



SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Enabling Environment

Snapshot

Myanmar/Burma

March 2026

Context

Period covered by the report: June 2025 - March 2026.

During the reporting period, Myanmar has experienced a further deterioration in political, security, and economic conditions, deeply shaping the operating environment for civil society. In 2025, the CIVICUS monitor [scored](#) Myanmar civic space as 'closed'. The junta's attempt to stage a national "[election](#)" between December 2025 and January 2026 intensified repression, as new laws and administrative measures criminalised criticism, restricted movement, and expanded state surveillance. Armed conflict has remained widespread, contributing to mass displacement, rising civilian casualties, and heightened economic distress.

During this period, the regime continued to rely on mass arrests, digital monitoring, travel blockades and targeted violence to consolidate control, while some armed groups imposed their own restrictions on movement and association in the territories they hold. New legal instruments—such as the [Election Protection Law](#), additional [migration controls](#), and the 2026 [Passport Law](#)—further tightened state authority over civic behaviour, expression, and mobility. At the same time, economic pressures have deepened as key development partners signalled aid withdrawals, exacerbating hardship for communities and [reducing resources](#) available to civil society actors.

Overall, these developments point to an increasingly hostile and volatile context, where civic space is severely constrained and public participation in governance is systematically suppressed. Civil society must navigate overlapping risks arising from armed conflict, authoritarian legal reforms, economic decline, and a rapidly expanding surveillance apparatus—all of which significantly undermine the safety, independence and viability of civic action in Myanmar.

1. Respect for and protection of fundamental freedoms

Fundamental freedoms in Myanmar/Burma continued to deteriorate sharply throughout June 2025–March 2026, with the military further criminalising expression, association, assembly and movement. The junta's escalating use of violence, digital surveillance and administrative controls reflects a systematic strategy to suppress dissent and consolidate authoritarian rule. Restrictions were imposed not only by the military but also by some armed groups, deepening overall insecurity for civilians and civil society. Key challenges and events include:

- Ongoing mass repression (as of March 2026): The junta [continued to detain](#) 22,358 political prisoners. Citing [ACLEDA data](#), since the 2021 attempted coup there have been at least 65,029 armed clashes and 16,710 civilian deaths, [displacing](#) over 3,473,400 people across the country.
- Criminalisation of dissent during the junta's "election" (December 2025–January 2026): The regime used its new [Election Protection Law](#) to arrest citizens for criticism, including for merely *sharing or liking* anti-election posts on social media. Digital monitoring [significantly increased](#) during this period.
- Restrictions on movement and association (2025–2026): The military [expanded checkpoints](#) and deployed advanced technology to identify resistance supporters and block travel to conflict areas, including [bombing a truck rest stop](#) in Sagaing Region during the December 2025 election period, killing nine civilians.

- Abuses by armed groups: In late 2025, the Arakan Army (AA) increasingly conducted [targeted violence](#) against Rohingya civilians and imposed its own travel restrictions in Arakan State, prompting [civil society to call](#) for inclusion of AA actions in the ICJ genocide proceedings in September 2025.
- New migration restrictions (January 2026): The junta [policy required](#) overseas workers with Overseas Worker Identification Cards (OWIC) to obtain a special approval letter from Naypyidaw before departure, causing [immediate travel blockages](#) for workers already at airports in January 2026.
- New Passport Law enabling total movement control (17 March 2026): On 17 March 2026, the junta [enacted](#) a new Myanmar Passport Law, granting the military-appointed Ministry of Home Affairs sweeping discretion to approve, reject or revoke Myanmar e-passports on national-security grounds, effectively [stripping citizens abroad of the right to renew documents](#) without returning to Myanmar under risk of arrest. The law integrates passports into the junta's expanding [UID-based](#) digital surveillance system.

Read together, these developments indicate an environment in which core civic freedoms are nearly extinguished in junta-controlled areas. The military's integration of physical repression with digital surveillance dramatically heightens the risks for activists, journalists and communities engaging in civic activity. Restrictions on movement—both within the country and internationally—further limit the ability of civil society to operate, rebuild, or seek refuge. Overall, the enabling environment is in a state of severe contraction, with freedoms routinely violated by both state and non-state actors.

2. Supportive legal framework for the work of civil society actors

The legal framework governing civil society in Myanmar continued to harden significantly during June 2025–March 2026, with the junta expanding its use of legislation to criminalise dissent and entrench military rule. New laws were designed not to regulate civic activity fairly, but to eliminate any opposition to the regime's authority. Key evidence and events were:

- Election Protection Law introduced: In July 2025, the [junta enacted](#) the *Law on Protecting Multi-Party Democratic General Elections from Obstruction, Hindrance and Destruction*, criminalising criticism and organising or distributing materials deemed harmful to the “electoral process.” By 19 January 2026, at least 404 individuals—including activists, civil society members and civilians—[were prosecuted](#) for anti-election speech and activities.
- Excessive sentencing for peaceful expression: On 20 September 2025, two young men [received 49-year sentences](#), and a 19-year-old woman received 42 years, simply for putting up anti-election posters in Yangon.
- Creation of the Union Consultative Council: On 3 February 2026, the junta's National Defence and Security Council [enacted](#) a new law, establishing the Union Consultative Council, an extra-constitutional authority with legal power to intervene in the affairs of parliament, the government, and the judiciary. The Burma Lawyers' Council [argued](#) that this move seeks to install a permanent military dictatorship, ensuring junta leader Min Aung Hlaing's control before the junta's government formed in March 2026.

These developments reflect a legal environment deliberately structured to suppress independent civil society and dismantle institutional checks on military authority. The criminalisation of peaceful expression has sharply increased the risks for civic actors, while the creation of new military-controlled bodies signals a shift toward permanent authoritarian rule. Civil society organisations face narrowing legal space, escalating penalties, and no avenues for protection under domestic law.

3. Accessible and sustainable resources

Access to resources for civil society remained highly constrained throughout 2025–2026, as international funding contracted and the junta continued to criminalise independent organisations. CSOs face shrinking donor pipelines and heavy restrictions on safe operating channels. Key evidence and events during the reporting period include:

- In September 2025, the Swedish Government confirmed it would end [all funding to Myanmar](#) by June 2026, cutting USD 2.65 million annually for independent media and human rights groups, [eroding](#) vital and historically supportive Swedish funding for Myanmar's pro-democracy movement.
- In February 2026, the United States [allocated USD 121 million](#) for humanitarian and development support, explicitly prohibiting its use through junta structures and directing funds through cross-border mechanisms.
- On 3 March 2026, the United Kingdom [banned](#) Myanmar nationals from obtaining student visas, imposing another restriction on Burmese civil society's resources. It raises fears that other countries may impose similar restrictions on Myanmar nationals and sever vital overseas education opportunities for civic actors.

The funding landscape is becoming increasingly polarised: while some donors withdraw, others shift toward non-state and cross-border modalities to avoid strengthening the junta. CSOs inside Myanmar remain severely under-resourced due to criminalisation and surveillance, while exile-based and cross-border organisations may see modest improvements. Overall, resource scarcity continues to weaken organisational resilience and humanitarian response capacity.

4. State openness and responsiveness

State openness to civil society is virtually absent in junta-controlled areas, with authorities refusing engagement and criminalising public input. In contrast, pockets of responsiveness have emerged in certain resistance-held areas developing interim governance structures. Key events during this period includes:

- Criminalisation of dissent against state projects: On 16 December 2025, [the junta issued an order](#) threatening legal action against any person or organisation opposing regime-led projects without what the regime deemed “sufficient evidence”, instructing all government departments to ignore public objections.
- Suppression of scrutiny of major infrastructure projects (late 2025): The above order was widely understood as a mechanism to push ahead with controversial projects such as the [Myitsone Dam](#) hydropower project on the Ayeyarwady River – suspended in 2011 following massive public protests over environmental, social, and cultural concerns – which the junta is actively seeking to restart with [Chinese partners](#).
- Contrasting engagement in resistance areas (2025–2026): Some emerging federal units and ethnic administrations [consulted civil society](#) on governance, while others maintained restrictive or hostile stances. Throughout 2025, a Karen education-focused CSO collaborated with the Karen National Union’s education department to strengthen its [education governance](#) policy. On 26 December 2025, a selection committee of seven groups – one group dedicated to civil society and women’s organisations – selected the [first prime minister](#) of the newly formed Magway Federal Unit Interim Government.

- Access to information in resistance areas: Some resistance groups have applied restrictions on access to information through internet blocks, including Starlink provider seizures. On 14 June 2025, due to Arakan Army (AA)-imposed Starlink and information restrictions, approximately 4% of people in largely AA-controlled Arakan State had [access to the internet](#) and cellular connection.

In junta-controlled areas, the environment is marked by complete state opacity, making meaningful participation impossible and exposing civil society to severe retaliation. The selective engagement seen in some resistance areas offers pockets of opportunity but remains highly uneven. Overall, civic actors face a governance landscape characterised by repression, unpredictability and systemic exclusion.

5. Political Culture and Public Discourses on Civil Society

Public discourse around civil society has become increasingly hostile and militarised, driven by junta propaganda [portraying CSOs as threats](#) to national stability. Despite this narrative, communities continue to depend on civil society as a lifeline amid state violence.

- Record number of airstrikes (2025): Citing ACLED data, the junta [launched 2,916 airstrikes](#), exceeding totals from 2023 and 2024 combined, targeting schools, hospitals, markets and other civilian infrastructure to undermine community support for the resistance.
- CSOs fill governance and service gaps (2025–2026): In both junta and resistance-controlled territory, local organisations [provided](#) food, healthcare, education and emergency support in conflict-affected areas abandoned or attacked by the junta. With CSOs [building trust](#) across ethnic regional lines through humanitarian assistance, they have gained the public mandate to support additional education, training and advisory activities.
- Local CSOs lead accountability actions: In September 2025, [local CSOs](#) led village-wide protests against a local armed group, demanding accountability for a child rape case which had not been investigated, holding the NUG to account and forcing it to respect due legal process.
- Junta blames CSOs for corruption (December 2025): When the junta issued its notice for military authorities to ignore and take action against unfavourable complaints on junta-led economic projects, it claimed that civil society [caused corruption](#), and hindered national investment and development, vilifying civil society by implying it was a risk to national development.

The junta’s vilification of civil society has deepened fear and mistrust, but its systematic destruction of public services has made CSOs indispensable to civilian survival. This dual dynamic places civil society in a precarious position—simultaneously criminalised by authorities and relied upon by communities. The political culture remains heavily polarised, with civic actors operating under constant threat.

6. Access to a secure digital environment

Digital freedoms deteriorated further in 2025–2026 as the junta expanded surveillance, censorship and targeted shutdowns. Myanmar remains one of the most digitally repressive environments in the world.

- In late 2025, of an estimated population of 54.9 million, [39.8 million](#) people were using the internet in Myanmar. Additionally, there were over 62.5 million cellular connections, and online penetration was 72.5%.
- Myanmar [was labelled](#) one of the *world's most restricted digital environments*, alongside China, in the Freedom House ranking (2025).
- The Myanmar Internet Project [recorded](#) 105 internet shutdowns across 73 townships in 14 of Myanmar's 15 states and regions, [frequently timed before airstrikes](#) to prevent civilians from receiving warnings.
- The junta used the 2025 Cybersecurity law to control telecom providers, monitor users and share data, enabling expanded surveillance at checkpoints. Their ever-developing surveillance system, supported by Chinese technology, highly [restricts digital freedom](#) and endangers civilians travelling through junta checkpoints and territory.
- Several resistance groups also carried out telecommunication [shutdowns](#) during this period.
- [Starlink service cuts](#): In October 2025, more than 2,500 users along the Thailand–Myanmar border lost service after network restrictions, impacting communication channels used by civil society and humanitarian responders.

The digital sphere has become a central battleground for control, with surveillance and shutdowns dramatically heightening risks for activists and communities. Restrictions severely limit information flows, inhibit humanitarian coordination and expose civilians to greater harm from military attacks. Civil society faces a near-total collapse of digital security, undermining both operational capacity and personal safety.

Challenges and Opportunities

Myanmar's enabling environment for civil society is on a severely negative trajectory, with shrinking freedoms, expanding surveillance, rising violence, and limited access to resources. While pockets of opportunity exist outside junta control, the broader civic space remains closed and extremely dangerous.

Risks:

- Intensifying conflict and airstrikes
- Further legal restrictions and digital surveillance
- Expanded and diversified movement controls and forced conscription
- Increased aid withdrawal and economic deterioration
- International or regional bodies bowing to junta interests following the military's "election"

Opportunities:

- Growth of cross-border funding pathways
- Emerging federal governance structures in resistance-held areas

- Rising international attention to systemic human-rights violations
- Strong initial international rejection of the military's "election"

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