



Myanmar 2025: Burmese Democratic Futures Working Group Observations

A Comprehensive Report on Major
Developments, Resistance Movements,
Political Climate, and Humanitarian Impact



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Introduction

In 2025, Myanmar remained in the grip of a deepening crisis, shaped by the enduring legacy of the 2021 military coup, a protracted civil war, and escalating human rights abuses committed by the ruling military junta. Across the country, the military intensified its campaign of violence against civilians and resistance groups, resulting in widespread casualties, arbitrary arrests, and the systematic destruction of homes and communities through airstrikes and arson. Despite relentless repression, the people of Myanmar demonstrated extraordinary resilience, with resistance organizations — including the National Unity Government (NUG) and a broad coalition of Ethnic Resistance Organizations (EROs) — holding significant territory and continuing to challenge military authority.

The past year was further marked by a controversial and widely discredited election, a catastrophic earthquake in central Myanmar, and the growing impact of cyber-enabled financial crimes. Chinese support for the military junta remained pivotal, influencing both the political landscape and the military's grip on power. Amid these overlapping crises, the Burmese Democratic Futures Working Group (BDFWG) closely tracked major developments using local news sources and field observations. The following report presents a comprehensive overview of the trends and key events that shaped Myanmar's political environment during this period.

Earthquake in Central Myanmar

On March 28, 2025, central Myanmar was struck by a devastating magnitude 7.7 earthquake along the active Sagaing Fault, with its shallow epicenter near the Sagaing–Mandalay border. This was the most powerful seismic event to hit Myanmar in over a century and was followed by a significant magnitude 6.4. The human toll was catastrophic. Official reports confirmed over 3,700 fatalities and more than 5,100 injuries, while local media and humanitarian organizations estimated the death toll to have exceeded 5,400 and injuries to have surpassed 11,000. The humanitarian crisis affected an estimated 28 million people across the six impacted regions as far as neighboring Thailand and southwestern China.

The earthquake also caused extensive structural damage, leading to estimated economic losses of approximately US\$11 billion. Over 48,000 residential buildings collapsed and more than 120,000 homes were damaged. Key infrastructure such as the historic Ava Bridge in Sagaing and parts of Mandalay International Airport were destroyed. Myanmar's cultural heritage also suffered severe damage. The Mahamuni Pagoda, Mandalay Palace, and many ancient temples in

the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Bagan were heavily damaged. In total, more than 6,000 pagodas and temples, 3,800 monasteries, and 136 mosques were reported damaged or destroyed.

The disaster unfolded amid ongoing political turmoil and civil conflict, complicating rescue and relief operations, particularly in Sagaing. The military junta tried to politicize the earthquake, seeing it as a good opportunity to get international recognition through humanitarian aid. The military junta declared a state of emergency in six regions and made an appeal for international assistance. Humanitarian assistance arrived, but it never reached the people or the affected areas. The military junta failed to respond effectively to the crisis. It did not provide adequate resources to rescue the people trapped in debris. The people initiated their own rescue missions. But due to local limited equipment and facilities, such missions were not very successful. As a result of the military junta's inadequate response, more people died in the trapped debris than the earthquake itself.

It should be stressed: Prior to the coup, the NLD government had made the necessary arrangements to respond to the possibility of an earthquake in these areas. After the coup, however, the military junta abandoned these arrangements in order to use the dedicated funds to support its military operations against its own people. The disastrous effects of the earthquake would have been far less were the NLD government still in power.

Resistance Movements and Regional Dynamics

Myanmar's resistance against the military junta gained significant momentum following the launch of Operation 1027 in October 2023, resulting in the seizure of 94 towns by 2024. The military junta has also suffered defeat in numerous battles during this period. It appears to be on the verge of collapse, with resistance forces making further advances. For example, Mandalay, the country's second most important commercial city, is now just a few miles from territory controlled by resistance groups. After the passage of the 2024 conscription law, the military junta forced many young people into military service and sent them to the front lines, using new recruits as human shields exposed to resistance fire. This led to thousands of deaths among newly conscripted soldiers within weeks. The military also escalated its use of aerial bombardment and drones, with drone technology supplied by China and Russia.

As the military junta appeared increasingly close to collapse, China intervened by blocking supplies to the advancing resistance forces, particularly those based along the China-Myanmar border, pressuring them to halt their advances. China also began assisting the military junta in launching counter-offensives. With China supporting the military junta as well as pressuring Ethnic Resistance Organizations (EROs) to stop fighting (including China supporting counterattacks on EROs), the resistance lost momentum, capturing only three towns in 2025.

The situation worsened as China increased its support for the military junta. The MNDAA surrendered Lashio, the de facto capital of northern Shan State, and the TNLA relinquished five towns. The NUG lost three towns, while the KNU and KNDF each gave up two. In total,

resistance groups lost 13 towns—Demoso, Nanmaekhon, Singu, Naungcho, Mogok, Kuaukme, Mongmit, Lashio, Moe Bree, Thabeikkyin, Hsipaw, Thingan Nyinaung, and Lay Kay Kaw.

Despite these setbacks, resistance forces still controlled 84 towns. Indeed, resistance persists. The NUG and KIA held 19 towns. Chin resistance forces controlled 16; Karenni forces held four; the Karen National Union controlled two; the MNDAA and TNLA held 21; the UWSA controlled two; and the Arakan Army held 20 towns. Fierce fighting for control of the towns of Bamow and Kyaukphyu continued through the end of the year. Clashes also continued in Mogaung, Moghnyin, and Hopin between the KIA and military junta forces. The NUG, PDFs, and Arakan Army launched offensives in the Irrawaddy, Magway, and Bago regions. The military junta attempted offensives in Chin State with little success, while fighting persisted in the Karen, Karenni, and Tanintharyi regions.

Sham Election and Political Climate

Backed by China, Myanmar's military junta held the first phase of a staggered general election on December 28, 2025, covering 102 out of 330 townships, with two additional phases scheduled for January 2026. Due to ongoing conflicts, voting did not occur in 65 areas. As expected, the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) dominated, according to the military-controlled Election Commission. The military junta reported over six million ballots cast, representing about 52% voter turnout for this round. However, many people did not trust the military junta's statistics, as widespread boycotts meant only military supporters and those fearing persecution turned out to vote.

China's support for the election is widely seen as an effort to legitimize the military junta, but most countries—including Western democracies and several Asian neighbors—reject the results, citing the lack of inclusivity, ongoing violence, and limited democratic freedoms. Indeed, independent analysts and international entities argued that the 2025 election would not be free or fair. These entities included the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, the United States' State Department, the European Union, as well as the governments of Australia, and New Zealand. Instead, collectively, these entities described the election as a sham process designed to legitimize further military rule. Observers also criticized the process for banning major democratic parties such as the NLD and SNLD, as well as for suppressing dissent. Only six political parties aligned with the military junta contested nationwide; of these, the USDP was the only strong, military-backed party, while the others were weak and unstable.

Prior to the election, the military junta passed election protection laws that allow for the death penalty as a punishment. They also arrested more than 220 people for allegedly attempting to sabotage the election process. These "sabotage" cases include actions such as reacting with a "LOVE" emoji to a Facebook post criticizing the election as a sham or posting comments against the election. Some individuals have received sentences of up to 49 years in prison. After the election, political parties complained about widespread electoral fraud, accusing the election

commission of inflating numbers for advanced voting without proof. In many cases, the number of advanced votes reportedly exceeded the actual ballots.

To counter criticism of the election process and results, China, Russia, Belarus, Cambodia, Vietnam, Nicaragua, and Kazakhstan sent election observation teams, but these teams were restricted to Nay Pyi Taw for “security reasons.” They were not allowed to travel elsewhere. Despite their confinement and heavy security presence, China and Russia praised the election after the first round. China’s Special Envoy Deng Xijun stated that the election was conducted in accordance with agreements between President Xi Jinping and Min Aung Hlaing, suggesting that China is exerting significant influence over Myanmar’s current situation. Despite the hopes of the military junta and China, however, the international community remains far from recognizing the election, and the results have not brought the legitimacy the military junta expected.

Resumption of the Myitsone Dam Project

In August 2025, Myanmar’s military junta formed a high-level committee—including members from the energy, defense, and foreign affairs ministries—to restart the Myitsone Dam project. This move aimed to speed up negotiations with China and manage local resistance, signaling the regime’s reliance on the dam as a survival tactic as well as a means to strengthen ties with Beijing.

On December 16, 2025, Vice Senior General Soe Win announced a new agreement with China’s State Power Investment Corporation (SPIC) to resume the dam’s construction. Calling the project essential for “national development and strategic partnership,” Soe Win also warned opposition groups of “decisive and severe consequences” for any efforts to obstruct the dam.

The Myitsone Dam, first planned in 2001 and agreed upon in 2009, is a massive hydroelectric project at the confluence of the Mali and N’mai rivers in Kachin State. It is designed to generate about 20,000 megawatts of electricity—90% of which is destined for China—making it one of Southeast Asia’s largest hydropower projects. The project’s budget is roughly US\$3.6 billion, and it would flood 447 square kilometers, displacing at least 11,800 people, mainly from Kachin communities.

The dam’s location and the area to be flooded is not only home to rich biodiversity but is also regarded as the birthplace of the Irrawaddy River, a site of immense cultural and spiritual significance for local people. Environmental assessments warned of irreversible damage to riverine ecosystems, loss of fisheries, and heightened risks of earthquakes and landslides due to the dam’s location on a major fault line.

In late 2009, a group of Burmese and Chinese scientists and environmentalists released a 945-page report, advising against the construction of the Myitsone Dam for China Power Investment. Despite the report, the Ministry of Electric Power-1, after conducting its own

environmental assessment, decided to proceed with the project. The dam's construction phase officially began on December 21, 2009.

Public protests and environmental concerns led President Thein Sein to suspend the project in September 2011. However, China continued to push for its revival, viewing the dam as a key element of the Belt and Road Initiative as well as being vital for energy supplies to Yunnan Province. In recent years, Chinese state-owned enterprises have offered more flexible terms and revenue sharing to win support, but widespread opposition remains.

The military junta's decision to resume the dam in 2025 is driven by the need for Chinese support amid sanctions, dwindling foreign reserves, and resistance from its own people. The project serves as a diplomatic bargaining chip with Beijing and a symbol of defiance against international pressure. For China, it strengthens strategic and economic ties, securing energy and transport links to the Indian Ocean.

Despite threats from the military junta, local and international opposition persists. Environmentalists, civil society, and Kachin leaders warn of irreversible ecological damage and the loss of cultural heritage, while the Kachin Independence Organization has vowed to defend ancestral lands. Reports of increased gold mining and deforestation have heightened concerns.

Cyber-Enabled Financial Crime and Scam Centers

Myanmar remained a hub for financial scam centers and cyber-enabled financial crime in 2025. Opensource reports indicate that organized crime syndicates, including the Border Guard Force (BGF) and Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), orchestrated large-scale money laundering as well as online fraud operations. These operations targeted victims worldwide, reportedly defrauding nearly \$10 billion annually from United States residents alone. Despite international pressure and high-profile raids by the military, the true leaders often evaded arrest while low-level operatives were detained. Recent United States sanctions against BGF and DKBA leadership, as well as the establishment of a task force to combat cyber money laundering, signal a growing commitment to this issue. However, experts remain skeptical about the military's willingness to genuinely curb these scams, especially as new fraud schemes proliferate across Myanmar.

The Spring Revolution Alliance (SRA) founded by 19 independent groups and welcome by NUG

After Myanmar's military coup in February 2021, the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) emerged to assert its legitimacy. This led to the creation of the National Unity Government (NUG), which established a Ministry of Defense (MoD) to coordinate newly formed youth resistance groups nationwide. Through the MoD, these groups were consolidated under the People's Defense Force (PDF) to centralize command and improve operational

effectiveness. Nevertheless, approximately 18 resistance groups in mainland Myanmar chose to remain independent, declining to affiliate with the NUG or MoD. Their lack of a unified command structure drew public criticism, as many believed stronger coordination was vital for mounting an effective challenge to military rule.

In response to the need for greater unity, fourteen of these mainland groups joined forces with several ethnic minority organizations: the Chin Brotherhood (a coalition of ethnic Chin groups), the Karenni Nationalities Defense Force (KNDF), the Mon State Revolution Force, the Danu People's Liberation Force, and the Pa-O People's Defense Force (Kham Dom). In November 2025, these groups officially launched the Spring Revolution Alliance (SRA). This collective brought together highly capable but previously small and isolated forces, allowing them to pool resources, coordinate strategies, and increase their impact against the well-equipped military junta.

The SRA's core objective is to build a unified military command that can plan and execute strategic operations against the military junta. Unlike the NUG, which serves as the political face of the opposition, the SRA functions strictly as an independent military alliance, acting as the operational engine of the resistance. Leadership includes prominent figures such as Khun Bedu from the KNDF, who played a pivotal role in organizing the alliance and serves as its spokesperson.

The strategic significance of the SRA lies in its ability to bridge ethnic and Bamar resistance groups, fostering a coordinated "constrictor" strategy aimed at expanding territorial control and intensifying pressure on the military junta. By transforming fragmented efforts into a united front, the SRA markedly enhances the effectiveness of anti-junta operations and injects fresh momentum into the revolution.

The NUG has welcomed the establishment of the SRA, recognizing its potential to fortify the collective resistance. Both entities have pledged to work closely to bring an end to military rule in Myanmar. The formation of the SRA represents a pivotal shift in the struggle, with the NUG (political leadership), Ethnic Resistance Organizations (EROs), and the SRA now collaborating more closely than ever. This united approach has galvanized hope for a successful revolution and the restoration of democracy in Myanmar.

Silent Strike 2025

Myanmar witnessed another silent strike on International Human Rights Day, December 10, 2025, as its streets emptied and cities like Yangon, Mandalay, Monywa, and Tedim became eerily deserted. This powerful act of collective courage and resilience was a direct response to ongoing military oppression, with citizens heeding the call from pro-democracy activists and anti-regime groups to remain indoors from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Once again, this peaceful protest—repeated annually since the 2021 coup—demonstrated the unwavering resolve of the people. Despite

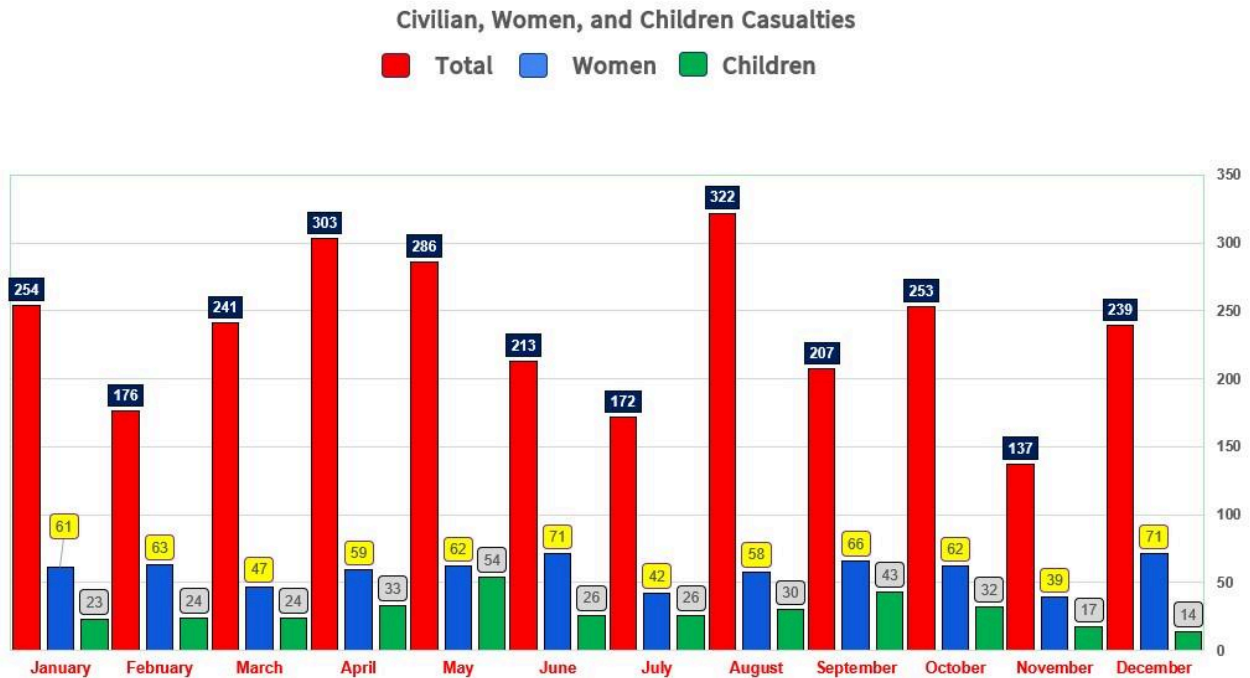
authorities threatening shopkeepers with arrest and pursuing activists under draconian new laws, haunting images on social media revealed the striking calm that blanketed the nation. The silent strike sent a clear message: the spirit of resistance among Myanmar’s people endures, unbroken by fear or repression.

Civilian Casualties and Humanitarian Impact

BDFWG closely monitors local media reports on a daily basis, compiling weekly and monthly updates. The following report covers the year 2025, with all information sourced exclusively from local media and verified through cross-checking.

Civilian Casualties

From January to December 2025, military air and artillery attacks across Myanmar resulted in the deaths of 2,803 civilians, including 346 children and 691 women. The Sagaing Region suffered the highest casualties with 758 deaths, followed by Mandalay Region with 457, Rakhine State with 320, Magway Region with 303, Kachin State with 197, Northern Shan State with 174, Bago Region with 145, Tanintharyi Region with 122, Karenni State with 82, Mon State with 71, Karen State with 55, Irrawaddy Region with 45, Southern Shan State with 40, and Chin State with 36.



Massacres:

BDFWG recorded 114 massacres (defined as the killing of more than five civilians by the military junta in a single event). These massacres resulted in 1,146 deaths. (BDFWG maintains a separate report detailing these incidents; please email hxz2nf@virginia.edu to access the report, or review the website, www.bdfwg2021.org/, where it will be uploaded in January 2026). The majority of the massacres occurred in the central and northwestern regions—specifically Sagaing, Mandalay, and Magway regions. These regions accounted for 65 of the 114 documented incidents. Sagaing Region was the most heavily impacted by the massacres (32), followed by Mandalay (18) and Magway (15). The violence extended to other areas, including Rakhine State, Shan State, Kachin State, and Karenni State, while regions like Yangon and Nay Pyi Taw reported no massacres. Of the 114 massacres in 2025, 97 resulted from aerial attacks targeting civilian locations such as monasteries, internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, hospitals, schools, teashops, wedding receptions, and funerals. The airstrikes appeared designed to deliberately hit sites where large numbers of unarmed people had gathered. Notably, the Oththingdwin village massacre in May 2025 claimed the lives of more than 20 underaged children, and the Mrauk-U Hospital massacre in December 2025 resulted in over 30 hospitalized civilians killed. In addition to aerial attacks, ground operations led to 12 massacres characterized by the arrest, torture, and killing of civilians and the burning of entire villages, with some particularly harrowing cases involving civilians being tied up, tortured, and burned alive.

Aerial Assaults on Civilians by the Military Council

Between January and December 2025, the military junta carried out 3,118 airstrikes throughout Myanmar. The Sagaing Region experienced 856 airstrikes, Mandalay Region 574, Magway Region 371, Northern Shan State 201, Kachin State 190, Tanintharyi Region 180, Rakhine State 145, Chin State 131, Bago Region 122, Karen State 116, Irrawaddy Region 97, Karenni State 67, Southern Shan State 36, and Mon State 32.

Civilians' Houses Burnt Down

Throughout Myanmar, 13,436 houses were destroyed by arson at the hands of the military junta in 2025. Mandalay Region reported 3,428 houses burned, Magway Region 3,368, Sagaing Region 3,142, Bago Region 1,329, Rakhine State 849, Tanintharyi Region 478, Southern Shan State 297, Karen State 252, Chin State 109, Irrawaddy Region 84, Northern Shan State 40, Kachin State 34, and Mon State 26.

Arrest of Civilians by the Military Council

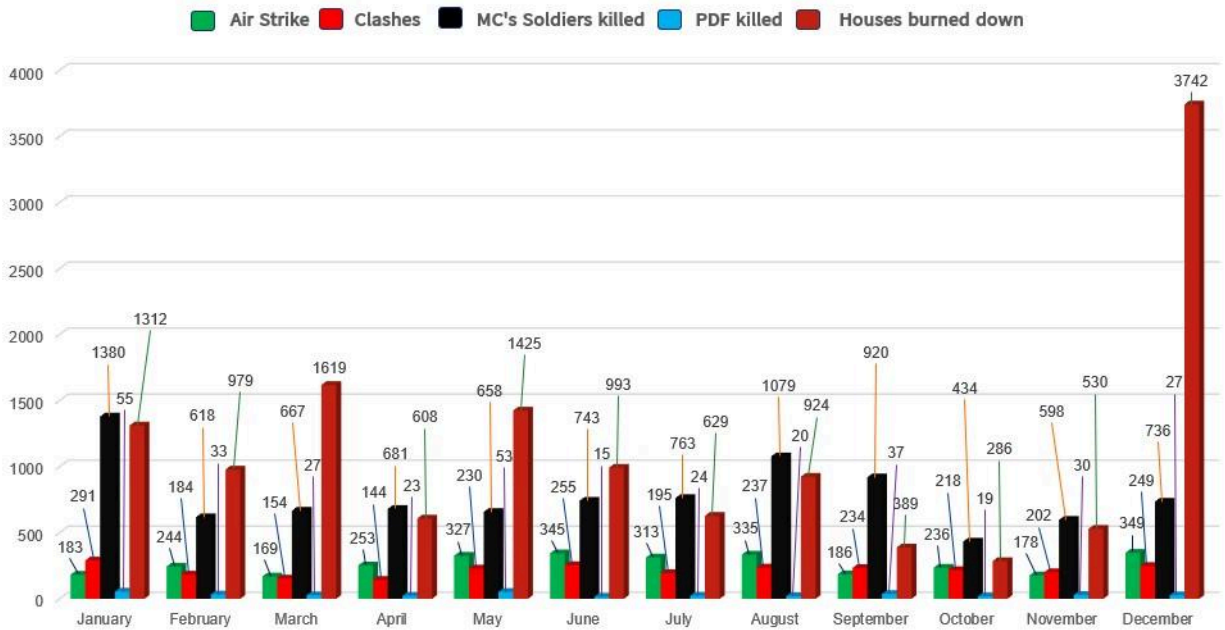
During the same period, 4,870 civilians were arrested by the military junta. Sagaing Region saw 1,381 arrests, Magway Region 655, Mandalay Region 627, Bago Region 511, Irrawaddy Region 390, Mon State 263, Tanintharyi Region 255, Yangon Region 231, Rakhine State 156, Kachin State 131, Chin State 65, Northern Shan State 56, Karen State 30, Southern Shan State 24, and Karenni State 5.

Armed Conflicts and Casualties

Between January and December 2025, there were 2,593 major and minor clashes, including drone strikes, with Sagaing Region reporting the highest at 397. Magway Region had 305, Bago Region 302, Karen State 299, Tanintharyi Region 293, Mandalay Region 248, Kachin State 176, Southern Shan State 152, Rakhine State 93, Irrawaddy Region 92, Northern Shan State 74, Mon State 68, Chin State 56, and Karenni State 38. Yangon Region did not record any clashes.

Throughout the year, 9,277 military junta soldiers were killed in combat. The highest number of deaths occurred in Sagaing Region with 1,514, followed by Magway Region with 1,411, Mandalay Region with 1,227, Bago Region with 1,208, Tanintharyi Region with 937, Karen State with 685, Kachin State with 535, Southern Shan State with 422, Rakhine State with 386, Karenni State with 280, Mon State with 240, Chin State and Irrawaddy Region with 176 each, Northern Shan State with 60, and Yangon Region with 20. Additionally, 363 fighters from resistance joint forces lost their lives in 2025.

2025 Summary



All information in this section is based on local news reports published in 2025. Sources - The Irrawaddy, RFA, Ayeeyarwaddy Times, D Day News, Myanmar Pressphoto Agency, Khit Thit Media, Narinjara, Mizzima, Myanmar Now, DVB, BBC, MeKong News, Than Lwin Times, PVTV, Khonumthung Burmese.

Data of Myanmar Conflict January to December 2025 Total								
States	Clashes between SAC and PDF/EAOs	Air Strike	SAC's soldiers killed	PDF killed	Children killed	Civilians killed	Civilians arrested	Houses burned down
January	291	183	1380	55	23	234	577	1312
February	184	244	618	33	25	151	326	979
March	154	169	667	27	24	217	303	1619
April	144	253	681	23	33	270	249	608
May	230	327	658	53	55	231	323	1425
June	255	345	743	15	15	144	296	993
July	195	313	763	24	26	187	413	629
August	237	335	1079	20	30	292	372	924
September	234	186	920	37	47	160	565	389
October	218	236	434	19	37	226	351	286
November	202	178	598	30	17	120	317	530
December	249	349	736	27	14	225	778	3742
Total	2593	3118	9277	363	346	2457	4870	13436

Additional Information from Sources Outside BDFWG:

The Ministry of Human Rights (MOHR) of NUG reports that as of December 31, 2025, the regime had conducted 4,498 airstrikes, resulting in 4,683 deaths. Furthermore, 5,116 individuals were killed in 494 massacres, and 31,763 people were forcibly recruited. The total number of human rights violations—including 5,351 extrajudicial killings, with the worst cases in Sagaing Region—amounts to 23,277, underscoring the persistent and escalating crimes against civilians since the coup in February 2021. By the end of 2025, UNHCR reported 3.6 million internally displaced persons (IDPs). Since the military coup in February 2021, over 7,600 civilians have been killed and more than 30,000 people have been arbitrarily detained, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP). According to a statement issued by the Ministry of Defense (MOD) of the NUG on January 21, airstrikes by the military junta across the country in 2025 resulted in 2,326 civilian deaths and 4,146 injuries.

Conclusion

Myanmar's experience in 2025 was defined by ongoing political repression, violent conflict, widespread human rights violations, and deepening humanitarian distress. The military junta's entrenched rule—reinforced by Chinese backing and legitimized through a sham election—continued to destabilize the nation and inflict suffering on millions. The effects of the March earthquake underscored the acute vulnerability of Myanmar's population and the urgent need for effective humanitarian aid, as official relief frequently failed to reach those most in need.

At the same time, the BDFWG report also documents the resilience of Myanmar's people which continues to shine through persistent violence and hardship, offering hope for a future free from oppression. The international community's response, the unity of resistance groups, and the protection of human rights will be crucial in determining the trajectory of Myanmar in the years ahead. Ultimately, the struggle for justice, dignity, and democracy endures at the heart of the nation's journey. The resilience demonstrated by the people of Myanmar stands as a testament to their enduring aspiration for freedom, justice, and a return to democratic rule.