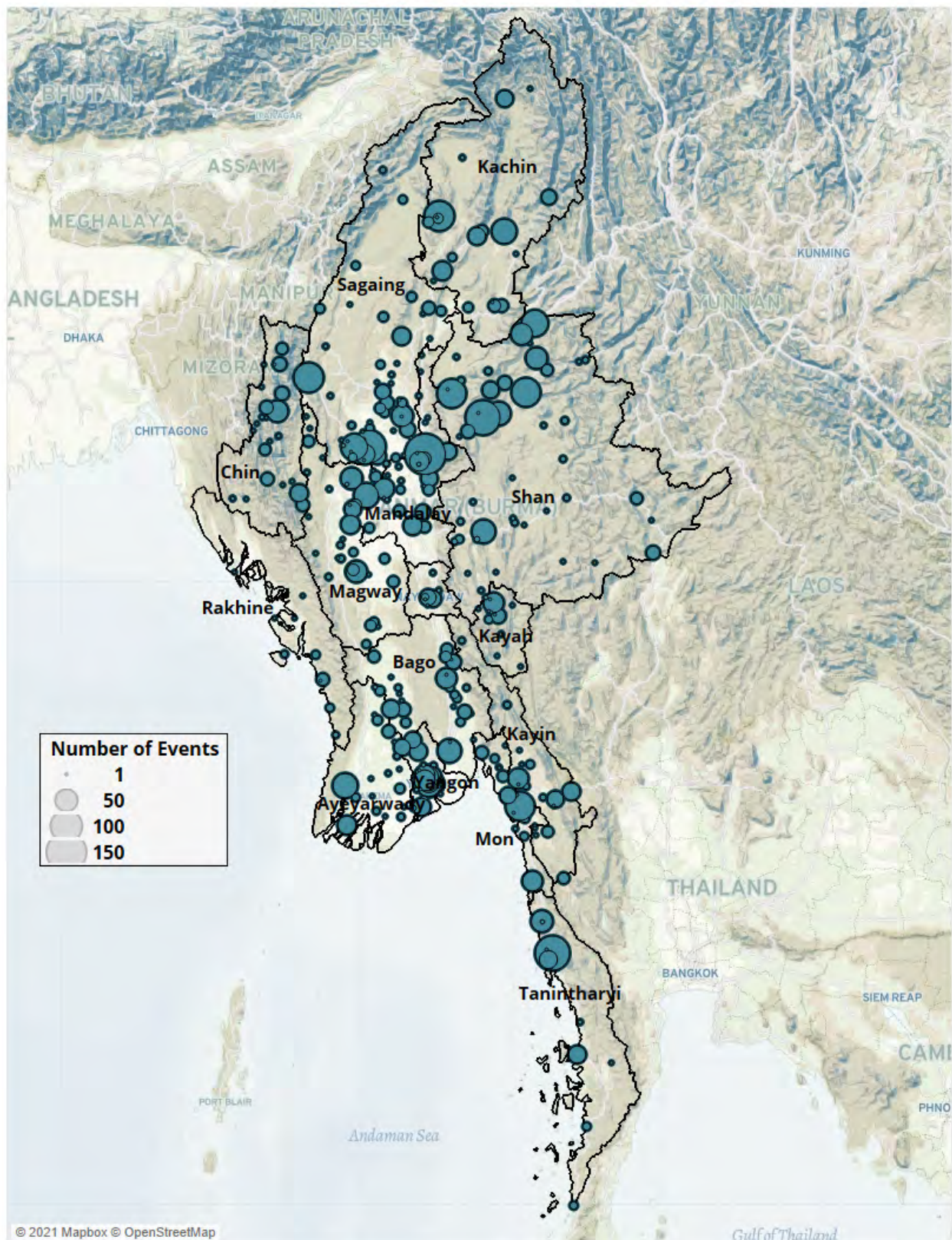
When the demonstrations began after the coup, it was not yet clear how the many ethnic armed groups that ring Myanmar would respond. Some offered support for the demonstrations, even accompanying demonstrators to ward off military violence. Others have been far less forthcoming in expressing a clear position. The deteriorating relationship between the NLD and ethnic minorities during the NLD administration has meant that the trust required to bring ethnic groups on board with the newly formed National Unity Government (NUG), composed of elected lawmakers overthrown by the military, will take time to build ([Foreign Policy, 1 July 2021](#)). While there are many ethnic armed groups in Myanmar, below is a review of four key ethnic armed groups and the conflict dynamics involving the groups after the coup.

United League of Arakan/Arakan Army (ULA/AA)

Shortly after the 2020 elections, the conflict in Rakhine state and Paletwa township in southern Chin state between the ULA/AA (an ethnic Rakhine armed group) and the military, which had been ongoing for the previous two years, came to a complete stop. After the coup, the military removed the ULA/AA from its list of “terrorist” groups and dropped charges against some individuals arrested in connection with the group ([Irrawaddy, 17 June 2021](#)). In turn, the ULA/AA has released some military and police officers. No battles have been reported between the two groups in Rakhine state post-coup. The ULA/AA has rejected overtures from the NUG for discussions.

Meanwhile, aside from the autonomous Wa Self-Administered Division in Shan state, out of all the states and regions in Myanmar, Rakhine state has had the lowest number of anti-coup demonstration events with only 37 events recorded (as of 30 June) (*see map below*). Some Rakhine civil society groups have expressed opposition to the coup. Rakhine elites in the Arakan National Party (ANP), however, initially accepted positions in the military’s ruling body, the State Administrative Council (SAC), though some have subsequently withdrawn ([Irrawaddy, 7 May 2021](#)). The ANP harbors resentment towards the NLD over its decision after the 2015 general election to appoint an NLD member as chief minister of the Rakhine state parliament despite the ANP winning the majority of seats in the state ([Frontier Myanmar, 13 February 2021](#)).

Anti-Coup Demonstrations in Myanmar (1 February 2021 - 30 June 2021)



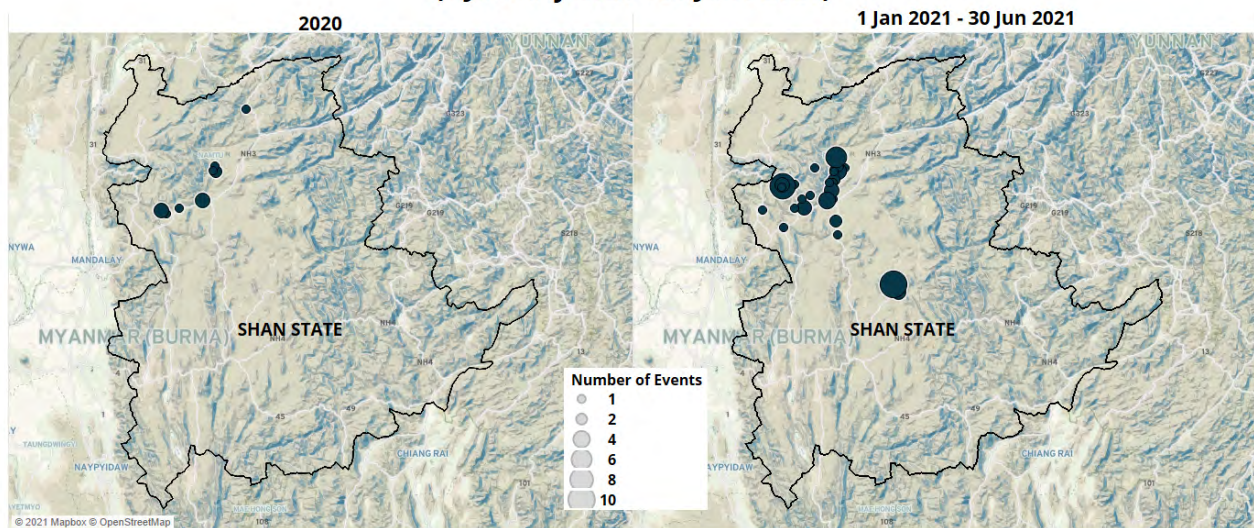
No political solution to the conflicts in Rakhine state — both those involving ethnic Rakhine and Rohingya — has been reached and many civilians remain displaced. The current lack of battles in the region is likely to continue only as long as the ULA/AA, which has expressed a desire for an autonomous region similar to the Wa Self-Administered

Division,³The Wa Self-Administered Division is governed by the United Wa State Party/United Wa State Army (UWSP/UWSA), the largest ethnic armed group in Myanmar, with little interference from the central government. The region has developed its own hospitals, schools, courts, and media ([Asia Times, 6 September 2019](#)). receives concessions from the military. There are reports that the ULA/AA has consolidated much of its influence over the northern part of the state where most of the fighting has occurred over the past few years ([Transnational Institute, 10 June 2021](#)).

Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army-South (RCSS/SSA-S)

One barrier to inter-ethnic unity among armed groups resisting the military has been the territorial disputes between such groups. Throughout the past several months, fighting between ethnic armed groups has increased in Shan state. It has expanded and moved southwards in recent weeks (*see map below*). The RCSS/SSA-S and the Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army-North (SSPP/SSA-N), both ethnic Shan groups, have clashed. Clashes have 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.

**Battles in Shan State between the
RCSS/SSA-S and the SSPP/SSA-N or PSLF/TNLA
(1 January 2020 - 30 June 2021)**



Both the SSPP/SSA-N and the PSLF/TNLA are allied with the United Wa State Party/United Wa State Army (UWSP/UWSA), the largest ethnic armed group in Myanmar. The UWSP/UWSA and some leaders from the SSPP/SSA-N were former members of the Communist Party of Burma, which split in 1989 ([Irrawaddy, 13 July 2021](#)). The UWSP/UWSA enjoys the support of China ([Irrawaddy, 12 July 2021](#)). More recently, there have been unconfirmed reports of the UWSP/UWSA supporting the SSPP/SSA-N in their battles with the RCSS/SSA-S ([Irrawaddy, 1 July 2021](#)).

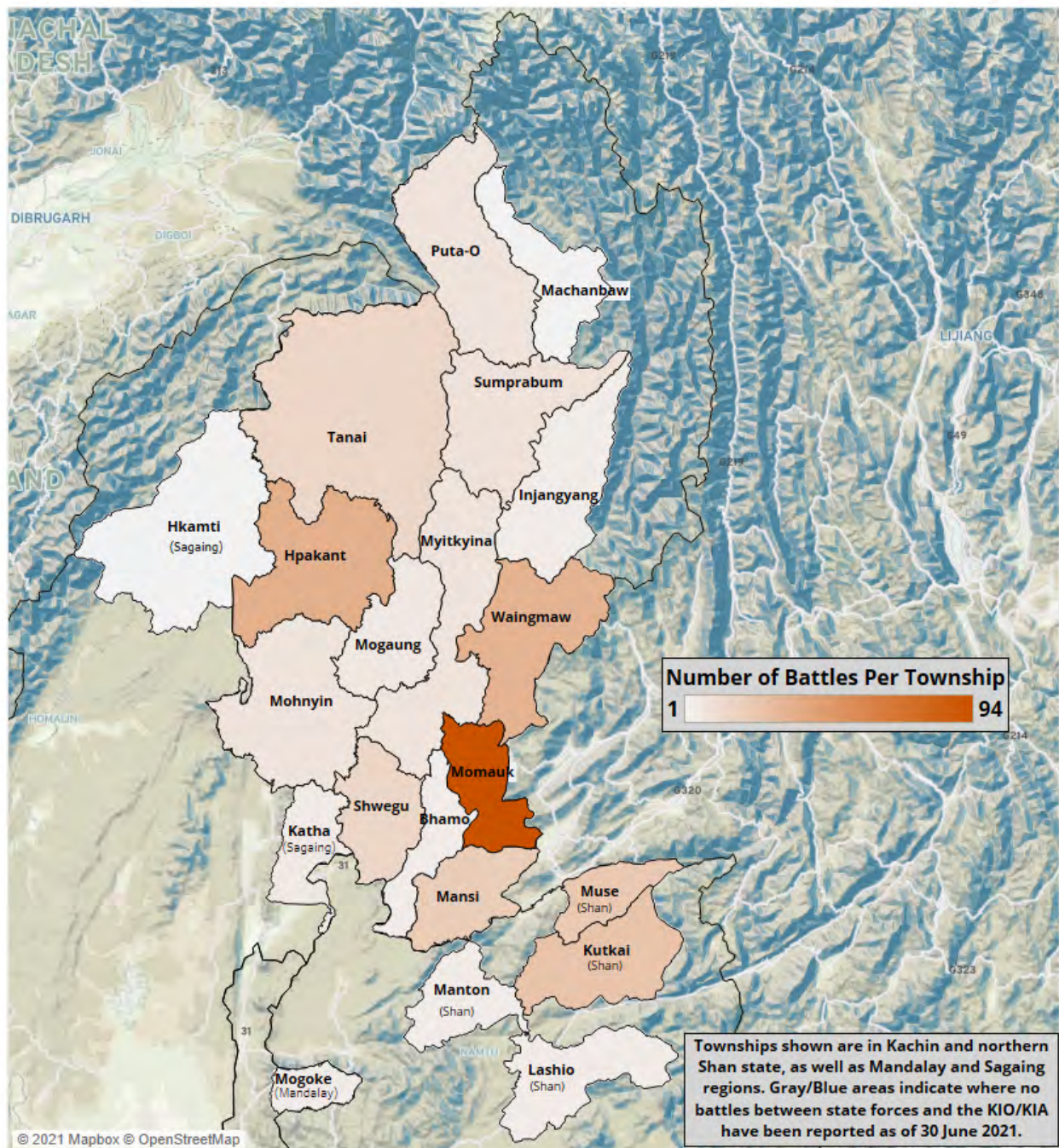
Some analysts have suggested the possibility of a proxy war emerging in the region ([Shan Herald Agency for News, 28 June 2021](#)), though the RCSS/SSA-S recently announced its withdrawal from mountain areas in Kyethi township, a key locus of the recent fighting. Frustration over the inter-ethnic fighting and its resulting weakening of a

united Shan response to the coup has led to the formation of a new group, the Shan State Front for Federal, which has made clear its opposition to the military regime ([Shan Herald Agency for News, 12 July 2021](#)). The significance of the group and how it will interact with the many armed groups in Shan state remain to be seen.

Kachin Independence Organization/Kachin Independence Army (KIO/KIA)

The KIO/KIA has largely indicated its support of the anti-coup movement. The coup has led to renewed fighting in Kachin state where few clashes had been reported since mid-2018. The KIO/KIA has been able to seize key positions from the Myanmar military, such as Alaw Bum in Momauk township, after days of fierce clashes. Momauk township has been the site of most battles between the military and the KIO/KIA after the coup (*see map below*). The KIO/KIA has also targeted military positions outside of its standard operating areas in Kachin and northern Shan state.

Post-Coup Battles Between Myanmar State Forces and the KIO/KIA (1 February 2021 - 30 June 2021)

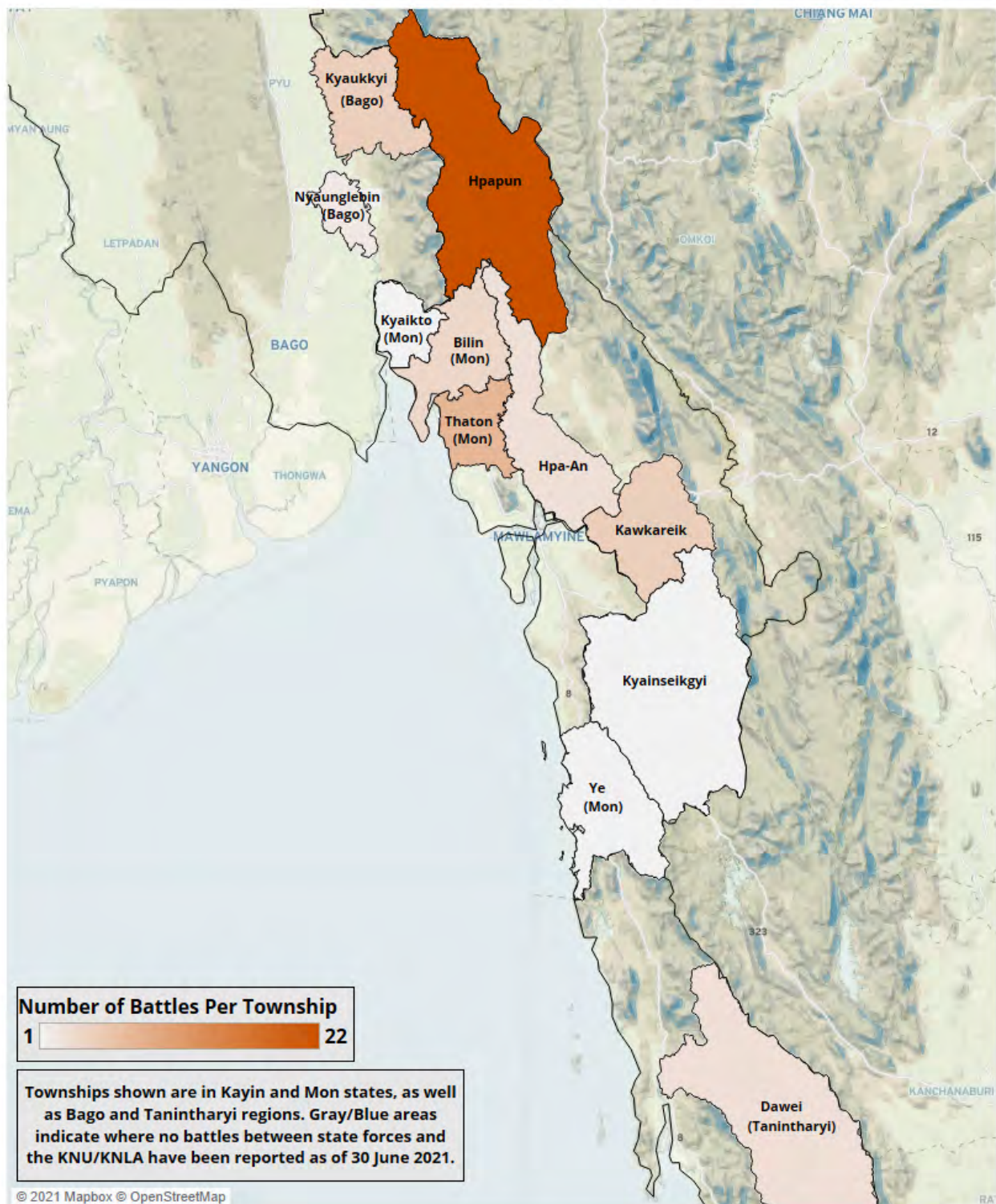


Despite expressions of support and practical assistance, limited progress has been made in convincing the KIO/KIA to operate under the command of the NUG. The KIO/KIA has explicitly said that any armed groups operating in their areas would fall under their control ([Irrawaddy](#), 2 June 2021). More recently, there have been reports of KIO/KIA members joining forces with local defense groups in clashes with the military (*see more in the following section*), though the group has denied they ordered their members to do so ([Myanmar Now](#), 29 June 2021).

Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army (KNU/KNLA)

The KNU/KNLA has also supported anti-coup protesters. Fighting between the Myanmar military and the KNU/KNLA in Kayin state and eastern Bago region has increased significantly since the coup along with military airstrikes in the region. Prior to the coup, clashes between the two groups had already begun increasing. Fighting has been most intense in the Hpapun area where KNU/KNLA Brigade Five operates (*see map below*). Brigade Five has been particularly vocal about their rejection of the coup despite some in the KNU/KNLA leadership indicating a willingness to talk with the military (Irrawaddy, 11 May 2021).

Post-Coup Battles Between Myanmar State Forces and the KNU/KNLA (1 February 2021 - 30 June 2021)



Factionalism in the KNU can also be seen during the recent dispute over the dismissal of two leaders of the Karen National Defense Organization (KNDO), an armed group also operating under the KNU. The two KNDO leaders — one the son of the now deceased long-term leader of the KNU, Bo Mya — have been accused by the military of killing civilians in their custody. However, the KNDO leaders have refuted the claim, arguing

those killed were soldiers in civilian clothing ([Myanmar Now, 13 July 2021](#)). While there have been calls for greater unity among ethnic Kayin armed groups, it remains to be seen whether continued factionalism will lead to additional fragmentation of existing groups.

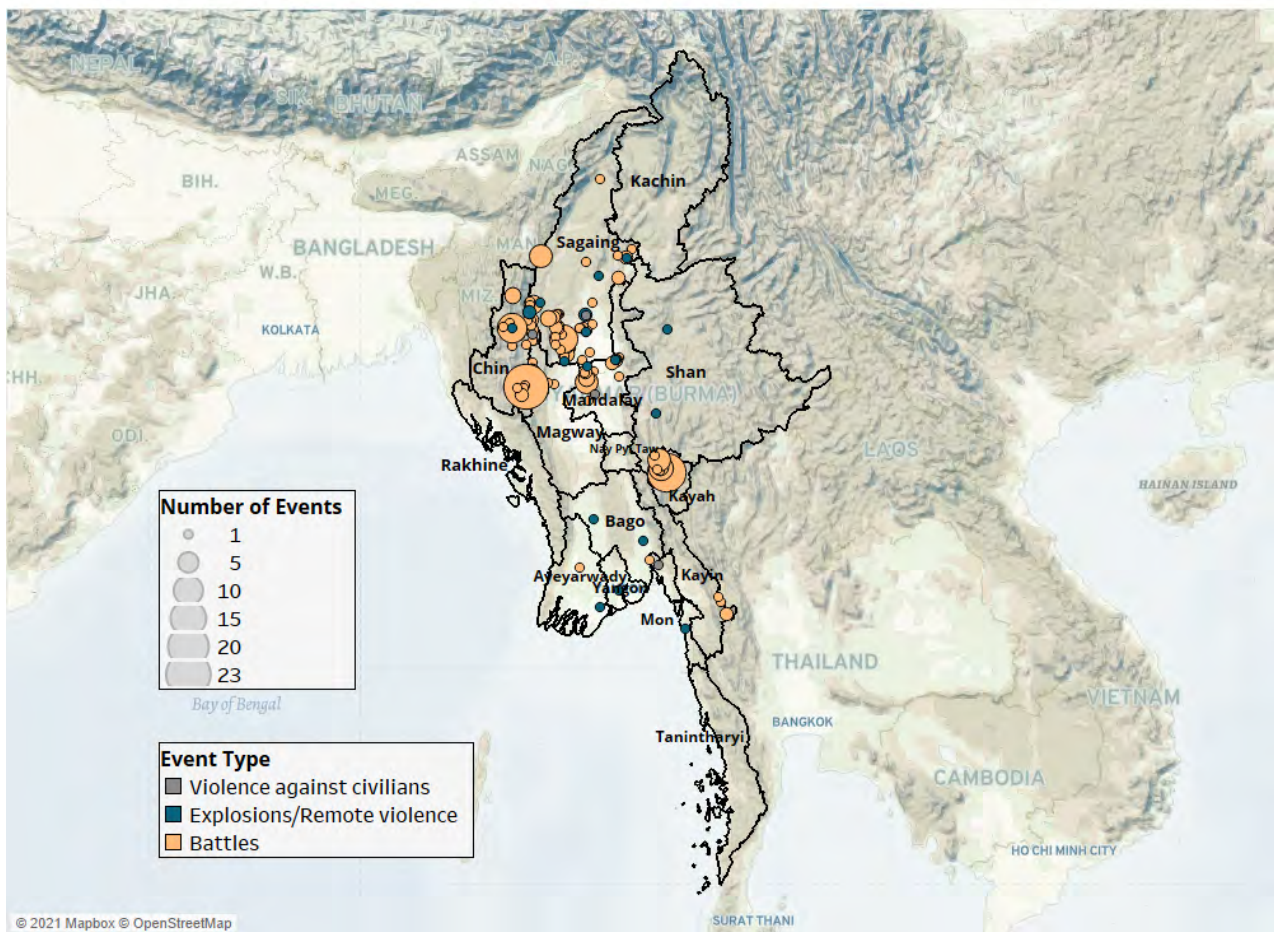
Emergence of Local Defense Forces

Shortly after the coup, elected members of parliament, primarily from the NLD, formed the Committee Representing the People's Hluttaw (CRPH) to represent the elected government of Myanmar. On 16 April, they announced the formation of the NUG. On 5 May, the NUG announced it would set up a People's Defense Force (PDF) as a precursor to a federal army that would also be inclusive of ethnic armed groups.

As the military began to crackdown on peaceful protesters, many activists began the arduous trek to jungle locations held by ethnic armed groups. The young activists sought military training from these groups, hoping to return to cities and towns across the country to defend themselves against the military ([Insight Myanmar, 11 July 2021](#)). Even prior to the NUG announcement of the formation of the PDF, many youths had formed small groups that they called 'people's defense forces'. While many local resistance groups that had already been formed have subsequently declared their alliance with the NUG's PDF, many groups have not. There is little top-down oversight of those groups that have aligned with the NUG.

While many local defense groups have announced their formation — including both those aligned with the NUG and those operating independently — only around 40 have been recorded by ACLED as being active (as of 30 June). Active groups are those that have engaged in organized political violence⁴Organized political violence is defined as 'Battles', 'Explosions/Remote violence', and 'Violence against civilians' event types in the ACLED dataset. — with battles with state forces being the most common form of engagement (*see map below*). Some groups have subsequently formed alliances with each other. There is wide variation in the resources and capacity of each group, as well as the extent to which they are armed. Announcement of a group's formation is largely indicative of the adoption of armed struggle as a tactic of resistance and not indicative of group size or a large supply of weapons.

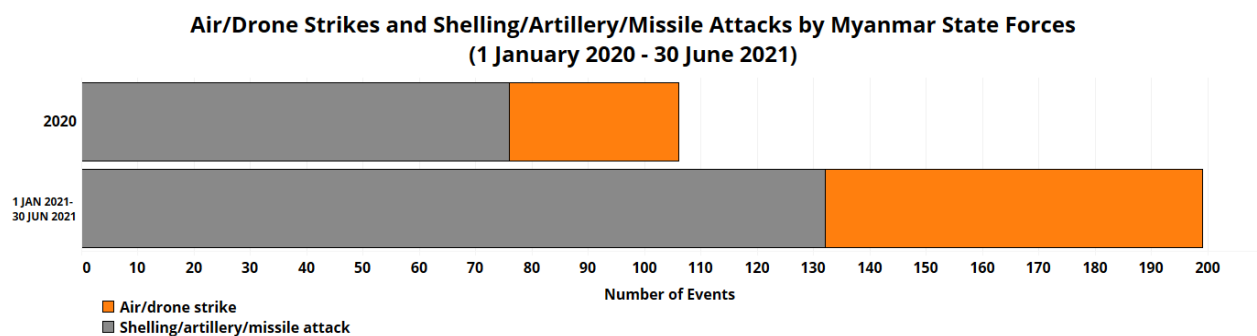
Organized Political Violence Involving Local Defense Groups in Myanmar (March 2021 - June 2021)



In recent weeks, urban areas such as Mandalay have seen clashes involving local defense forces. Yet, many of the battles between local defense forces and the military have been fought in Chin state and Sagaing region, as well as in Kayah state (*see map above*). These areas have been relatively peaceful in recent years. The emergence of such forces in Chin state in particular was supported by the availability of traditional hunting guns. In contrast, areas such as Rakhine state have not yet seen the emergence of active local defense forces, likely due to the strong presence and position of ethnic armed groups, in this case the ULA/AA.

In many areas, though, ethnic armed groups and the newly formed defense groups have fought alongside each other. As noted, members of the KIO/KIA have joined such groups in clashes with the military. Smaller ethnic armed groups have also joined forces with local defense forces to combat the military. The Chin National Front/Chin National Army (CNF/CNA), for example, signed an agreement with the NUG to work together against the military junta ([Frontier Myanmar, 30 May 2021](#)). Meanwhile, the Karenni National Progressive Party/Karenni Army (KNPP/KA) in Kayah state has joined forces with the Karenni Nationalities Defense Force (KNDF), an alliance of local defense forces in the region. It remains to be seen the extent to which local defense groups will adopt the same political positions of the ethnic armed groups with whom they ally in the future.

According to local defense groups, many soldiers in the Myanmar military have been killed during clashes with such groups. Subsequently, the military has employed its “four cuts” strategy of cutting off supplies and public support for the groups in places such as Mindat, Chin state ([Al Jazeera, 5 July 2021](#)). The military has also increased its use of remote violence⁵While ACLED does not code the perpetrator of violent events between two armed groups, this information has been manually assessed and included for analysis in the visual here. — often through air strikes and shelling — in response to the growing armed resistance (*see figure below*), with the number of events during the first half of 2021 already nearly twice the number recorded throughout all of last year.⁶According to ACLED methodology, ‘Explosions/Remote violence’ events are only coded in the absence of a simultaneous battle. Air strikes and shelling that occur during a battle are not coded as separate events, though this information is noted in the ‘Notes’ section of the event. Air strikes and shelling that occur during a battle are not included in this visual. Suffering heavy losses on the ground, and unable to overpower groups with better knowledge of the local terrain, the military has often resorted to asymmetric warfare when engaging with both local defense groups and the ethnic armed groups they continue to battle.



Formation of Pro-Military Militias

Meanwhile, as local defense forces have emerged in opposition to the coup, a pro-military militia named after a Bagan era king, Pyu Saw Htee, has been formed by military and USDP supporters. Members of these groups have been armed and appear to be acting at times at the direction of the military ([Irrawaddy, 11 June 2021](#)). A few clashes have already been recorded between local defense forces and Pyu Saw Htee members, though often the members do not openly identify themselves as such. In some cases, Pyu Saw Htee members have accompanied the military and police during battles with local defense forces.

Pyu Saw Htee groups have also targeted civilians, particularly members of the NLD. In Myingyan township in Mandalay region, a couple — both members of the NLD — were killed by suspected Pyu Saw Htee members. Prior to their killing, Pyu Saw Htee released a list of 38 NLD members in the region that it planned to target ([Frontier Myanmar, 14 July 2021](#)).

The military in Myanmar has a long history of organizing paramilitary and pro-government forces to do their bidding. Under the past military dictatorship, the military often employed a group they labeled Swan Arr Shin (Masters of Force) to carry out violence against activists and protesters ([Irrawaddy, 6 August 2015](#)). The use of such groups — often loosely organized and drawing from criminal elements in society — gives the military cover, allowing them to misrepresent violence as stemming from community conflicts or driven by anti-coup actors.

Increase in Violence by Anonymous or Unidentified Armed Groups

In recent months, there has been an increase in violence carried out by anonymous or unidentified armed groups, with rates during the first half of 2021 already over three times as prevalent at rates seen throughout all of last year. Bombings and explosions have been reported across the country by unidentified actors — with the military and anti-coup groups trading blame. Alongside the military killing of NLD members and activists, there has also been a rise in killings by unidentified assailants of USDP members, township and ward administrators working for the junta, and military informers (*dalan*). The military and police withdrawal of the provision of public safety — even at the expense of their own supporters — is a strategic move. Doing so allows disorder in the hopes that the opposition and the public at large will eventually acquiesce to military rule so that order is restored. It is a tactic used during the 1988 uprising and subsequent military seizure of power (see [Ferrara 2003](#)) and one that the military seems likely to continue to use.

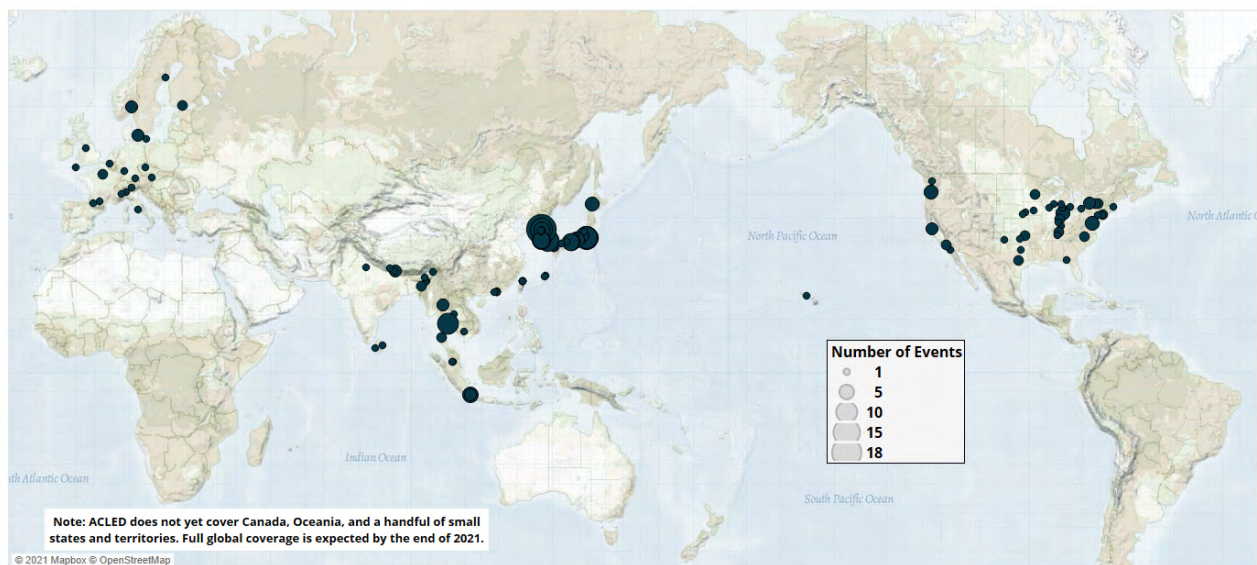
International Response and Demonstrations in the Diaspora

The international response to the military coup in Myanmar — or lack thereof — has led many Myanmar citizens to the conclusion that they are alone in their fight against the military. During the height of protests in February and March, there were repeated calls by protesters to the international community to intervene, with some invoking the UN's Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle. Protesters congregated in front of UN offices in Yangon and in front of various embassies in an effort to have their demands heard by the international community.

While some countries have issued statements condemning the violence of the military, and some have passed sanctions against the coup leaders, the actions of some international actors have emboldened the coup leaders. For example, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) policy of non-interference was belied by what appeared to be clear interference when Min Aung Hlaing, the leader of the coup, was invited to a meeting on 24 April of ASEAN member states. The five-point consensus that emerged from that meeting, meant to encourage an end to the military's violence, was immediately dismissed by Min Aung Hlaing on his return to Myanmar ([The Diplomat, 22 June 2021](#)). As well, it would appear that China has accepted the coup and the likelihood of long-term military rule in Myanmar, calling Min Aung Hlaing the leader of Myanmar ([Financial Times, 22 June 2021](#)). Min Aung Hlaing also recently attended a meeting of defense ministers in Russia in order to shore up Russian support ([Radio Free Asia, 23 June 2021](#)).

Internationally, activist networks in the Myanmar diaspora have been working to support the anti-coup movement by raising funds and demonstrating in solidarity with those inside Myanmar. Many have lobbied their respective governments to take action. Over 300 demonstration events against the coup have been reported across the globe (*see figure below*). Many Myanmar people in the diaspora have been refugees or sought asylum during previous periods of dictatorship. They have maintained strong connections with activist networks inside the country and a commitment to resisting military rule in Myanmar (News Channel 3, 6 July 2021). Demonstrations in the diaspora are likely to continue as long as military violence continues.

Global Demonstrations Against the Military Coup in Myanmar
(1 February 2021 - 30 June 2021)



Conclusion

As shown in this report, the military coup in Myanmar was met with widespread peaceful protests. The violent military response to the Myanmar public's rejection of the coup has led some demonstrators to engage in armed struggle. Amid all the political disorder wrought by the military junta, Myanmar is now experiencing a third wave of the coronavirus pandemic. Having arrested and killed many health workers over the past months of violence, the military is not trusted by the people to respond adequately to the growing health crisis (Guardian, 14 July 2021). As the year continues, the impact of the coup across all sectors of society will be deeply felt. Resistance to the coup — both armed and unarmed — is likely to continue as the majority of people in the country reject the military junta and their campaign of violence.



ACLED is the highest quality, most widely used, real-time data and analysis source on political violence and protest around the world. Practitioners, researchers, and governments depend on ACLED for the latest reliable information on current conflict and disorder patterns. Data and analysis are found on acleddata.com.