



**Policy Brief**  
**Myanmar's 2025–2026 Elections:**  
**Institutionalized Fraud and Policy Options for the International Community**

**Executive Summary**

Myanmar's 2025–2026 general election was not a democratic transition but a strategic exercise in institutional capture designed to legitimize the military junta following the 2021 coup. Conducted amid civil war, mass displacement, and the dismantling of opposition politics, the elections served as a mechanism for consolidating military power under a nominally civilian façade.

Through restrictive party laws, a captured Union Election Commission (UEC), manipulated voting systems, geographic exclusion, coercion of voters, and violent repression, the junta engineered a pre-determined outcome favoring the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). The process disenfranchised millions and erased the political mandate of the 2020 election.

International responses remain divided. While China and parts of ASEAN lean toward selective engagement, Western governments and the United Nations reject the polls as illegitimate. This policy brief assesses how Myanmar's election architecture functions as a mechanism of authoritarian entrenchment and outlines policy options for governments, regional organizations, and multilateral institutions seeking to prevent the normalization of military rule while supporting bottom-up democratic alternatives.

**1. Background and Context**

Following the February 2021 coup, Myanmar's military nullified the landslide 2020 victory of the National League for Democracy (NLD) and declared emergency rule through the State Administration Council (SAC). Repeated extensions of emergency powers broke the rules set by the junta's own 2008 Constitution, allowing more time to dismantle political opposition and resistance groups.

In July 2025, the SAC was replaced by the State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC), centralizing power in Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, who simultaneously took on military and civilian roles. This organizational restructuring blurred the distinction between military command and government leadership, ensuring that any "civilian" government formed after elections would still remain under military control.

The elections took place amid widespread violence, forced conscription, economic collapse, and the displacement of more than five million people. Instead of resolving Myanmar's



crisis, the polls were seen as a way to avoid accountability, allowing junta leaders to portray themselves as elected officials rather than coup leaders.

## **2. Electoral Engineering and Political Exclusion**

### **2.1 Political Parties Registration Law**

The cornerstone of electoral control was the 2023 Political Parties Registration Law. It increased membership and organizational thresholds to unrealistic levels for genuine opposition parties operating under repression and conflict. Union-level parties were required to recruit 100,000 members and establish offices in at least half the country's townships within months—conditions impossible to meet outside military-controlled zones.

Failure to re-register resulted in automatic dissolution. Consequently, major parties like the NLD and Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) were removed from formal politics. Later amendments enabled the UEC to disqualify parties for contact with so-called “terrorist” groups, a label broadly used for the National Unity Government (NUG), People's Defense Forces, and ethnic organizations.

This resulted in a controlled pluralism: multiple parties existed, but only those loyal or harmless to the regime remained competitive.

### **2.2 Capture of the Union Election Commission**

The UEC was restructured after the coup and came under direct military control. Its leadership comprised former generals with a record of overseeing fraudulent elections.

Most critically, the UEC canceled the entire 2020 election despite lacking the constitutional authority to do so. Under Myanmar's electoral law, only constituency-based challenges resolved by tribunals can overturn results. By canceling the national outcome, the UEC acted outside the law, replacing legal processes with command authority.

Later directives limited political parties from engaging with foreign diplomats or journalists without approval, further isolating Myanmar's remaining political space from international oversight.

## **3. Technical Manipulation and Geographic Disenfranchisement**

### **3.1 Voting System Changes**

The junta changed Myanmar's electoral system by adding Mixed-Member Proportional (MMP) representation in the upper house and regional assemblies. Although framed as a reform, this change prevented any single opposition group from gaining majorities and ensured military dominance when combined with constitutionally reserved military seats. With 25% of seats automatically allocated to the armed forces, proportional rules further decreased the popular vote share required for military control.



### **3.2 Electronic Voting Failures**

The introduction of Myanmar Electronic Voting Machines (MEVMs) created new vulnerabilities. Machines malfunctioned across multiple townships, failed to provide verifiable audit trails, and raised fears of vote monitoring. In some areas, machine tallies conflicted with voter behavior, and independent verification was impossible due to the lack of paper backups. Instead of modernization, technology became an additional layer of opacity.

### **3.3 Territorial Fragmentation**

Elections were conducted in phases because the junta lacked control over territory. Polling was canceled or limited in at least one-third of the townships, especially in Chin, Sagaing, Magway, and Rakhine. Yet, results from a few junta-controlled urban areas were used to determine representation for entire states. This practice turned conflict geography into political exclusion, depriving millions of meaningful participation while boosting turnout in regime-controlled zones.

## **4. Coercion, Advance Voting, and Legal Repression**

### **4.1 Manufactured Participation**

Official turnout figures surpassed 50 percent, but independent observers reported mostly empty polling stations. Participation was coerced through threats: denial of household registration, fears of conscription, pressure on students, and detention of villagers until they voted. Voting thus shifted from a political right to an administrative obligation enforced by fear.

### **4.2 Advance Vote Manipulation**

Advance voting served as the junta's main method of election fraud. Military personnel, civil servants, and pro-regime networks cast large volumes of ballots that overturned election-day results. In several townships, advance votes surpassed the number of registered voters or shifted opposition leads into USDP victories. This mirrored patterns from Myanmar's 2010 military-managed election and demonstrated institutional continuity in manipulation.

### **4.3 Election Protection Law**

The 2025 Election Protection Law criminalized criticizing the election process. Peaceful speech, protests, journalism, and artistic expression were penalized with long prison sentences, including life in prison. Hundreds were arrested, including artists and journalists whose only crime was expressing public skepticism. By criminalizing dissent, the junta made sure that electoral fraud couldn't be challenged publicly within the country.

## **5. International Responses and Strategic Risks**

### **5.1 China and the Stability Bloc**



China endorsed the election as a path to “stability,” focusing on protecting strategic investments through the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor. Beijing’s strategy supports a controlled political settlement that ensures military dominance while allowing limited civilian involvement. This creates a stability bloc in which legitimacy is functional rather than democratic.

## 5.2 ASEAN Fragmentation

ASEAN failed to present a united response. While some members quietly engaged with the junta, others rejected the election for violating the Five-Point Consensus. This division undermines ASEAN’s credibility and allows Myanmar’s generals to take advantage of diplomatic ambiguity.

## 5.3 Western Rejection

The United Nations, EU, and United States outright rejected the election. However, without coordinated enforcement mechanisms, non-recognition risks remaining merely symbolic rather than leading to real change.

## 6. Policy Implications

Myanmar’s election shows how authoritarian regimes can use elections not to promote political competition, but to **reinforce repression**. The junta is shifting from overt military rule to bureaucratized authoritarianism: “men in uniform” becoming “men in white.”

Normalization of this process risks:

- Entrenching military dictatorship through electoral branding.
- Marginalizing legitimate resistance governance structures.
- Establishing precedents for managed elections in fragile states.
- Allowing geopolitical interests to take precedence over democratic norms.

However, the rise of alternative governance models in resistance-controlled territories—like the Karenni Interim Executive Council—demonstrates that democratic capacity still exists outside of junta institutions.

## 7. Policy Recommendations

### For Governments and Multilateral Organizations

1. **Non-Recognition with Enforcement**  
Go beyond just dismissing by connecting non-recognition to visa bans, financial restrictions, and limits on diplomatic engagement with election-derived officials.
2. **Targeted Sanctions on Electoral Institutions**  
Expand sanctions to target the UEC, election technology providers, and ministries enforcing mandatory participation.
3. **Support Alternative Governance**



Direct humanitarian and development aid through local resistance administrations, civil society, and cross-border mechanisms instead of junta structures.

4. **Protect Information Space**

Increase funding for independent Myanmar media and strengthen communication platforms to combat election-related disinformation and repression.

5. **ASEAN Pressure Mechanisms**

Encourage ASEAN to condition engagement on reducing violence, releasing political prisoners, and including the NUG and ethnic groups in dialogue frameworks.

**For International NGOs and Donors**

6. **Invest in Bottom-Up Federalism**

Support administrative, legal, and gender-protection frameworks emerging in resistance areas, strengthening democratic capacity beyond the junta's reach.

7. **Document Electoral Crimes**

Expand evidence collection on coercion, voting fraud before elections, and territorial disenfranchisement for future accountability measures.

**Conclusion**

Myanmar's 2025–2026 elections did not restore civilian rule; they restructured dictatorship. Using law, technology, violence, and coercion, the junta transformed electoral processes into tools of authoritarian control.

For international actors, the challenge is not whether to recognize the election, but whether to oppose the normalization of managed authoritarianism. Policy responses must therefore move from symbolic condemnation to strategic engagement with Myanmar's democratic alternatives, ensuring that elections act as instruments of representation rather than tools of control.