



# MYANMAR WITNESS

A project by



CENTRE for  
INFORMATION  
RESILIENCE

## MYANMAR MILITARY- LED ELECTION 2025-2026

Ongoing Conflict In Townships Limits Freedom of  
Expression While USDP Secures Victory

# MYANMAR MILITARY-LED ELECTION 2025-2026:

## Ongoing Conflict In Townships Limits Freedom of Expression While USDP Secures Victory

26 March 2026

Note: This report references military websites that may be unsafe to access without a VPN. Efforts have been made to archive such links, but where it has not been possible, those links have been highlighted in red.

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## 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Myanmar has held its first nationwide elections since the 2021 military coup, with the results largely favouring the military-supported Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). The Myanmar government promoted this election as a “multi-party democratic general election”. However, it took place amid widespread civil conflict, extensive legal restrictions were imposed, and it constrained significant political competition.

Myanmar Witness’s investigation found a consistent disconnect between the designation of “stable” townships for electoral participation, the phased schedule and the reality of ongoing conflict and reported arrests on the ground. This investigation analysed conflict incidents, including airstrikes, fires, landmines, drone and paramotor activity and casualty events, which repeatedly occurred in townships that were officially deemed safe for voting. During this process, it was notable that constituencies within ethnically diverse and conflict-affected states were excluded from the elections altogether.

### Key findings:

- The political field was significantly restricted. Eighty-four parties, including the National League for Democracy (NLD), were disbanded and barred from taking

part in the elections. Meanwhile, 63 parties that were largely aligned or accepted by the military were allowed to participate in the elections.

- Elections were only held in areas that the military deemed “manageable” or “secure”. Initially, at least 121 constituencies were excluded due to security concerns, though some were later included in Phase 3. For example, in Chin and Rakhine states, less than 25 percent (%) of townships were allowed to vote.
- The electoral system was reconfigured, and 25% of parliamentary seats remained reserved for military appointees, thus limiting the scope of a genuine and free competition.
- The Election Protection Act, along with other laws, were utilised to arrest and even prosecute hundreds of people, including activists, protest leaders and citizens. For example, several individuals were often arrested for peaceful expression or minor acts such as distributing stickers or tearing up political leaflets.
- Across all three phases of voting, townships scheduled to vote experienced conflict-related incidents during the four-month pre-election period, before voting even began.
- Phase 3 had the highest proportion of affected townships, with Sagaing (စစ်ကိုင်း) and Tanintharyi (တနင်္သာရီ) recording incidents in every voting township.
- During the election period of 28 December 2025 - 25 January 2026, at least one incident was recorded on all but three days nationwide, with 19 participating townships having experienced events within a week before, a week after, or on their election date.

Taken together, the ongoing conflict, selective territorial inclusion, and legal repression indicate that the process was used to consolidate military power rather than reflect genuine democratic choice.

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## 2 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Since the coup in 2021, Myanmar’s political landscape has been under the tight control of the military. The election, referred to as the ‘2025 Multi-Party Democratic General Election’ by the military, was held under altered electoral laws and constituency arrangements largely revised by the [military government](#).

## 2.1 PARTIES AND PARTICIPATION

The Union Election Commission (UEC) formally recognised 63 parties as eligible to [contest](#) in the 2025-2026 military-led elections. Most of the parties were aligned with or accepted by the military, while 84 opposition parties, including the National League for Democracy (NLD), were [disbanded](#) and did not participate. The military heavily favoured candidates and parties it considered acceptable to participate in the elections.

Early voting was [made possible](#) for some groups, including Burmese citizens abroad and individuals displaced within Myanmar, along with specific provisions explicitly prioritising the Myanmar armed forces and their families. Several parties formally complained and [raised concerns](#) about the lack of transparency around advanced voting, including apparent disproportionate benefits to USDP candidates compared to others.

## 2.2 TERRITORIAL COVERAGE

It was also reported that elections were only held in constituencies that authorities deemed “manageable” or “secure”. Around 121 constituencies could not initially hold elections because authorities considered them unsafe, according to [government and state media](#) reports. Although authorities later included some of these in the final phase, many remained excluded.

This clear selective territorial coverage had significant effects in ethnically diverse regions. For example, in Chin and Rakhine, fewer than 25% of the townships participated, leaving over 75% of the townships excluded from the electoral process. This type of exclusion shaped Myanmar Witness’s analysis, as it signalled where political participation was curtailed.

## 2.3 ELECTORAL SYSTEM CHANGES

Since the 2021 coup, the electoral framework has significantly altered:

- The [Pyithu Hluttaw](#) (House of Representatives), which previously elected one representative from each of 330 townships, was altered to use temporary constituencies, prioritising populous townships. Driven by security and administrative constraints, this was a one-cycle arrangement.

- The [Amyotha Hluttaw](#) (House of Nationalities) retained 168 seats but had shifted to a mixed First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) and Proportional Representation system. Six FPTP representatives per state/region were elected, with additional seats allocated to self-administered zones and the remaining seats filled through Proportional Representation constituencies that grouped multiple townships.
- At the state and region level, each township now elects one representative via FPTP and one through Proportional Representation, thus replacing the previous dual-FPTP system.
- As in previous systems, 25% of all parliamentary seats are reserved for military-appointed representatives, limiting the proportion of seats subject to popular vote.

The phasing voting schedule for the 2025-2026 elections was as follows:

- Phase 1 - [28 December 2025](#): 102 townships
- Phase 2 - [11 January 2026](#): 100 townships
- Phase 3 - [25 January 2026](#): 63 constituencies

## 2.4 INTERNATIONAL RESPONSES

International observers, including the [United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights](#), Volker Türk, have highlighted that the elections took place amid intensified violence, intimidation, and arbitrary arrests, and under the new 'Election Protection Act'. This is a legal framework that severely restricts free political participation, which carries [long sentencing](#) periods and the death penalty. As such, ASEAN has refused to certify the election, stating concerns over the lack of free participation, according to [Al-Jazeera](#).

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## 3 ELECTION-RELATED VIOLENCE AND ARRESTS

### 3.1 VIOLENCE AND OTHER CONFLICT INCIDENTS

Since 2023, Myanmar Witness has systematically collected claims of election-related violence as well as incidents occurring within the broader conflict context around the December 2025 - January 2026 election phases. The following are examples of these claims.

### 3.1.1 TARGETED INFRASTRUCTURE AND MOVEMENT RESTRICTIONS

On 10 November 2025, military and militia forces [allegedly](#) destroyed bridges between Shein Khaung (ရှိုန်းခေါင်နဲ) and Lan Sel (လန်ဆယ်) in Khaunglanhpu Township (ခေါင်လန်ဖူးမြို့နယ်), Kachin State. This reportedly impacted residents' ability to travel in a largely inaccessible area in the run-up to voting.

### 3.1.2 POLLING STATION ATTACK

On 26 December 2025, a drone attack allegedly hit a military polling station near a bridge in Lay Nyar village (လောညာ) in Bokpyin Township (ဘုတ်ပြင်းခရိုင်), Tanintharyi Region. According to [Khit Thit Media](#), the strike reportedly killed five soldiers, though casualty figures could not be independently verified. Myanmar Witness geolocated the incident to [11.449724, 98.995651] (figure 1).



Figure 1: Myanmar Witness geolocated drone footage of an explosion incident, allegedly at a polling station, near the bridge of Lay Nyar village in Bokpyin Township, Tanintharyi Region, at [11.449724, 98.995651] (Source: [Khit Thit Media](#) via Facebook).

### 3.1.3 VILLAGE BURNINGS LINKED TO “FAKE ELECTIONS”

[Mandalay Free Press](#) reported that between 17 and 19 January 2026, columns of approximately 200 Myanmar military troops burned villages in Salin (စလင်း) Township, Magway (မကွေး) Region. The news organisation stated that this was part of “fake election” efforts to gain control, although this cannot be confirmed. Myanmar Witness verified the fires via NASA FIRMS and were further corroborated by [Sentinel-2 imagery](#) (figure 2).

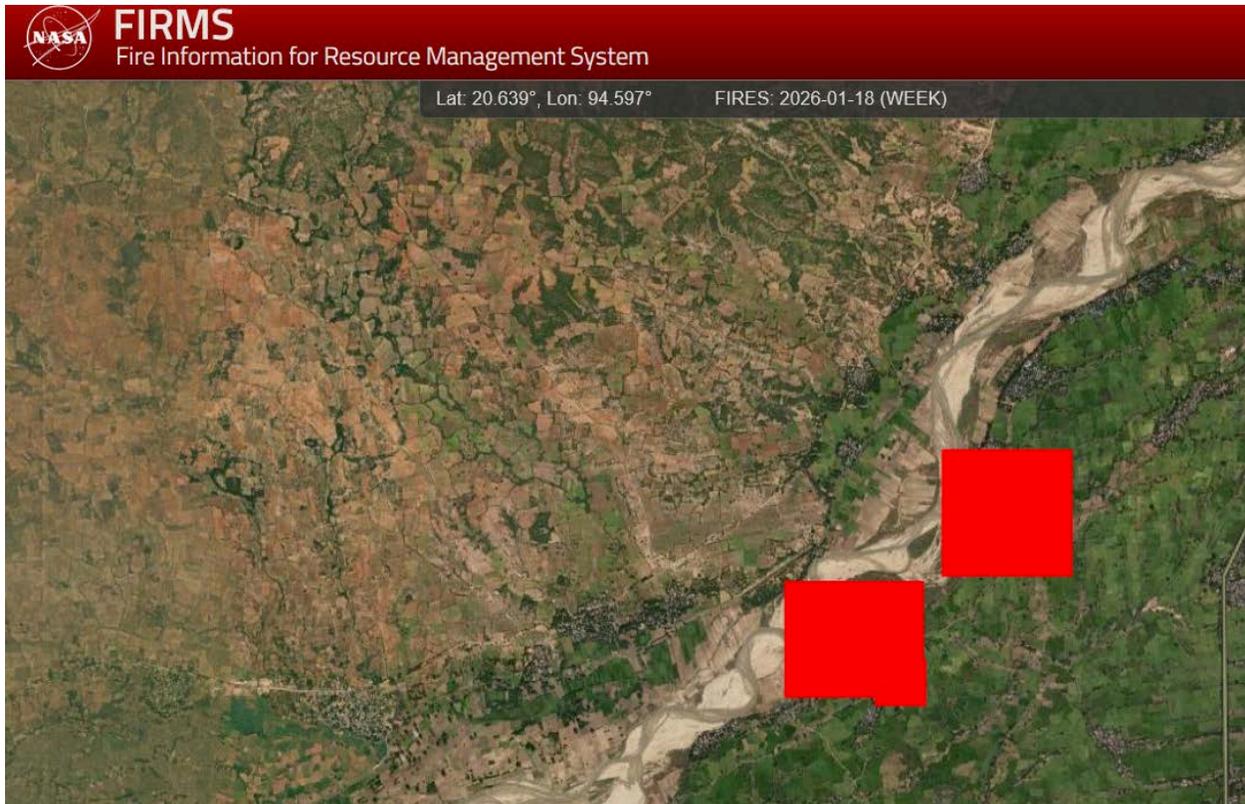


Figure 2: NASA FIRMS data that suggests the burning of multiple villages on 18 January 2026 in Salin Township in Magway Region (Source: [NASA FIRMS](#)).

### 3.1.4 BOMBARDMENT AROUND ELECTION DATES

Local reporting, including [Mandalay Free Press](#), claimed that from December 2025, the military carried out intense aerial bombing (allegedly using jets, gyrocopters and other air assets) in Sagaing Region on townships such as Shwebo (ရွှေဘိုမြို့), Khin-U (ခင်ဦး), Wetlet (ဝက်လက်), Kanbalu (ကန်ဘလူ), Kyun Hla (ကျွန်းလှ) and Tabayin (ဒီပဲယင်း). Some events appeared to have been linked to election days or immediately surrounding dates.

In Chin State, two townships included in Phase 1, such as Hakha (ဟားခါး), reported an airstrike two days before voting, and Tedim (တီးတိန်) Township recorded an incident one day after the elections. Despite Falam (ဖလမ်း) Township not participating in elections, the area allegedly experienced airstrikes on 28 December 2025, though Myanmar Witness could not independently verify this claim.

### 3.1.5 POST-ELECTION “PUNISHMENT” INCIDENTS

According to the [Karen National Union](#) (KNU), on 26 January 2026, the day after Phase 3 of the election, the Myanmar Air Force (MAF) carried out an airstrike on Hpaung Taw Cyi (ဖောင်းတောကြီး) village in Dawei (ထားဝယ်) Township, Tanintharyi Region, damaging a building. The KNU addressed this incident as a punishment directed at areas not participating in the election and framed it as an attempt by the military to enforce “fake elections” in military-held areas, while bombing those in areas they have lost control of to instil fear in the population.

### 3.1.6 REPORTED ATTACKS ON ELECTORAL OFFICIALS

While elections were ongoing, Facebook [users](#) claimed polling stations in Bago and Magway regions were attacked on 11 January 2026. This allegedly resulted in the death of a District General Director of the Election Commission and injuries to other commission members.

Taken together, these examples with Myanmar Witness’s data indicate strongly that the election took place alongside active conflict in many areas that were designated as “stable” by the military.

## 3.2 ARRESTS AND THE ELECTION PROTECTION ACT

Arrests under the Election Protection Act and other related legal provisions evidently played a central part in limiting political activity before, during, and after the elections.

### 3.2.1 REPORTED WIDESPREAD PROSECUTIONS

[France24](#) reported that at least 200 people were charged under the Election Protection Act between 29 July 2025 and mid-December 2025, with 34 arrested and five convicted, which critics describe as a method to silence dissent and block scrutiny ahead of the elections.

### 3.2.2 HARSH SENTENCES FOR MINOR ACTS

Three individuals in Hlaingthayar (လှိုင်သာယာ) Township in Yangon (ရန်ကင်း) Region were reportedly [arrested](#) for spreading stickers claiming the elections were false, and were later handed sentences of 42 and 49 years of hard labour on grounds of election interference. This is a punishment that appears significantly disproportionate to the reported acts.

In Chaungzon (ချောင်းဆုံ) Township of Mon (မွန်) State, the Mawlamyine District Court sentenced another individual to 17 years (likely with hard labour) for allegedly tearing candidate list papers.

### 3.2.3 PROTEST LEADERS AND ACTIVISTS

Similarly, in December 2025, prominent protest leaders, including Doctor Tayzar San, and others were [charged](#) with election disruption, likely in response to a [flash mob protest](#) at a bazaar in Mandalay (မန္တလေး) city on 3 December 2025 (figure 3).



Figure 3: The distribution of election boycott leaflets in Mandalay city in Myanmar at [21.979706, 96.077744] in December 2025 (Source: [Tayzar San](#) via Facebook)

[Myanmar Now](#) reported that a 24-year-old student protest leader from Mandalay - who was the president of the Yadanabon University Students' Union and involved with anti-authoritarian networks - disappeared from contact on 14 December 2025, and was later (on 18 December 2025) confirmed to have been arrested.

### 3.2.4 PRESSURE ON VOTERS

Social media [claims](#) indicated that the Myanmar military was reportedly arresting individuals unable to provide their voter list numbers on 23 December 2025. This

further blurs the line between general electoral administration and population control.

### 3.2.5 ARRESTS AND REPRESSION OF CANDIDATES AND PARTY FIGURES

Election-related arrests and violence also affected standing candidates and party figures. [Burma Independent Voices](#) reported on 17 November 2025 that the Union Electoral Commission (UEC) questioned a People's Party candidate for using phrases associated with the spring revolution in their campaign materials. Allegedly, this is a violation of the electoral law.

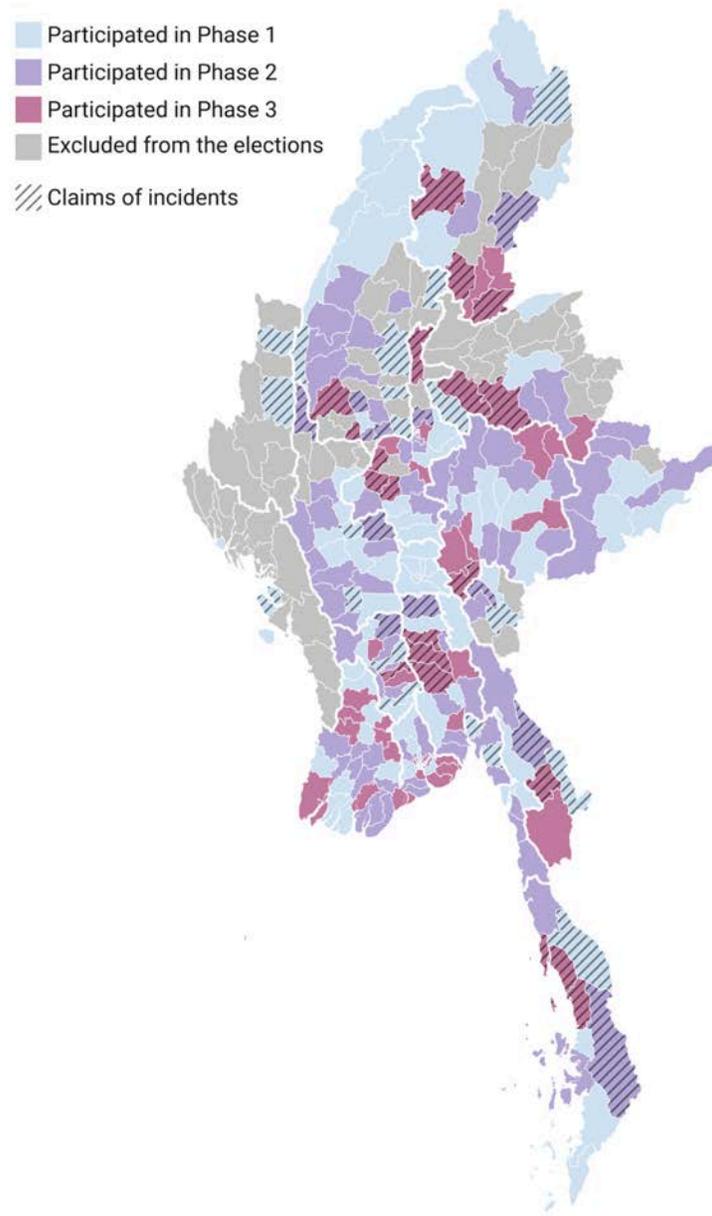
On 13 January 2026, as elections were ongoing, the military [arrested](#) People's Pioneer Party (PPP) Chair and Central Committee member, Daw Thet Thet Khine, who had previously served as the Minister of Refugees and Tourism under the military government, before being relieved of her duties in January 2025.

These examples highlight how the Election Protection Act and other regulations have been utilised to not only cause disruption but also to criminalise peaceful political participation and expression.

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## 4 INCIDENTS IN THE RUN-UP TO ELECTIONS

From August 2025 to November 2025, Myanmar Witness recorded and mapped incidents in townships scheduled to vote in each phase, to assess whether areas deemed "stable" enough for elections were actually safe (figures 4 and 5).



Map: Myanmar Witness • Map data: USAID • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 4: Myanmar Witness’s mapping of townships and election cycle phases they will participate in, if at all, as well as information about conflict-related incidents taking place in said townships (source: Myanmar Witness).

## Townships participating election phases per State / Region

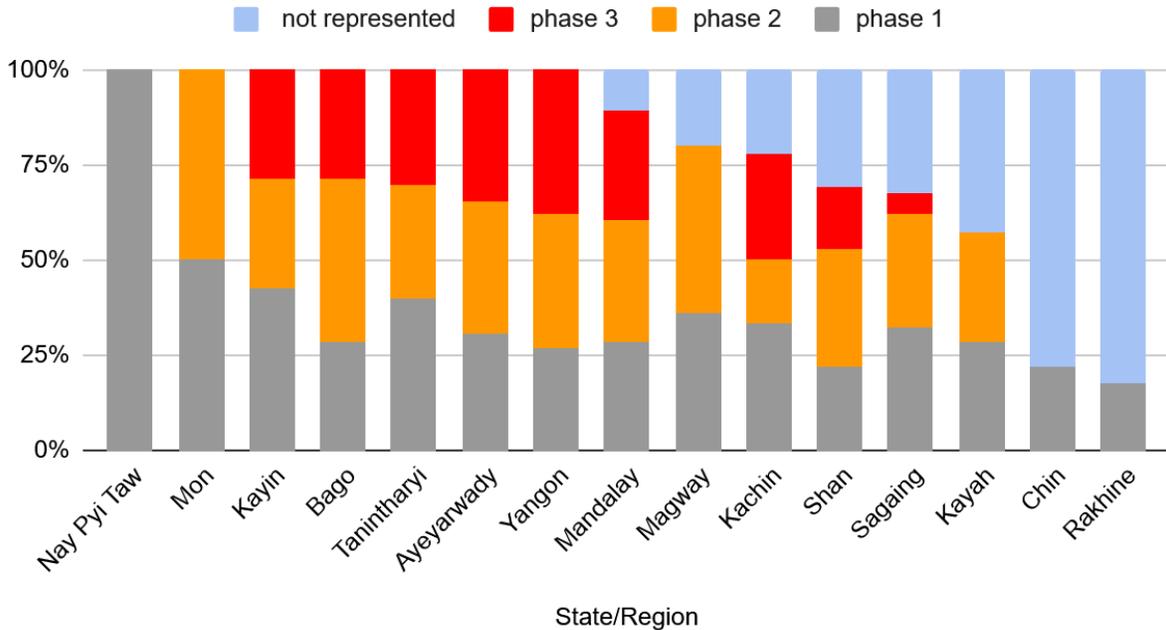


Figure 5: Myanmar Witness graph ranking states/regions by the number of townships included in Phase 1 (grey), Phase 2 (orange), and Phase 3 (red) of the voting process. This analysis highlights the uneven inclusion between states and regions and shows which ones were largely excluded from the overall electoral process.

### 4.1 PHASE 1

Scope: 102 townships designated for Phase 1 voting

Myanmar Witness identified 94 conflict-related incidents, including airstrikes, fires, landmines and casualty events across townships designated for Phase 1 voting (figure 6). Nineteen of the 102 townships experienced at least one incident between August and November 2025. This pattern suggests that stability was relative rather than absolute, as these areas were indicated as unsafe, and residents' ability to meaningfully participate was limited.

While Myanmar Witness makes no assertions as to why certain areas were chosen for limited participation in Phase 1, core administration areas such as Nay Pyi Taw, which had high inclusion and relatively fewer incidents, were regarded as central and secure areas for elections. Ethnically diverse and historically conflict-related states such as

Rakhine, Shan and Chin states, on the other hand, had much lower inclusion and higher exposure to violence than the townships that did vote.

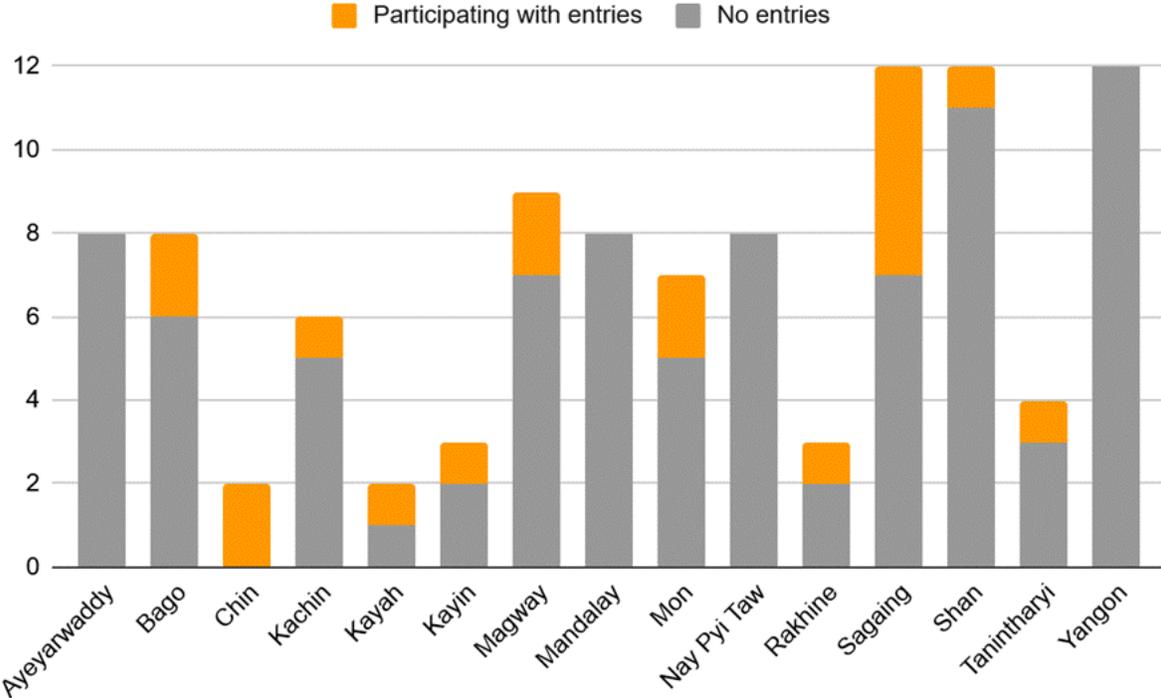


Figure 6: Myanmar Witness's graph demonstrates the differing levels of recorded incidents in participating townships in Phase 1 of the military-led elections.

### 4.2 PHASE 2

Scope: 100 townships participated in Phase 2.

Myanmar Witness documented 52 incidents across Phase 2 townships, with 12 of 100 townships experiencing at least one conflict-related incident. These included airstrikes, fires, casualties and paramotor activity. While these incidents indicate ongoing insecurity in some Phase 2 voting areas, they were more dispersed than in Phase 1, with fewer clusters in specific townships (figure 7).

Yangon, Shan, Mon, and Ayeyarwady recorded no incidents in their Phase 2 townships, while Sagaing recorded 11 incidents across three townships. Chin and Rakhine were absent from Phase 2 entirely, having only a small subset of townships in



Phase 1, leaving more than 75% of townships in these states excluded from the entire electoral process.

[Data For Myanmar](#) (D4M) reports that in Phases 1 and 2, ethnic and regional-based parties such as Mon Unity Party, Naga National Party, Pa-O National Organisation, Arakan Front Party, Zomi National Party and Rakhine Nationalities Party won representation mainly in ethnic states via the Proportional Representation system. This highlights how participation and representation intersect with ethnic geographies.

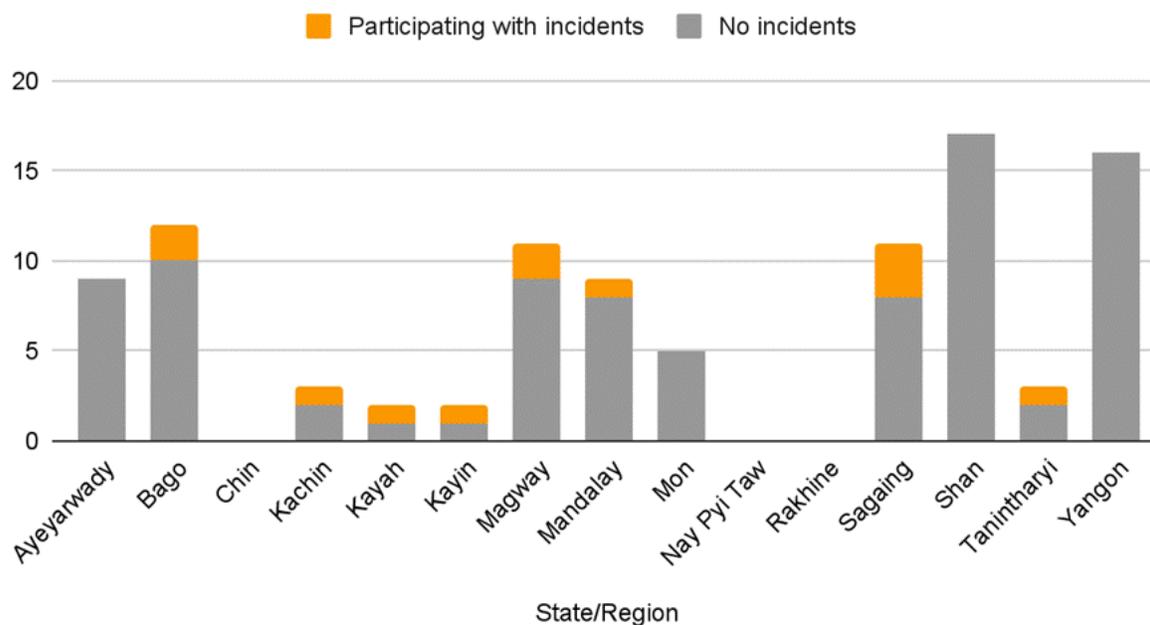


Figure 7: Myanmar Witness's graph demonstrates the differing levels of recorded incidents in participating townships in Phase 2 of the military-led elections. The graph shows that Nay Pyi Taw, Chin, and Rakhine had no townships voting in Phase 2, for different reasons.

### 4.3 PHASE 3

Scope: 63 constituencies participated in Phase 3

Myanmar Witness documented 49 incidents in phase 3 townships, with 20 of 63 (just under one-third) experiencing at least one incident during the pre-election period, the highest proportion of any phase.

Incidents were more clustered within fewer townships than in earlier phases, suggesting that Phase 3 areas were scheduled later, not because they were safer, but potentially because they were comparatively less stable and more heavily contested (figure 8). Mon, Kayah (ကယား), and Mandalay had all their designated “stable townships” vote in earlier phases and not participate in Phase 3. In contrast, Sagaing and Tanintharyi recorded incidents in every participating township, while Mandalay, Kayin, Kachin, and Bago each had at least half of their participating townships affected. Yangon and Ayeyarwady were the only regions with no recorded incidents, reflecting their relatively lower levels of documented conflict since the 2021 coup.

Across all three voting phases, the data documented indicates that many townships that were labelled as “stable” for elections nevertheless experienced violence in the months leading up to the voting. This challenges the military’s narrative that exclusion of voting was driven by security concerns, while inclusion was deemed safe.

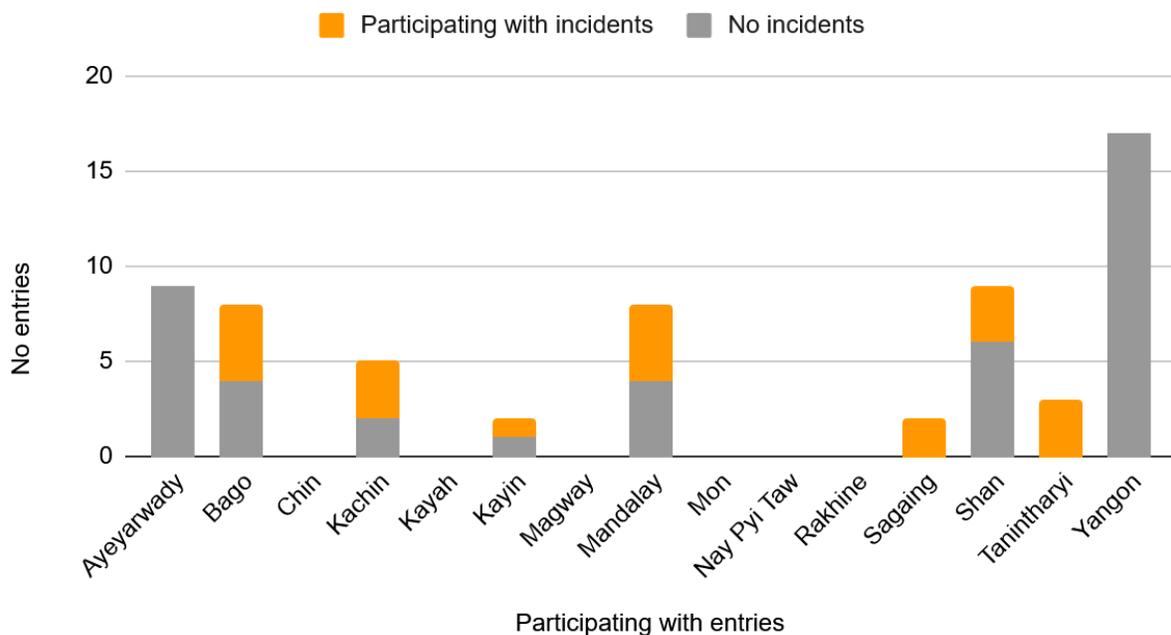


Figure 8: Myanmar Witness graph demonstrates the differing levels of recorded incidents (entries) in participating townships in the Myanmar Phase 3 electoral process. The graph illustrates that Sagaing and Tanintharyi had an incident in each participating township.

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## 5 THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF CONFLICT TYPES

Myanmar Witness examined specific incident types across the voting townships between August 2025 and November 2025 in order to understand how different forms of violence could affect voter participation.

### 5.1 AIRSTRIKES

Myanmar Witness recorded airstrikes in 39 of 265 voting townships. The unpredictability and lethality of airstrikes can strongly deter public gatherings and impact travel and participation in religious or educational activities, as civilians may fear being misidentified as opposition supporters or caught in indiscriminate attacks. In townships selected for electoral participation, the continued risk of airstrikes suggests that residents may prioritise personal safety over electoral engagement.



*Figure 9: Myanmar Witness geolocated damage to multiple civilian infrastructure in Htee Lin (ထီးလင်း), Bhamo Township in Kachin State at around [24.2807961, 97.161468]. The incident allegedly took place on 22 January 2026 (source: [Kachin News](#) via Facebook).*

## 5.2 FIRE

Alleged incidents of fire were documented in 24 of 265 voting townships. Fires destroying homes and livelihoods can disrupt community cohesion and shift priorities toward survival and away from electoral engagement, and often displace people from the townships where they are registered to vote.

This method of violence, loss of housing, and documentation can directly impact voter registration and turnout, while the experience of being targeted or displaced could lead to deep political alienation or fear.

## 5.3 CASUALTIES

Claimed incidents involving casualties were identified in 37 of 265 voting townships. Whether from airstrikes, clashes, or other forms of violence, resulting death and injuries can reinforce a climate of anxiety and risk that makes involvement in public events, such as voting, more dangerous.

## 5.4 LANDMINES

Myanmar Witness recorded alleged landmine incidents in seven of 265 voting townships. The reported presence of landmines in an area may further constrain political participation by restricting civilians' perceived mobility and access to public spaces in the period leading up to voting. For voters, especially in rural areas, the risk of landmines can outweigh the perceived benefits of voting, especially when political participation has already been constrained.

## 5.5 PARAMOTOR

Paramotor-related incidents were recorded in nine of 265 voting townships within the study period. Paramotors became a [more widely cited](#) factor of the conflict in 2025, with the Myanmar military generally being the attributed actor. The presence or suspected presence of paramotors may further constrain political participation by increasing insecurity and fear, limiting civilians' willingness or ability to travel, including to vote.

Myanmar Witness geolocated footage of damage to civilian infrastructure in Na Bet (နဘက်) village in Myaung (မြောင်) Township, Sagaing Region, at approximately [21.766124, 95.353886], allegedly resulting from a paramotor attack (figure 10). [Sentinel-2](#) satellite imagery indicates that the damage occurred between 4 January 2026 and 9 January 2026, within the broader election period.



Figure 10: Geolocated footage of damage to civilian infrastructure in Na Bet village at approximately [21.766124, 95.353886], allegedly due to a paramotor (Sources: [Left] Google Earth Pro, © 2025 Airbus [Right]: [ဖက်ဒရယ် FM](#) via Facebook).

## 5.6 DRONE

Myanmar Witness recorded claimed drone incidents in eight voting townships. Drones can create a persistent sense of surveillance and potential strike capacity. Even in areas where drone incidents are infrequent, their presence can foster fear, leading civilians to avoid public gatherings, travel, and participation in religious, educational, or political activities. Both military and resistance groups use drones as attack methods, meaning that civilians often find themselves caught in the crossfire, which further increases insecurity around elections.

Overall, each of these themes contributes to a multi-layered environment of insecurity and fear that significantly undermines the conditions for safe political participation, especially in areas officially designated as “stable”.

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## 6 INCIDENTS OCCURRING DURING THE ELECTION PERIOD

Myanmar Witness also collected nationwide information of incidents during the national voting window from 28 December 2025 to 25 January 2026, to assess how violence occurred across Myanmar and not just in townships participating in elections. Except for three days, at least one conflict incident was recorded somewhere in Myanmar on every day of the election period. Myanmar Witness analysis indicates that electoral participation in Myanmar was likely influenced by security conditions.

To understand how this converted into voter participation, Myanmar Witness calculated, for each state and region, the proportion of townships that both participated in the elections and had no recorded incidents during two key periods. These were the pre-election period between 1 August and 30 November 2026, and the seven days before and seven days after the state/region’s election date. By doing this, it provided a conservative indicator of where safer participation was theoretically possible.

The figure below illustrates that urban and administrative zones such as Nay Pyi Taw and Yangon apparently achieved 100% safe participation with no incidents documented, while conflict-affected and ethnically diverse states and regions such as Sagaing, Kachin, Chin, Kayah, Rakhine and Shan had much lower proportions of townships able to participate and displayed much lower levels of safe participation. For example, Chin State only had two townships take part in the elections, and both recorded incidents.

## Portion of participating townships without incidents

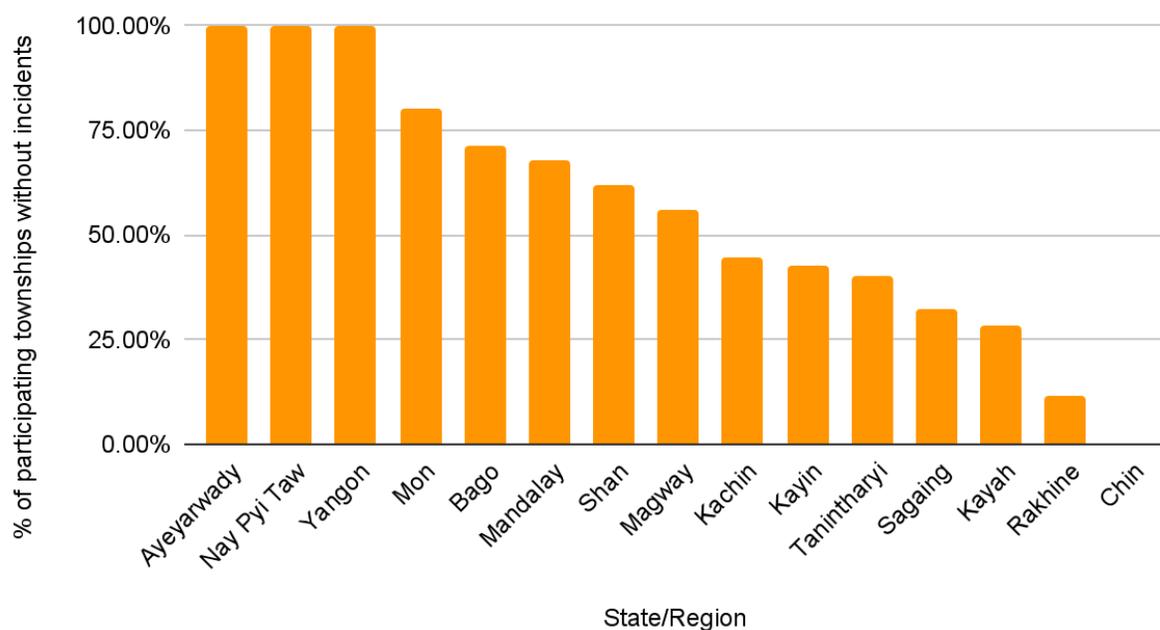


Figure 11: Proportion of townships with claimed safe participation by state/region

Myanmar Witness's dataset includes 19 participating townships that experienced at least one incident in the week before, the week after, or on their election date.

For these townships:

- 12 incidents took place in the week before their election day.
- 10 incidents occurred in the week after.
- One incident happened on the election day itself.

Given that 265 townships participated in the elections, this means that almost one in ten townships recorded an incident in the period of a week before or after the elections.

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## 7 OVERALL ANALYSIS: SECURITY, PHASING AND PARTICIPATION

From Myanmar Witness's analysis, several key patterns emerged.

### 7.1 "STABILITY" AS A RELATIVE, NOT ABSOLUTE, CONDITION

In every phase of voting, a notable proportion of townships experienced conflict-related incidents in the months leading up to the elections, including airstrikes, fires, landmine incidents, drone and paramotor activity, and civilian casualties. Phase 3 especially recorded the highest proportion of affected townships, with regions such as Sagaing and Tanintharyi documenting incidents in every participating township.

What this demonstrates is that the Myanmar military's designation of "stable" townships was relative, and voting inclusion appears to have signalled areas where the military believed they could either manage or contain the conflict enough to run a polling process, but not genuinely a safe area for civilians.

### 7.2 UNEQUAL ACCESS TO "SAFE PARTICIPATION"

When connecting participation status and exposure to incidents, there was a clear disparity.

Historically, conflict-affected states and regions such as Sagaing, Kachin, Chin, Kayah, Rakhine, and Shan show continued exposure to violence and have a low inclusion rate. For example, Chin and Rakhine were technically included in Phase 1, but fewer than 25% of their townships participated, leaving more than 75% excluded from the electoral process. On the other hand, more urban and administrative centres such as Yangon, Naypyidaw, and Ayeyarwady had near-complete coverage of township inclusion, and fewer documented incidents in the pre-election period and around election dates.

This pattern highlights that civilians from conflict-affected areas not only bore the brunt of the violence but were also faced with greater limitations on their ability to vote in the elections.

## 7.3 PHASING AND INSECURITY

The phased approach for the elections did not provide safer conditions:

- Phase 1: included townships with substantial pre-election incident histories
- Phase 2: showered fewer clustered incidents; however, there was continued insecurity in specific areas, such as Sagaing
- Phase 3: There were combined lower inclusion rates with a high proportional exposure to incidents.

## 7.4 RESTRICTED FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The Election Protection Act and other regulations amplified the restriction of freedom of expression and assembly.

- Long prison sentences were given to various protest leaders, student activists and citizens for carrying out acts such as distributing stickers or tearing up candidate lists
- Candidates and party officials were investigated or arrested, including those with prior roles in the military government. This highlights that even those competing who went through official channels remained vulnerable to potential coercion.

This type of strict legal environment undercuts the possibility of safe, open campaigning, public debate or even independent observation.

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## 8 CONCLUSION

Myanmar Witness's documentation of conflict-related incidents and arrests in townships designated as "safe enough" for elections raises serious concerns about the criteria used to define security in the electoral context. The persistent use of airstrikes, fires, landmine activity, drone and paramotor attacks, along with casualty incidents, indicates that safety was relative and not absolute.

Furthermore, the apparent phased structure of the electoral process did not resolve these problems. Phase 3 in particular confirms this, witnessing concentrated conflict in many participating townships. This suggests that strategic factors, rather than genuine concern for voter safety, may have influenced the inclusion or exclusion of

specific areas. At the same time, the way the Election Protection Act was implemented and used to prosecute activists, citizens, and even candidates further undermined the credibility of the process and political freedom.

Therefore, in this environment, it is evident that voter participation in many townships was constrained by fear and physical danger rather than reflecting a free expression of political will. It is important to note that the selective inclusion of certain townships should not be taken as evidence of broad stability or genuine engagement in the elections, but rather as participation under difficult conditions that fall short of free and fair elections.

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## 9 METHODOLOGY

Myanmar Witness follows a methodology of digital preservation and rigorous, replicable analysis. Digital content is collected and archived in a secure database and hashed to confirm authenticity and prevent tampering.



### 9.1 DATA COLLECTION AND TIMEFRAME

Myanmar Witness's incident data collection focuses on the following timeframe:

- Core pre-election period: 1 August 2025 - 30 November 2025
- Election period window: 28 December 2025 - 25 January 2026, including a specific two-week window (seven days before, and seven days after) for each township's election date.

Incident types: airstrikes, fires, casualties, drones, paramotor incidents, landmine activity, and events involving casualties.

### 9.2 ELECTION GEOGRAPHY AND PHASING

The military government announced a staggered election schedule:

- Phase 1: 28 December 2025 - 102 townships
- Phase 2: 11 January 2026 - 100 townships
- Phase 3: 25 January 2026 - 63 constituencies

The list of townships participating in each phase was compiled from English-language publications on the Myanmar government websites and the Global New Light of Myanmar (GNLM), a state-run media outlet. Several inconsistencies were found and corrected by cross-referencing it with the [D4M map](#).

### 9.3 ANALYTICAL APPROACH

Myanmar Witness's analysis of this study was as follows:

Descriptive mapping of incidents and participation:

- A theme was considered present in a township if it was reported at least once during the study period.
- Phase-by-phase comparison to see whether certain phases had greater exposure to conflict.

Thematic overview of incident types:

- Grouping incidents in six themes (airstrikes, fires, casualties, drones, paramotor incidents and landmines) to assess how each form of violence could affect political behaviour and perceptions of safety. Each township was assessed based on the presence or absence of key incident themes rather than frequency.

To assess whether a township was designated as “stable”, Myanmar Witness calculated, for each state and region, the proportion of townships that both participated in the elections and had no recorded incidents during two key periods. These were the pre-election period between 1 August and 30 November 2025, and the seven days before and seven days after their election date. By doing this, it provided a conservative indicator of where safer participation was theoretically possible.

This report contains figures showing how footage has been geolocated. In these images, coloured lines are used to represent the left and right arcs of vision. Coloured boxes show corresponding landmarks or distinguishing details in each piece of footage or data. Geolocation is conducted using an array of open-source tools, such as

Google Earth, to match satellite imagery with visual features identified in the footage or images. Geolocations are peer-reviewed.

## 9.4 LIMITATIONS

The incident dataset is not exhaustive due to collection and reporting constraints. The analysis focuses on conflict and documented arrests, so it cannot fully capture non-visible coercion, such as threats or other subtle forms of pressure that could shape and manipulate behaviour and cause potential danger. Absence of recorded incidents does not guarantee safety, but it may reflect data gaps or under-reporting.

Moreover, the official lists of participating townships and their assigned phases also contained inconsistencies; while cross-checking reduced errors, some misclassifications may remain. These limitations show that the patterns described in this investigation likely represent a conservative estimate of how conflict and potential coercion intersected with the military-led elections.