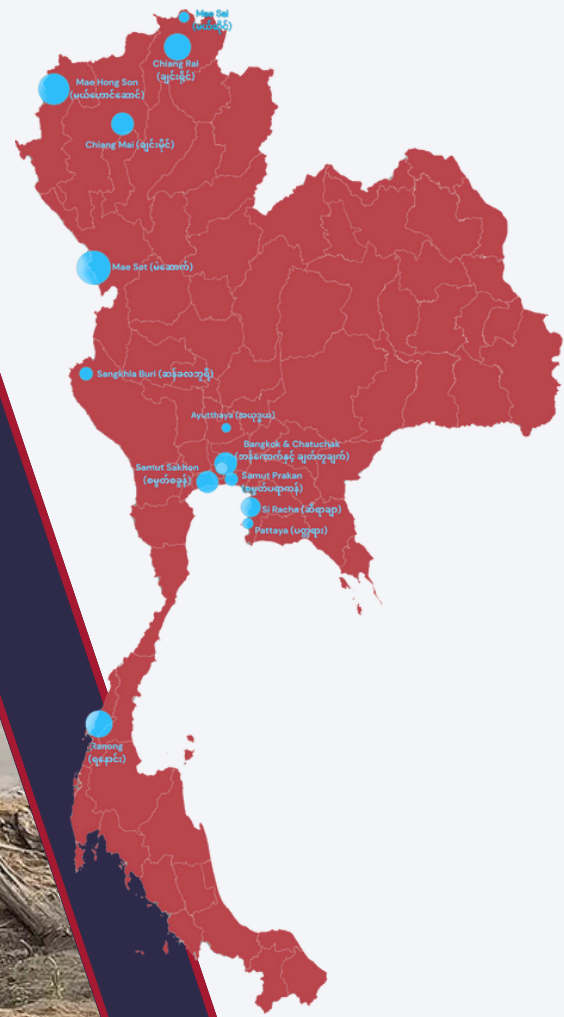


RESPECT MYANMAR

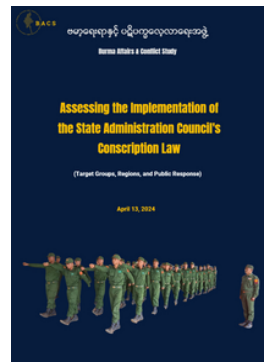
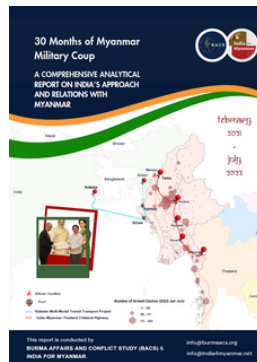
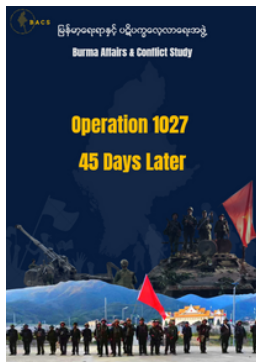
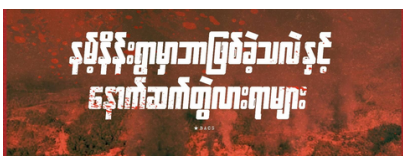
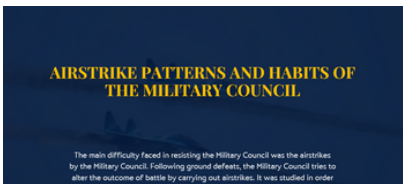
RESEARCH ON ELECTORAL SECURITY,
PARTICIPATION, ENGAGEMENT, AND CIVIC TRUST
OF MYANMAR MIGRANTS



Introduction to BACS

The Burma Affairs and Conflict Studies Group (BACS) is an organisation formed by a collective of committed young people including activists, engineers, students, media professionals, and others from diverse backgrounds—who share a firm determination to resist all forms of authoritarian rule. Prior to formally organizing, members had individually engaged in collecting information strategically, conducting analyses, and preparing reports to be shared with relevant policymakers and movement actors.

In 2022, BACS was established with the intention of presenting research-based analysis to the public and to local and international stakeholders in a more systematic and comprehensive manner. From the early days of the Spring Revolution’s protest movement to the present period of armed resistance, BACS has been actively conducting political and military analysis for nearly five years. Its core objectives include strengthening the people’s movement, contributing to the complete dismantling of authoritarian systems, and advancing transitional justice efforts in the post-revolution period. The group remains committed to these aims through continuous research and analytical work.



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Introduction of RESPECT Myanmar Research

The Myanmar military seized control of the country during an attempted coup d'état in February 2021, refusing to recognise the results of the 2020 general elections, in which the public had overwhelmingly participated.¹ The military junta initially stated that they would return power to the people through a five-point political roadmap, including holding a multi-party democratic election.² However, nearly five years after the coup, the junta has neither conducted the promised multi-party elections nor adhered to the provisions of the 2008 constitution they created. Instead, they repeatedly extended the term of the State Administration Council (SAC) seven times, disregarding the constitutional framework.³ During its five-year rule, the Myanmar military has implemented numerous undemocratic measures, including arresting opposition party members and abolishing organisations that were not registered under its newly updated political party registration law.⁴

Moreover, the junta announced the 'Election Protection Law' - a law that can restrict citizens' freedoms of expression and choice and even impose the death penalty—on July 29, 2025.⁵ Under this law, 64 civilians have already been prosecuted, and further arrests and repression continue.⁶ Findings indicate that up to 120 individuals have been arrested and charged under this legislation.⁷ Amid these conditions, the military continues to commit widespread human rights violations, including arbitrary arrests, detention, intimidation, killings, nationwide bombings, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, systematically repressing the public.⁸ In such an environment, the conditions, authority, and opportunities necessary to hold a genuinely democratic election that reflects the will of the people are clearly absent.⁹

Nevertheless, the military has sought to hold a non-inclusive election under its control to legitimise its continued hold on power.¹⁰ This planned election has received financial, technical, political, and economic support from both powerful countries and neighboring states, including China and India.¹¹ Such support highlights the lack of protection for the oppressed Myanmar population and the tacit enabling of the junta's actions by the international community.¹² Given this context, it is crucial to collect, document, and communicate the perspectives, opinions, voices, and sentiments of the Myanmar people regarding the 2025 elections.

This ensures that public voices reach international platforms, however indirectly. In response, the Burma Affairs and Conflict Study (BACS) undertook systematic research efforts to gather the views, attitudes, understanding, recognition, and sentiments of the public toward the junta-controlled election to be heard by the international communities. These efforts culminated in the “RESPECT Myanmar” Research.

Because of the constraints related to participants’ freedom and safety, as well as limitations on the research team’s ability to operate freely, this research targeted Myanmar migrants across Thailand, focusing on their views, access to information, willingness to participate, concerns, and expectations regarding the military-controlled elections. The research also explored the participants’ perceptions of the authorities, institutions and pro-democracy forces involved in the nation-building process, their assessment of the current situation in Myanmar, and the challenges and anxieties they face. This information was systematically collected, analysed, and presented in a manner consistent with rigorous research methodologies, while connecting the findings to international discourse, recommendations, and policy considerations.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research methodology to deeply understand and present the views and attitudes of Myanmar migrants in Thailand regarding the military junta’s planned 2025 election, as well as the challenges and pressures they face while living in Thailand during a period of intense military and political turmoil.



Data Collection Methods

Primary data were collected through In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The fieldwork was conducted in areas of Thailand where large populations of Myanmar migrants reside, based on demographic data identified prior to data collection.

The selected areas included - **total 14 Cities (11 Provinces)**

- Northern and Western regions: Mae Sot, Mae Sai, Mae Hong Son, Chiang Mai, and Chiang Rai, Sangkhla Buri
- Central region: Bangkok and Chatuchak, Ayutthaya
- Coastal and industrial zones: Samut Sakhon, Samut Prakan, and Ranong
- Eastern coastal region: Si Racha and Pattaya (Chonburi)

Participant Selection

Participants were intentionally selected using **purposive sampling** to ensure representation across diverse perspectives, including variations in gender identity, age, occupation, legal status, migration background, and duration of stay in Thailand. The IOM’s January 2025 data on Myanmar migrants in Thailand was used as a guiding reference.¹³ Priority was placed not on achieving numerical balance, but on capturing a wide range of lived experiences.

Fieldwork Process

Data were collected continuously over a period of two weeks. To accurately capture the perspectives and wishes of Myanmar migrants, the data collection process was conducted widely and comprehensively, reaching not only the locations within the researchers' immediate reach but also engaging with labour organisations, local community groups, humanitarian support organisations, women's and youth groups, as well as university students. The process included in-person meetings, interviews, and consultations to ensure thorough and representative information gathering.

Challenges and Limitations

Given the political nature of the study, researchers faced several challenges, including:

- The need to build sufficient trust for participants to speak openly about political and conflict-related issues
- Language barriers and variations in dialects
- Participants' concerns regarding personal safety

Researchers allocated significant time and effort to address these issues and create a safe environment for open discussion.

Ethical Considerations

The study followed strict research ethics protocols. Participants were clearly informed that their involvement was voluntary and based on their free consent. The research purpose and data usage were transparently explained before consent was obtained. Interviews and discussions were conducted in secure and trusted locations with the support of community facilitators, and researchers took care to understand local linguistic nuances and meanings with the help of residents and resident organisations.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using a combination of cloud-based Computing and Simulation and manual qualitative analysis to ensure both accuracy and depth of interpretation. Socioeconomic backgrounds, migration conditions, and varied personal profiles were compared and triangulated to identify divergent and convergent viewpoints.



Executive Summary

In the “Respect Myanmar” research, a **total of 209** Myanmar migrants residing across **14 cities (11 provinces)** of Thailand participated—**111** through in-depth interviews and **98** through **12** focus group discussions. Participants represented diverse groups in terms of gender identity and sexual orientation. The number of male and female respondents was nearly balanced, while individuals with other gender identities were included in smaller proportions.

Among all participants, the age group between 18 and 35 formed the largest segment, accounting for more than half of respondents in both data collection formats. The study population also comprised individuals from a wide range of occupations and ethnic backgrounds, as well as people who had migrated from different regions of Myanmar. For analytical purposes, the migration periods were categorised into three phases: before the military coup, after the coup but prior to the announcement of the conscription law in 2024, and post-2024 following the announcement of the conscription law. Clear shifts were observed across these migration cohorts, and the findings indicate notable links between reasons for migration and age groups. *(Further details can be found in the background information section.)*

Almost all participants in the study valued and respected democratic elections, viewing them as an essential national process in which all citizens should have the right to participate. Respondents also expressed a strong desire to actively engage in elections, driven by their expectations for the emergence of a civilian government, improvements in national systems, and enhanced public services through a democratic electoral process.

When comparing public attitudes toward politics and elections—and specifically their views on the upcoming 2025 election—with their past electoral engagement, particularly the 2020 general election, notable patterns emerged. Those who had participated in the 2020 election were found to have been involved not only through voting but also through election-related educational activities, poll-watching, and volunteering in election observation efforts. Their discussions reflected their hopes and aspirations for the 2020 election and their broader future expectations. Respondents who had taken part in the 2020 general election commonly described it as a fair and free election, one that genuinely represented the will of the people, evidenced by the high level of public participation.

In addition, participants highlighted that, under the former civilian government, they had experienced improved transportation infrastructure, economic stability, better employment opportunities, freedom of expression and safety, as well as freedom of movement. They also expressed that during the 2020 election period; they were able to hold aspirations and hopes for the future. Many noted, however, that all of these aspects had been lost as a direct consequence of the military coup.

(These reflections are further elaborated in the sections comparing public perceptions of democratic elections and participation in the 2020 general election.)

Although Myanmar migrants place high value on democratic elections and hold strong expectations for them, they do not believe that the military council's planned 2025 election will be free or fair, nor do they expect it to address the country's current challenges or hardships. They therefore do not consider it an election in which they should participate. In other words, they clearly perceive this election as a staged, illegitimate process that is neither relevant to them nor appropriate for their participation. Most respondents reported that they only had a basic awareness that an election would be held, while very few possessed detailed information that voters should typically know. Those who were actively seeking information were not doing so out of an intention to vote; rather, they were monitoring the process with skepticism to understand how the military council was shaping the election. These individuals were predominantly from civil society backgrounds and the media sector.

The majority of respondents believed that the military council does not have legitimate authority to conduct an election. Some expressed the view that the military council's legitimacy does not depend on public recognition, as they are armed groups who simply act according to their wish. This indicates that the public does not recognise the authority of the military council and views its current governance as an imposed and coercive rule.

The second-largest group stated that, although they acknowledged local or regional representation by various revolutionary forces, they did not believe that any single individual or organisation currently possesses the capacity to represent the entire country. Respondents from ethnic nationality regions tended to trust the ethnic revolutionary organisations associated with their respective ethnic groups. Among migrant workers, a notable minority expressed a desire to grant representative authority to labour rights organisations and individuals who have been actively protecting their rights and providing assistance during difficult circumstances. (These findings are further detailed in the section on public views regarding representation.) Regarding the conditions of living as migrants in Thailand, a dedicated section of the study examined the concerns and challenges they currently face. The majority of respondents highlighted their most pressing worries as the increasingly restrictive environment surrounding legal residency, the difficulties in obtaining official documentation, and the fact that many become undocumented simply because they cannot afford to renew their documents. Additionally, they expressed concerns about limited job opportunities, violations of labour rights, exploitation, and cases of wage theft. Many also feared the Thai authorities' arrests and forced deportations of undocumented Myanmar migrants back to Myanmar, which they perceived as life-threatening.

Other concerns included the shortage of food in refugee camps, the harsh living conditions, and the loss of access to education, healthcare, and future opportunities for young people. Although almost all Myanmar migrants expressed their intention not to vote in the 2025 election, they nonetheless worried that their decision to abstain might lead to even tighter restrictions and more severe consequences related to the hardships described above. These findings highlight the limited ability of Myanmar migrants to freely participate in the 2025 election, and show that rather than anticipating positive or meaningful changes from the election, they primarily feel heightened stress and fear. Notably, not a single respondent viewed the 2025 election as something beneficial for the country or as a meaningful step toward important change.

Continuing with questions on perspectives and sentiments toward the international community, the findings show that Myanmar migrants feel deeply disappointed with the United Nations and other international organisations, perceiving them as having neglected Myanmar's crisis. Similarly, respondents view ASEAN member states as approaching the Myanmar issue primarily through the lens of their own economic and strategic interests, rather than standing with the Myanmar people who continue to suffer from hardship and violence. They strongly believe that ASEAN lacks the willingness to genuinely support the Myanmar people.

Regarding Thailand, as a neighboring country, respondents expressed sincere gratitude for the acceptance and opportunities provided to them. They further hoped for increased humanitarian assistance, emphasising that they wished to be regarded not merely as “Myanmar nationals” but rather as vulnerable individuals in need of protection. They would like the Thai government to consider supporting them as displaced persons.

Moreover, respondents expressed a desire for Thailand to consider issuing a form of residency or work permit that is not tied to the military junta—one that would allow them to live and work lawfully during this transitional period in which they cannot bring about systemic or administrative change inside Myanmar. They suggested that such documentation could be granted based on Thailand’s own verification processes.

Particularly regarding arrests and deportations, respondents stated that deportation to Myanmar is equivalent to being sent to their deaths. They therefore strongly appealed for Thai authorities to refrain from such actions and instead handle cases strictly in accordance with Thai law.

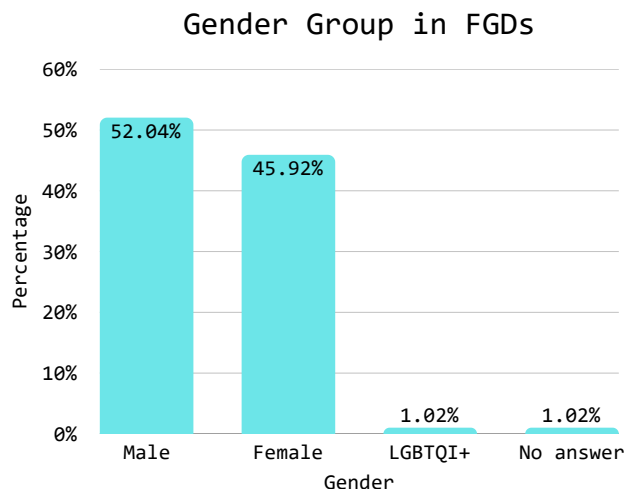
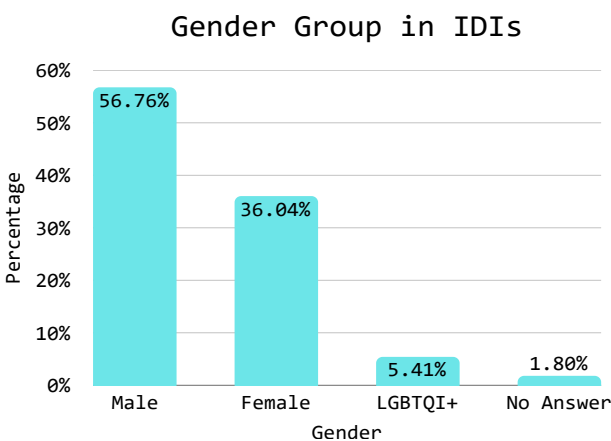
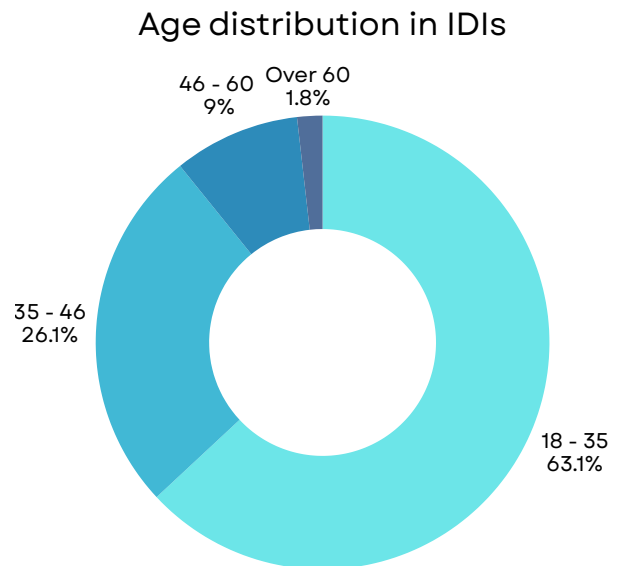
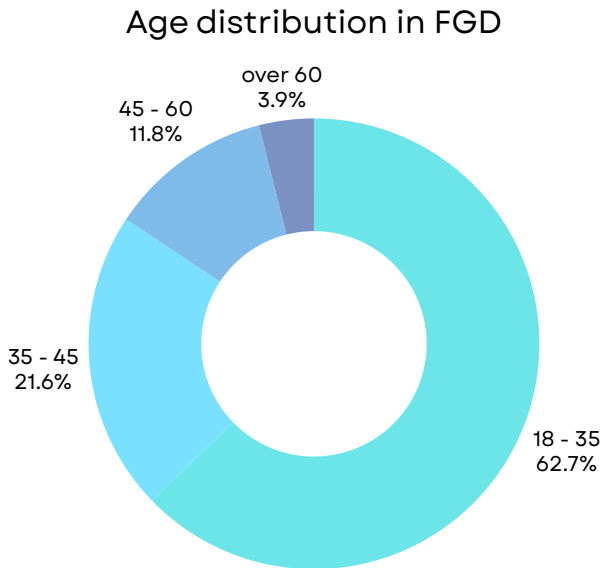
In conclusion, Myanmar migrants expressed deep concerns and hopes regarding future developments. Their foremost worry is that the international community—including Thailand—may mistakenly regard the military junta’s repressive, unfree, and unfair election as legitimate and formally recognise it. Respondents fear that if the junta gains any form of legitimacy, domestic repression will intensify and pressure on migrants abroad will increase, including higher taxation, forced contributions, and threats against family members in Myanmar such as arrests and the confiscation of property.

Looking ahead, respondents strongly believe that meaningful change and improvement in education, healthcare, economic conditions, and the overall political and military situation will require a collective leadership capable of driving genuine transformation. All participants perceived Myanmar as being in a state of severe deterioration across multiple sectors and emphasised the urgent need for greater cooperation among domestic actors, as well as more proactive international engagement to support conflict resolution.

Amid their own difficult circumstances, respondents were also found to express words of encouragement to fellow migrants and especially to those inside Myanmar, who continue to live under even more extreme constraints and dangers. These expressions of solidarity highlight the resilience and determination of the Myanmar people, which respondents recognised and deeply valued.

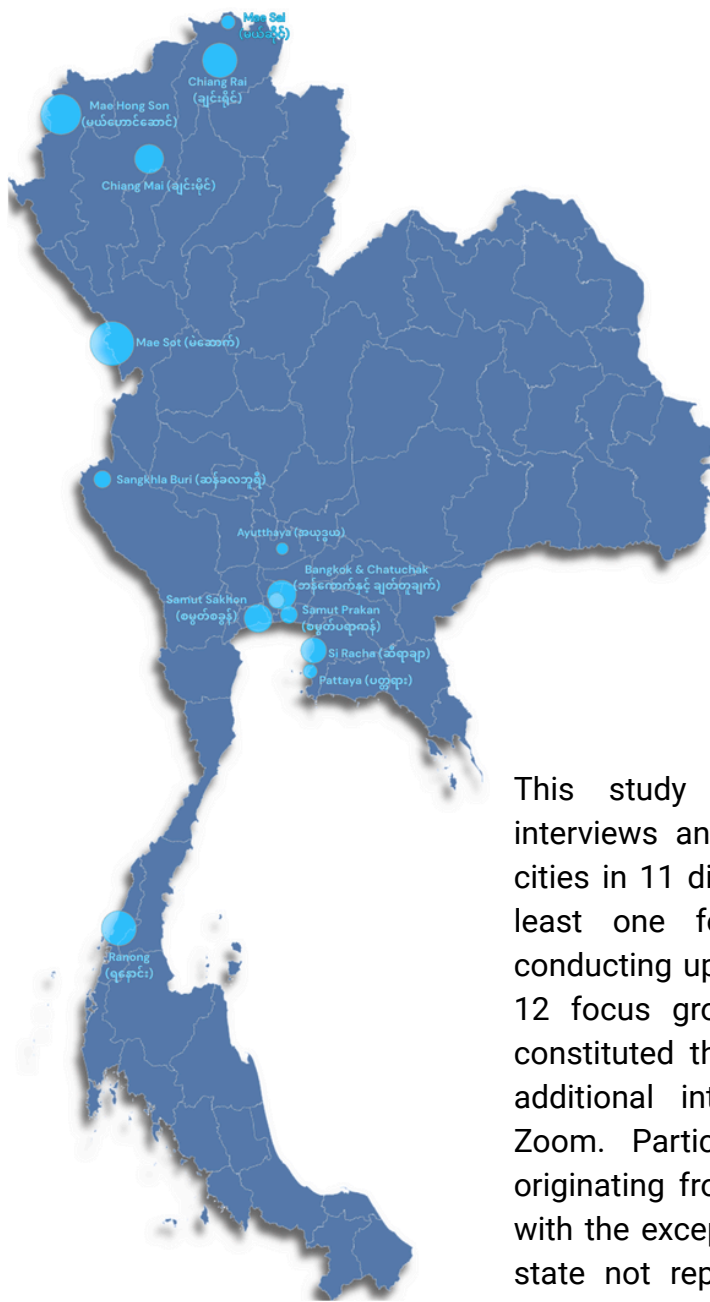
Demographic Information of the Research

This Research was conducted in 14 cities across 11 provinces in Thailand, with a total of 209 participants – 111 individuals who took part in IDIs (in-depth interviews) and 98 participants who joined 12 FGDs (focus group discussions). In examining the backgrounds of the participants, factors such as age, gender identity, ethnicity, occupation, previous place of residence, year of migration, and reasons for migration were considered. For clarity and ease of measurement, numerical calculations are based primarily on the 111 one-on-one interview respondents. The focus group discussions were mainly used to compare, validate, and enrich the findings from the 111 individual interviews with broader perspectives, shared experiences, and collective viewpoints from the group participants.

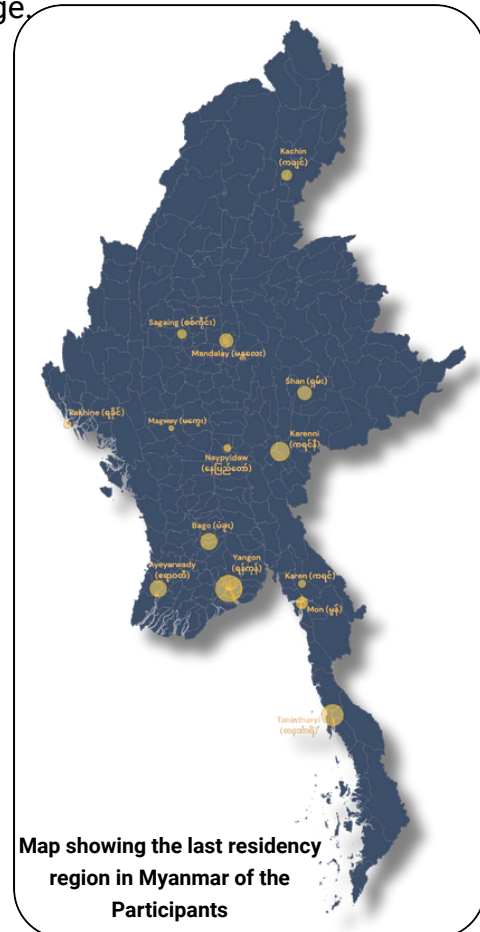


In addition to the one-on-one interview participants, the group discussion participants were also predominantly young people between the ages of 18 and 35. In terms of gender distribution, male participants constituted slightly more than half, while female participants made up nearly half of the total. It can therefore be said that the numbers of male and female participants were relatively balanced. Participants from other gender identity groups accounted for only a small percentage.

Research Area



Map Showing the Regions Where the Survey Was Conducted



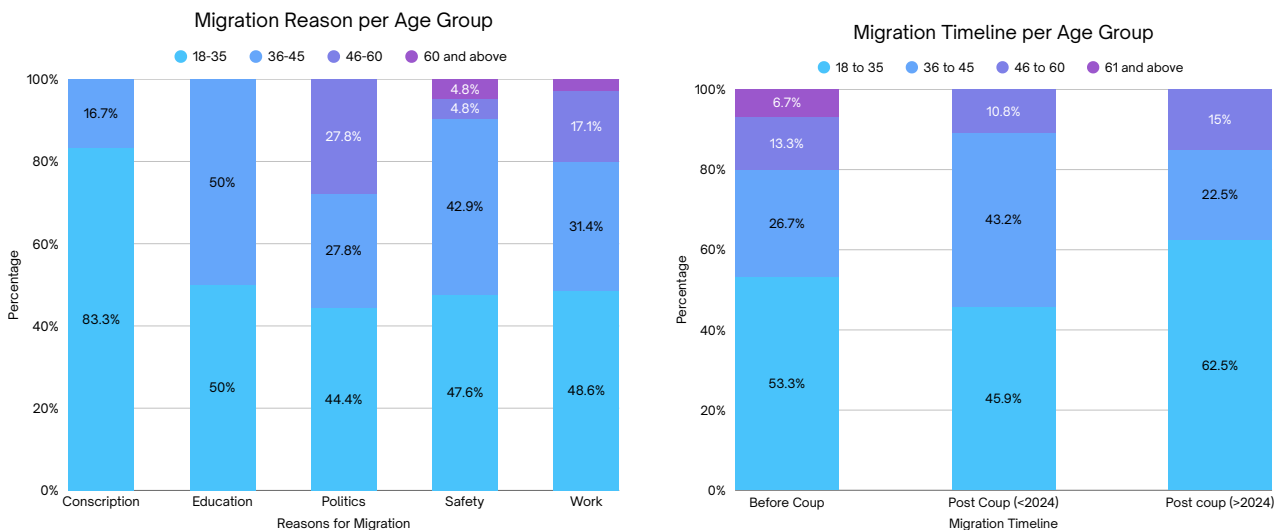
Map showing the last residency region in Myanmar of the Participants

This study was conducted through individual interviews and focus group discussions across 14 cities in 11 districts in Thailand. Each city hosted at least one focus group discussion, with some conducting up to two sessions, resulting in a total of 12 focus group discussions. Individual interviews constituted the majority of the data collection, and additional interviews were conducted online via Zoom. Participants in the study were migrants originating from all states and regions of Myanmar, with the exception of Chin State, which was the only state not represented among the locations where migrants were residing. However, the study did include participants from diverse ethnic backgrounds, including Chin ethnicity.

Examining the Migration Backgrounds of Participants

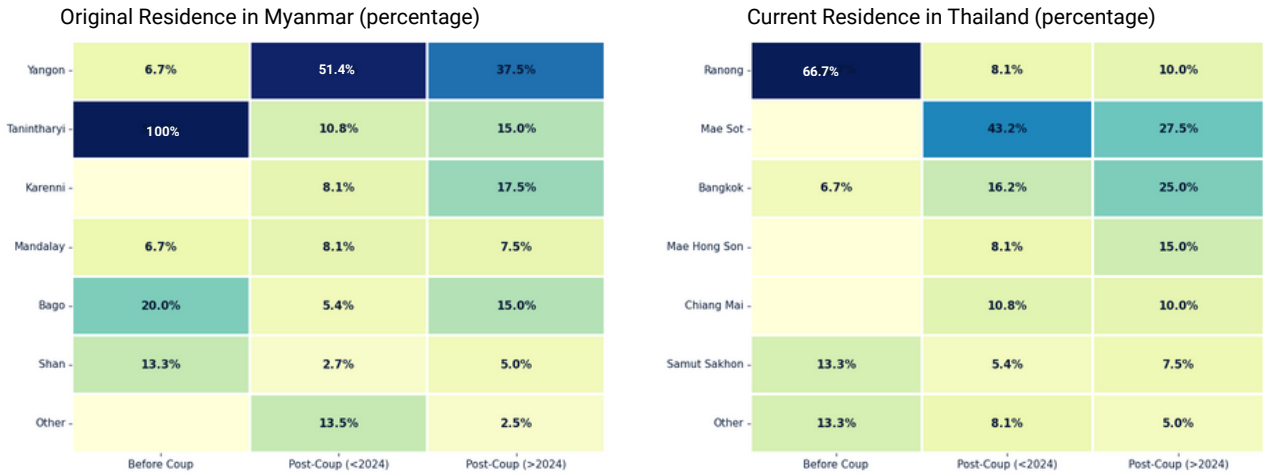
Participants in the study came from diverse backgrounds, and notable variations were observed in their migration circumstances. Therefore, the migration patterns of participant groups were examined based on age group and gender identity, including their periods of migration, destinations, and reasons for migrating. In addition, changes and differences in migration patterns were also identified in relation to different time periods and motivations for migration.

When categorizing the reasons for migration, five primary factors were identified: political persecution making it difficult to remain in one’s home area, pursuit of education, lack of safety in one’s community, the need to seek employment, and avoidance of forced conscription. In examining the periods of migration, the study distinguishes between three phases: the period before the military coup, the period from the coup up to 2024 before the initiation of forced conscription, and the period after the enforcement of forced conscription in 2024. According to available data on Myanmar migration trends, there has been a clear increase in the number of Myanmar migrants after 2024. This rise is linked not only to the escalation of forced conscription—which affects not only pro-democracy activists but the wider population across the entire country—but also to the broader insecurity and disruptions caused by the worsening political situation.³⁴

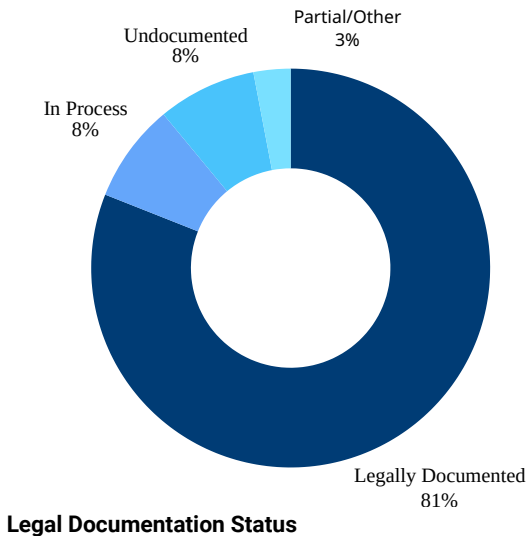


Among the respondents, it was found that young people constituted the largest group migrating due to forced conscription, with migration peaking after 2024. For middle-aged participants, education-related reasons were the most common factor driving their migration, and their migration was observed primarily in the period following the military coup.

Original Places of Residence and Current Settlement Locations



When comparing participants’ migration locations across different time periods, the study found that prior to the military coup, migrants from Tanintharyi Region constituted the largest group relocating to Thailand, with Ranong being the most common entry point. After the coup, Yangon became the primary place of origin among migrants, and Mae Sot emerged as the most common destination. In the post–2024 period, when forced conscription was implemented, most migrants originated from Yangon, Tanintharyi, and Kayah (Karenni) State, while Mae Sot and Bangkok became the most frequent destinations in Thailand. These findings indicate that participants came from across Myanmar and dispersed throughout various regions of Thailand due to multiple consequences of the coup. Furthermore, the data show that the military regime’s takeover and subsequent repressive governance have created conditions in which people across Myanmar are unable to live safely in their own communities, compelling them to migrate.



This study was conducted in 14 cities across 11 provinces in Thailand, using both in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Each city hosted at least one, and up to two, focus group discussions, resulting in a total of 12 focus group sessions. Most IDIs were conducted in person, while some were carried out online via Zoom.

1. Perceptions and Attitudes of Myanmar Migrants in Thailand Regarding the Junta planned 2025 Election

Trust in a Democratic Election

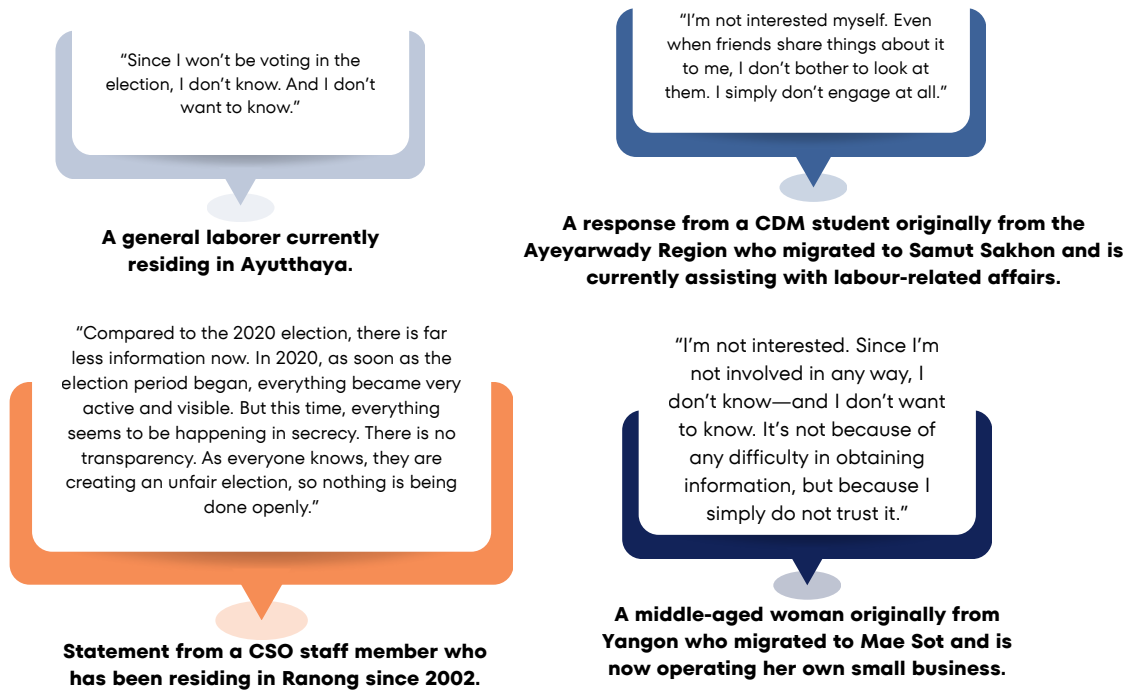
When examining migrant communities’ perceptions of the planned 2025 election in Myanmar, the study first explored their views on what constitutes a democratic election. More than 98 percent of respondents stated that a genuinely democratic election—conducted in accordance with the essential principles and characteristics of a free and fair electoral process—is indispensable for political transition in any country. The findings indicate that they place their trust and expectations only in elections that meet democratic standards.



In addition, more than half of the respondents believed that public legitimacy is the most essential characteristic of any election. They further stated that elections must be free and fair, transparent, conducted in accordance with electoral laws and procedures, allow political parties to participate and campaign freely, ensure freedom of expression, include independent election-monitoring mechanisms, and be administered by an elected civilian government. Only two respondents indicated that they were unsure. These responses clearly demonstrate the value that the Myanmar people place on democratic elections and their willingness to participate in such processes.

1.(a) Access to Information on the 2025 Election

Nearly all respondents were generally aware that the military junta plans to hold an election in December 2025, with only five individuals stating that they were unaware of it. However, when asked about their access to election-related information, more than one-third of those who knew about the planned election reported that they were not receiving any information. Most of these respondents indicated that their lack of interest in seeking further information stemmed from their distrust of the processes and procedures associated with the 2025 election. The remaining respondents stated that they had not received information because of the junta’s ineffective dissemination of election-related communication.



“Since I won’t be voting in the election, I don’t know. And I don’t want to know.”

A general laborer currently residing in Ayutthaya.

“I’m not interested myself. Even when friends share things about it to me, I don’t bother to look at them. I simply don’t engage at all.”

A response from a CDM student originally from the Ayeyarwady Region who migrated to Samut Sakhon and is currently assisting with labour-related affairs.

“Compared to the 2020 election, there is far less information now. In 2020, as soon as the election period began, everything became very active and visible. But this time, everything seems to be happening in secrecy. There is no transparency. As everyone knows, they are creating an unfair election, so nothing is being done openly.”

Statement from a CSO staff member who has been residing in Ranong since 2002.

“I’m not interested. Since I’m not involved in any way, I don’t know—and I don’t want to know. It’s not because of any difficulty in obtaining information, but because I simply do not trust it.”

A middle-aged woman originally from Yangon who migrated to Mae Sot and is now operating her own small business.

The level of interest among Myanmar migrants in Thailand toward the upcoming election is at its lowest point. Even basic election-related information—such as the date of the election—is not something they actively search for. Instead, they learn about it only through what circulates on social media, or through information shared by friends, acquaintances, family members, and relatives. In contrast, journalists, media workers, and some members of civil society organizations show relatively higher levels of interest due to the nature of their work. It was observed that they monitor updates on the military council’s election activities through state-owned newspapers such as *Myanmar Alinn*, state-run television news channels, and official websites including that of the Union Election Commission.¹⁴

1.(a-1) Advance Voter Registration – Form (15)

Following the announcement that the 2025 election would be held in December, one of the key processes closely watched by Myanmar migrants in Thailand has been the issue of advance voter registration, specifically Form (15). Form (15) is the application form that must be completed by eligible voters residing outside their respective townships listed on the electoral roll. It is typically used by citizens living abroad to submit their advance voter registration through the Myanmar embassy in the host country. Announcements stating that Form (15) could be obtained and submitted through Myanmar embassies overseas are usually made ahead of elections. In 2025, such announcements from Myanmar embassies in several Asian countries, including Thailand, began circulating widely on social media around August and September. The Myanmar Embassy in Thailand officially announced the availability of Form (15) through its Facebook page on 22 August.¹⁵



"Advance Voting at the Chiang Mai Consulate for the 2025 Election"



"Advance Voting at the Chiang Mai Consulate for the 2020 Election"



More than half of the research participants stated that they had never heard of Form (15) and had never seen it. Even among those who said they were aware of it, many reported that they had not obtained or received the form. The decision to obtain or not obtain Form (15) is directly linked to respondents' levels of interest, willingness to participate, and desire to engage in the election process.

To understand this situation, it is useful to compare it with the experiences of those who participated in overseas voting during the 2020 election. In 2020, there were many individuals and groups who actively assisted overseas voters in accessing advance voting information and ensuring that they could cast their ballots. In contrast, discussions among respondents indicate that, for the upcoming election, such information-sharing efforts are significantly weaker, and the public likewise shows little interest or motivation to participate. This comparative analysis clearly shows that public interest, willingness to participate, and sense of engagement in the upcoming election are substantially diminished. On the other hand, the current situation also suggests that the military junta has made no genuine effort to ensure that migrants have meaningful access to election-related information, instead issuing only the minimum procedural announcements required. These reflections are extracted and presented below.



In the previous election, people here—around this area—went to the consulate in person to collect the ballot application forms. After collecting them, we were instructed to fill them out within our neighborhoods in order to vote. At that time, there were people who were very active in helping with the process, and those participating were also quite engaged. That was how it was back then. But now, there is no one taking the lead and no one assisting. It’s completely inactive—nothing is happening. It has become the kind of election that nobody is interested in at all.



“Response from a young male general labor migrant who arrived after the 2021 coup.”



Back then, it felt like I was truly casting my own vote, so I did it with real enthusiasm. But that was only that one time. Now, no matter how much they try to persuade or pressure us, I have absolutely no interest at all. At that time, around this period, the whole neighborhood would be talking about when to go to the embassy. Everyone gathered, and it was lively and cheerful. There were so many people—really a lot. It was exciting because we were going to vote for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, so we went early. Girls like you would already be actively preparing to submit the forms by now. When we heard that it was time to vote, my friends and I would rent cars—big double-decker buses, four or five of them leaving from here. We would depart around 1 a.m. because we were afraid, we wouldn’t make it in time and would have to queue. That’s how energetic and motivated people were. But now? Nothing. Whatever they say, whatever they do, I’m simply not interested. Even when I see things online, I pretend not to notice and just scroll past. I don’t want to talk about anything related to them anymore. That’s how far it has gone.



“Statement by a young female general worker who migrated to Thailand in 2012.”



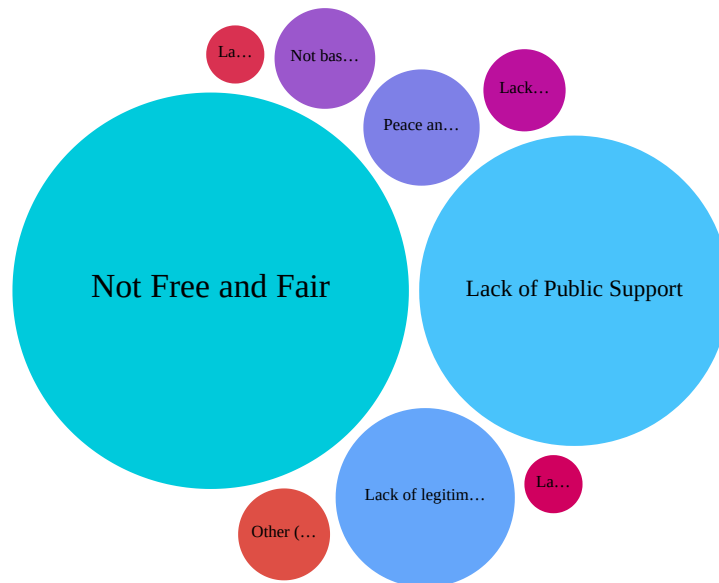
Back then, they did help. But now it’s not the same as before. How should I put it—people just don’t care anymore. When the public no longer accepts them, no matter how much they try to persuade, the people simply won’t accept it.



Response from a middle-aged male general worker

1.(b) Legitimacy of 2025 election, Authority of the Junta and problem solving capacity of 2025 election

Respondents who view democratic elections as an important political process expressed a lack of confidence regarding the legitimacy of the 2025 election, the junta’s authority to organize it, and its capacity to address the country’s ongoing crisis.



Almost all research participants consistently expressed the view that the 2025 election lacks legitimacy, a finding that was also uniformly reflected across all twelve focus group discussions. They predominantly argued that an election organized by a military regime—one that suppresses the public and does not allow freedom of expression—cannot be free or fair, and therefore cannot be considered legitimate. Many also believed the election lacks legitimacy because it does not have the support or participation of the general public. Additionally, some respondents stated that the military’s refusal to acknowledge the results of the 2020 election and its subsequent unlawful seizure of state power, carried out according to its own interests, further delegitimizes the upcoming election.

A total of 90.9 percent of research respondents stated that they do not regard the Myanmar military regime as a legitimate authority capable of conducting an election. This perspective highlights the interconnected nature of political authority and legitimacy. Further analysis of the explanations provided by those who questioned the regime’s legitimacy reveals clear and substantive political reasoning, reflecting concerns that cannot be easily dismissed in the current context.

Extracts from Respondents' Statements

A mother in her mid-30s who migrated to Mae Sot, Thailand in December 2024 said

“

They seized power unlawfully, and now they are just doing whatever they want. So I do not consider it fair at all. Their election is illegitimate. This election will not be fair or meaningful. The country has already collapsed—completely fallen apart—yet they cling to the power they grabbed for themselves. They will simply do as they please, relying on weapons to oppress the people. Because they are ruthless and brutal, they have already ‘won’ even before the election begins. That is why I absolutely reject this election. I do not like it at all. There is no rule of law or fairness whatsoever—that is what I want to say.

”

A young male general worker living in Pattaya, Chonburi Province, Thailand said

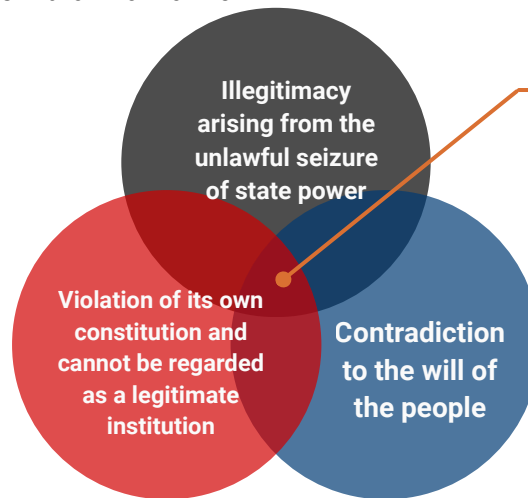
“

The military council seized power and is now running the election by itself—competing alone and winning alone. There is no trust. The country is in the middle of a war. If we really want to move toward a Federal Democratic Union, everyone needs to come to an agreement first. Only when the public genuinely supports it should an election be held. Right now, they are doing it as part of a political maneuver, just to claim themselves as a legitimate government. That’s all it is. They talk about federal democracy, but if they truly wanted that, they wouldn’t hold the election nationwide all at once—they would do it gradually, region by region. The NLD has been banned. Only small parties remain. And then you see military personnel switching into civilian clothes and running. With their own people doing everything, this kind of election is impossible. It’s ridiculous.

”

1.(b-1) Shared Perception of the Lack of Authority of the Junta

The majority of respondents believe that the military junta lacks legitimacy because it has unlawfully seized state power, and therefore any election it organises cannot be considered legitimate. This perception aligns with international law and political theory, both of which regard a coup d'état as an unconstitutional act rather than a lawful constitutional transition.



Among the respondents, 90.9 percent stated that they do not regard the Myanmar military junta as a legitimate entity capable of holding an election. This view reflects the perceived interdependence between authority and legitimacy.

Respondents further pointed out that the junta violated the 2008 Constitution, which it had drafted according to its own preferences. This view underscores that the junta has failed to adhere even to the legal framework it established to justify its authority, indicating a complete erosion of constitutional and legal legitimacy. Other respondents who linked the issue to the initial constitutional violation also argued that the junta cannot be regarded as a lawful entity, and therefore does not possess the authority to organise an election. This reflects a perception that the junta lacks the legal recognition and lawful competence required to function as a legitimate governing body of the state.

Some respondents believe that the junta holds no rightful authority because its actions run counter to the will of the public. This view emphasises the democratic principle of popular sovereignty, which asserts that legitimate authority derives from the people. Therefore, actors who act in opposition to the people's will cannot possess lawful or legitimate authority.

Some Extracts from the Focus Group Discussions

Similar views were consistently observed across all twelve focus group discussions. Some of the voices from different regions are excerpted below.

From the Focus Group Discussion conducted in Mae Hong Son – A middle-aged woman, formerly from Demoso and displaced after the coup said

“I personally don’t think so. In democratic countries, there is simply no such thing as an election being organised and led by armed actors. It is entirely impermissible. And in Myanmar, after the military seized power, they have been trying all sorts of things to claim they have a public mandate.



Armed SAC soldiers on a road amid demonstrations against the military coup in Naypyidaw © STR / AFP

1.(b-2) Recognition of Authority Based on Present Realities

A differing perspective is held by 4.5 percent of respondents, who view the military junta’s authority to conduct an election as something that must be acknowledged given the current circumstances. Their main rationale is that the junta has already seized political power unlawfully or is unlawfully exercising control and therefore, by default, holds the practical ability to carry out such activities.

De Jure vs. De Facto – This divergence in views reflects the distinction between authority that is legally legitimate (based on the constitution and public consent) and authority that is exercised in practice (based on coercive control through force). The perspectives of these respondents indicate an acceptance of the de facto reality, but—as can be observed from their responses to other questions—this acceptance does not equate to recognition of de jure legitimacy.

Among that respondent group individuals, one participant expressed the following view

“

“The power is in their hands. Since they have the authority to do whatever they want, then yes, they do have the authority. Whether it applies or not—it applies. Because whatever they do becomes ‘right’ in the end.”

”

It was observed that they responded with discouragement and resignation.

Such respondents consistently indicated that they did not believe the 2025 election would be conducted fairly. Their subsequent discussion elaborated on...



Myanmar's junta chief, attends an army parade on Armed Forces Day in Naypyitaw in March 2023. (Photo by Ken Kobayashi)

“

“This election is not an outcome of the current circumstances. I see it as an election that will not be free and fair. It is simply an election they will lead, and they will conduct everything as they wish.”

”

1.(b-3) Views on the Problem Solving Capacity of the 2025 Election

A large majority of respondents (89.1%) believe that the election organised by the military will have no capacity whatsoever to address Myanmar's ongoing multifaceted crisis. These respondents are also those who consider democratic elections to be important.

(1) Not a genuine pathway out of the crisis

Among those who believe the Junta planned election has no problem-solving capacity, 20.2% stated that the election does not constitute a real solution to the current challenges. This perspective reflects an understanding of the election not as a policy mechanism capable of transforming the situation, but merely as a political maneuver within the existing power game.

(2) A political exit designed for the military's self-interest

12% of respondents view the election as nothing more than a political exit crafted for the military's own benefit. They believe its purpose is not to serve the interests of the country or its people, but to secure and perpetuate the military's hold on power.

According to 10% of respondents, the election cannot resolve any issues precisely because it is an illegitimate process. This reflects a political understanding that authority without legitimacy diminishes the effectiveness of any political undertaking.

11% of respondents think that holding an election will not lessen ongoing political and armed conflicts. From the perspective of conflict resolution theory, this view suggests that an election lacking legitimacy cannot function as a trust-building mechanism to de-escalate tensions; instead, it may further deepen the conflict.

(4) Lack of legitimacy undermines problem-solving capacity

(3) No potential to reduce existing conflicts

A small number of respondents pointed out that the election would be unworkable while the country remains unstable. In political science, an environment lacking security and stability poses fundamental barriers to voter participation, free competition, and public acceptance of election results. Thus, the current situation is widely viewed as unsuitable for holding an election.

“

This election is not one that leads the country toward peace. It is a one-sided election carried out to prolong the authoritarian regime and entrench their power.

a middle-aged man who lives in Mae Sot

”

A young unemployed man who moved to Bangkok in late 2024 said

“As for them holding an election, we believe it is because they want a political escape route, and also because they want to claim some form of legitimacy. I believe this election is not for the good of the country—it is one carried out for the benefit of the military dictatorship. Another point I want to make is that even among groups that reject this election, there are forces on this side—from the PDFs to organisations aligned with the EROs. So regardless of whether the election is completed or not, the revolution will continue. That means the political and military situation will not be resolved.”

“This election will not only fail to resolve the pressures we are facing, but it could also create many additional hardships.”

A young male CSO worker who relocated to Samut Sakhon in early 2024



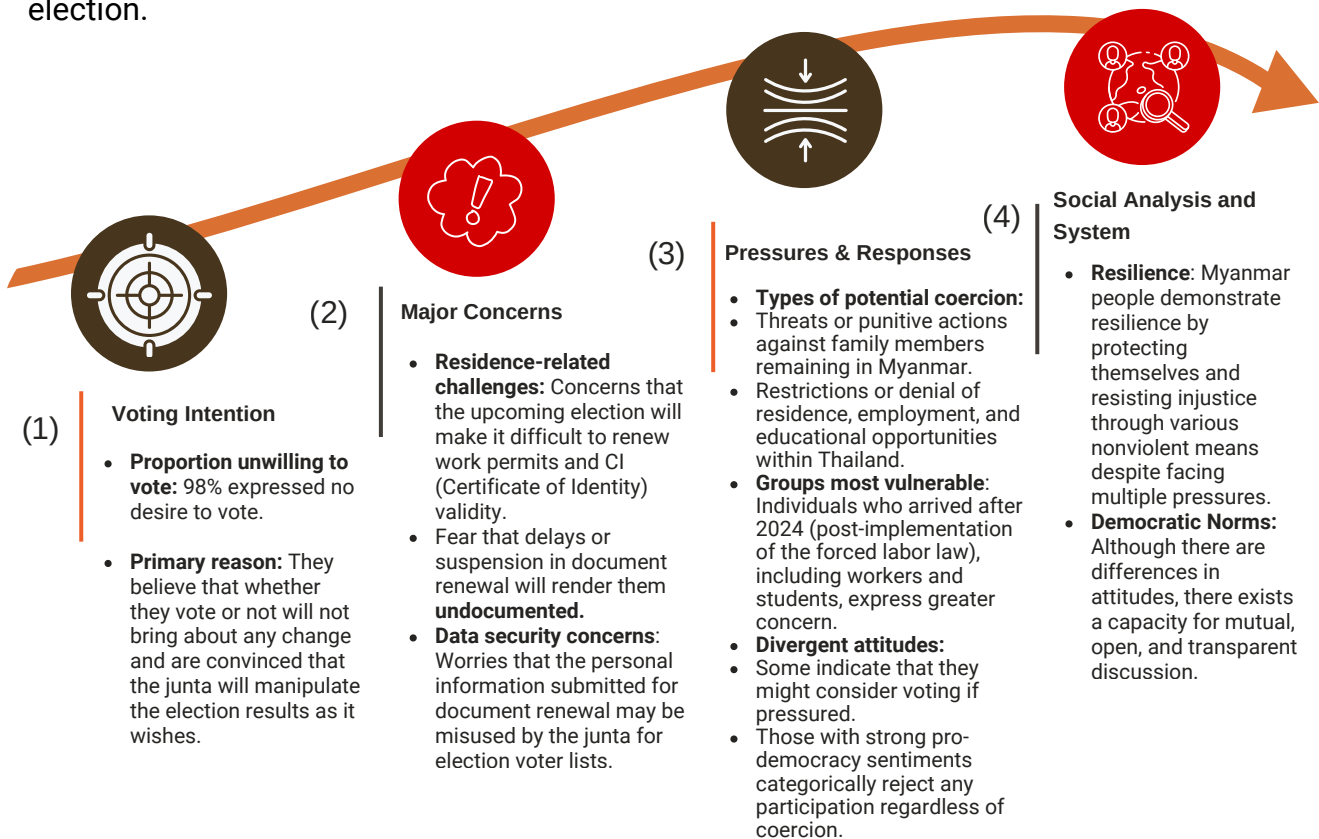
A migrant Myanmar worker in Thailand © The Irrawaddy

A middle-aged man who moved to Mae Sot in September 2023

“If I speak honestly about my belief, I have no confidence at all that this election could provide any solution. Why? Because although the violent military council is saying they will organise a major election, the reality is that those leading and administering it have never once treated all citizens in our country with fairness or with respect for freedom. Our human rights have been violated. That is exactly why we ended up here.”

1.(c) Participation, Expectations, Concerns, and Anticipated Future Conditions Regarding the 2025 Election

Nearly all research participants (98 percent) indicated that they have no intention to take part in or vote in the military junta’s 2025 election. Among those who do not wish to vote, almost half believe that their participation or non-participation will have no impact whatsoever. This perceived lack of impact comes not only from the fact that they are currently outside the country, but also from their belief that the military will manage and manipulate the election results as it sees fit. As a result, they consider their participation in the 2025 election to be inconsequential. On the other hand, some respondents who do not wish to participate in the 2025 election expressed concerns about the potential hardships and forms of coercion they may face as a consequence of boycotting the election.



The majority of Myanmar migrants expressed concerns and perceptions regarding the dysfunction of governance in Myanmar due to ongoing conflicts. They highlighted apprehensions about the country’s socio-economic situation, noting that Myanmar is fragmented and deteriorating. There is widespread fear that the military junta’s upcoming election period will exacerbate strictness and severity, and respondents expressed deep concern that the country may face even greater destruction and instability than it currently does.

1.(c-1) Election Boycott and Related Concerns

Respondents expressed concerns that, as a consequence of boycotting the junta-planned election, they would face heightened difficulties with their residency and documentation status. General labour migrants worry that delays in extending their work permits could result in the expiration of their legal stay in Thailand, forcing them into undocumented status. In addition, many noted their concern that the Thai–Myanmar joint “Certificate of Identity (CI)” issuance and renewal process—which was initiated during the NLD administration to allow Myanmar nationals without passports to move freely within Thailand¹⁶—has been suspended and may be terminated entirely.



Myanmar Migrant Workers at Samut Sakhon Labour Registration Office © EPA

At the same time, respondents explained that both newly applying and renewing migrant workers fear that if the issuance of documentation continues, their personal information could be accessed and misused by the Myanmar military junta to support or legitimize the outcome of the 2025 election. Details regarding the appeals made to the Royal Thai Government concerning these issues are presented in the section titled “*Requests of the Myanmar Migrant populations to the Royal Thai Government and Thai people.*”

Furthermore, some respondents stated that because they refuse to support or participate in the 2025 election, they fear being placed on the junta’s blacklist and possibly being subjected to screening, arrest, or detention should they return to Myanmar.

1.(c-2) Pressures and Forced Electoral Participation

Even among respondents who stated that they did not wish to participate in the election, many discussed that they might be compelled to reconsider their stance if they were to face significant pressures or the types of threats and concerns outlined above. Their anticipated pressures fall mainly into two categories. The first concerns the fear that their family members remaining inside Myanmar could be subjected to coercion or intimidation based on whether or not they participate in the election. The second involves the potential loss of rights in Thailand, including the right to residency, work authorization, and access to education. Workers and students who migrated due to the junta’s forced conscription law—were the groups most likely to express these concerns. By contrast, respondents who migrated after 2021, many of whom oppose the coup and reject any form of collaboration with the military junta, consistently emphasised that no degree of pressure or coercion would change their decision not to participate.



A queue of voters outside a polling station in Yangon during the 2020 general election – AFP Policemen arrest a protester demonstrating against the military coup in Mandalay – AFP

We can predict how people in today’s Myanmar are attempting to confront the hardships and conflicts they face by looking at the responses regarding how different migrant groups intend to cope with pressures and constraints. While Myanmar citizens are striving to protect themselves and find ways to survive amid injustice and repression, they are simultaneously seeking to resist and push back against those very forces.¹⁷

These discussions reveal that people are also searching for forms of protection and support that could help them collectively navigate these challenges. Despite these constraints, their resilience and persistent efforts to stand up against oppression clearly demonstrate their understanding that their political agency ultimately lies in their own hands.

- 1** **Dominant Sentiment**
 98% do not want to vote.
 No trust in Election and SAC.
- 2** **Fear Factors**
 Concern that their documents (CI/Work Permit) may not be renewed.

 Fear of threats to personal and family safety.
- 3** **Minority Views**
 The three respondents who expressed willingness to vote are not doing so out of trust in the election, but because they see it as a potential “exit” to bring the conflict to a quicker end.

 Five undecided respondents stated that they are still observing the evolving situation on the ground.
- 4** **Political Reality**
 The election is viewed merely as an escape route for the military junta and not a solution to the political crisis.

 The military junta lacks legitimacy to hold an election.
- 5** **The Solution**
 A unilateral election cannot resolve the conflict; only an inclusive dialogue involving all stakeholders can lead to a meaningful solution.

This finding emerges not only from individual interviews but also across all 12 focus group discussions conducted in the same cities. In roughly one out of three focus groups, even among those who firmly stated they would not vote under any circumstances, some participants acknowledged that certain pressures could force them to participate.

Another observation from these discussions is that, despite holding differing views and interpretations of the situation, participants were able to express their perspectives openly and freely, and engage in mutual exchange. Such patterns of discussion indicate that even amid oppression and adversity, the people of Myanmar continue to practice the very democratic values they aspire to.

1.(c-3) Attitudes and Circumstances of Those Willing to Vote

Three young male workers and students living in southern Thailand Ranong and Mahachai (Samut Sakhon) expressed their willingness to participate in the 2025 election. However, all of them stated that they did not know how they would be able to cast their vote. They had migrated to Thailand after the coup, primarily because the political crisis made it difficult for them to remain in Myanmar and they needed to relocate in order to find work.

They were familiar with the basic features that a democratic election should have, and they believed that elections are important. They viewed the junta’s planned election as a faint source of hope amid the severe conflict and constraints they are currently experiencing.



Living in a foreign country has been exhausting for us too. We really want to return home as soon as possible and reunite with our families in safety and peace. So I sincerely ask that this situation be stopped. And we hope a civilian government will emerge through a proper and legitimate election as quickly as possible.



Statement from a young male factory worker who migrated to Ranong in 2023

PARTICIPATION, EXPECTATIONS AND CONCERNS

All three interviewees clearly understood the oppression and war crimes committed by the military authorities, and their desire to vote stemmed from their wish to see an end to the deteriorating conflict situation. At the same time, similar to many other respondents, they did not believe that the junta-led election would have the capacity to resolve or ease the ongoing conflicts, regardless of the extent of their own participation.

“

Why? Because even now, our country's politics and the lives of young people are ruined. So many people have been killed.

These are all consequences of what they have done. I have absolutely no trust in their government.

”

Statement from a young male factory worker who migrated to Ranong in 2023

Five respondents stated that they were unsure whether they would participate in the upcoming election. These individuals represent all three gender identity groups and include migrant workers who arrived after the coup, as well as civil society staff and activists. Their primary considerations in deciding whether or not to vote are: observing which parties or leaders will be allowed to participate, their own circumstances of being inside or outside the country during the election period, and the capacity or willingness of revolutionary forces to provide protection or take responsibility. This group appears likely to make their decision only if they perceive the election conditions to be practically viable from their point of view.

“I WANT EVERYTHING TO BE PEACEFUL”

1.(d) Views on the 2025 Election Compared with the 2020 Election

Although no direct or specific questions were asked regarding their views on the 2020 election, respondents nevertheless discussed and compared their experiences of participating in that election, the expectations they held at the time, the services they received from the civilian government under Daw Aung San Suu Kyi between 2015 and 2020, and the hopes they had for the future—now contrasted against the junta-planned 2025 election. Approximately 20 percent of research participants made such comparisons when responding to questions about their willingness to participate in the 2025 election, the potential consequences of participating, their concerns going forward, and the changes they wish to see.

Because this comparison emerged organically and was not prompted by dedicated research questions, the absence of similar reflections among the remaining respondents should not be interpreted as an indication that they did not participate in the 2020 election or that they had no expectations or aspirations associated with it. Rather, it should be understood simply as non-disclosure. Therefore, this analysis focuses only on the subgroup that explicitly discussed their views related to the 2020 election.



Migrant workers supporting Aung San Suu Kyi waving at her at the coastal fishery centre of Samut Sakhon, in Thailand, on June 23, 2016. PHOTO:REUTERS

1.(d-1) Participation of Those Who Voted in the 2020 Election in the Upcoming 2025 Election

Those who stated that they had held high expectations regarding the 2020 election come from diverse backgrounds in terms of age, gender, and occupation. Only a small number within this group reported being unaware of information about the 2025 election, while the majority stated that they were aware of key developments. This group includes individuals with varying degrees of interest in the 2025 election—from low to high, as well as moderate levels of engagement. However, many of them reported that they would not vote or participate in the 2025 election, as they do not believe it to be a legitimate electoral process nor one that could meaningfully resolve Myanmar’s current crises.

Among the respondents in this study were individuals who had served as polling station monitors during the 2020 election, volunteered in election-related activities, or participated in civic education initiatives encouraging public participation in the vote. Because of these experiences, they strongly rejected the military junta’s justification that the coup was carried out due to electoral fraud. This group also included young people who, at the time of the 2020 election, were underage and therefore could not vote, but will become first-time voters in 2025. Although they had been excited at the prospect of casting their first ballot, they now expressed that they would not participate in the junta-organised 2025 election. Similar discussions were observed across the focus group discussions as well.



“An election conducted by a government that fails to protect its people, violates their human rights, and relentlessly persecutes them—through daily bombings, attacks, arbitrary arrests with intent to kill, and extrajudicial executions—cannot, in any sense, be considered protective of or accountable to the people.”



Said by male respondent of working age, a migrant from Ngaputaw Township, Ayeyarwady Region, currently living in Mae Sot.

1.(d-2) Expectations in 2020 Election vs Expectations in 2025 Election

Respondents who had actively participated in the 2020 election described having held expectations for political change that they believed would emerge after 2020. They noted improvements in their living standards during the 2015 and 2020 civilian governments due to better public service delivery, which further strengthened their hopes.



Families heading to cast advance votes in Yangon during the 2020 election (Photo – Myo Min Soe, The Irrawaddy)



Myanmar migrant workers lining up to cast advance votes at the Myanmar Embassy in Bangkok, Thailand, during the 2020 election. (Photo – Nyein Nyein, The Irrawaddy)

Some voters also acknowledged that, although they did not fully trust elections conducted under the 2008 Constitution, they participated in previous elections because they held hopes in the NLD government’s constitutional reform agenda.

Some Myanmar migrant workers who had arrived in Thailand even before the 2021 coup stated that, following the 2020 election, they had the desire and plans to return home. However, they explained that the 2021 military takeover shattered those hopes of going back.



Myanmar migrant workers casting advance votes at the Myanmar Embassy in Bangkok, Thailand, during the 2020 election (Photo – Nyein Nyein, The Irrawaddy)

However, these same individuals now view the 2025 election as one that cannot resolve existing crises and may instead worsen them. They expressed concern that not only their personal hardships but also the country’s political and military challenges are likely to intensify.



Large numbers of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand welcoming and meeting State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi during her visit to Thailand in 2016 in her capacity as Union Minister for Foreign Affairs
© Getty Images

“ In our military environment, we were subjected to indoctrination and intellectual suppression. At that time, we understood Daw Aung San Suu Kyi only as someone who might destroy the country. It was only gradually, as I grew older and later moved to Yangon, that I began to feel secure and happy under civilian government, to dream and set goals, and to genuinely experience freedom. In Nargis, I felt this more distinctly. ”

“In the testimony given by the son of a Tatmadaw medical sergeant.”

“ Earlier, I had considered returning home; I no longer wanted to stay here. I made a firm decision to leave everything behind. Before the coup, I had planned to go back and work in my own country. Honestly, it felt better to make that choice. I didn't need to do anything else—no need to process a passport or care about others' opinions. I could live off even 3,000 [kyat] a day in my own country. But now, after the takeover, I have decided not to return. ”

A male trader who migrated from southern Shan State to Chiang Rai, Thailand, stated -



Large numbers of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand welcoming and meeting State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi during her visit to Thailand in 2016 in her capacity as Union Minister for Foreign Affairs
© Getty Images

2. The People's Mandate of Representation and Expectations for Change

In this Research, the perspectives of Myanmar migrants were examined with regard to their views on the mandate of representation and related expectations for change. Following the coup, they have faced numerous socio-economic hardships, particularly in relation to migration rights, recognition of legal documentation, and support for working as general laborers abroad.¹⁸ Myanmar migrants in Thailand have had to navigate these challenges with very limited assistance or resources.

Although those who control the country’s resources and authority are responsible for ensuring the functioning of state administration and for providing services that meet the needs of the population, their failure to fulfill these responsibilities has resulted in significant losses and hardships for both the nation and its people.¹⁹



Young people protesting against the military dictatorship in Yangon on December 8, 2021.

Photo: University Students' Unions Alumni Force - USUAF, CJ

The Myanmar military, which holds primary responsibility for the defense of the country, seized the authority mandated by the Myanmar people through the 2020 election—power that had been underpinned by weapons financed through public taxes—by force and unlawfully. Following this, millions of Myanmar citizens concluded that there was no government in the country capable of fulfilling state responsibilities or administering governance on their behalf. Their perspectives have been expressed in diverse ways and forms across all sectors and have persisted continuously over the past five years.²⁰

Among these voices are the Thailand-based Myanmar migrants who participated in this research. Consequently, establishing a system that addresses the longstanding administrative instability in Myanmar and providing representatives accountable to the people has become an urgent and critical necessity for the time being.

When asked who they consider their legitimate representatives, Myanmar migrant respondents both individual and group participants demonstrated a simultaneous presence of certainty and deliberation. In terms of certainty, approximately 92 percent of respondents immediately identified that the military junta does not represent them, instead pointing to other power groups. These findings are significant in other researches, too.²¹ About 3 percent of respondents did not answer this question. The deliberation observed reflects respondents’ cautious consideration of whether the current administrative and systemic conditions in Myanmar could fully act on their behalf, indicating hesitation and the need for reflection before providing a definitive answer. Even amid such careful consideration, respondents were able to identify and articulate those representatives they perceived as closest to genuinely representing their interests.

Representatives who received the people’s mandate

Analysis of the representatives who received the people’s mandate



2. (a) Representation and the National Unity Government (NUG)

Among the respondents, the largest proportion –26 percent–identified the National Unity Government (NUG) as their representative. They cited NUG’s legitimacy based on public support and trust, its provision of public services such as education, health, defense, and security, and its active resistance against the military junta alongside the people. Some respondents also noted that NUG derives its legitimacy from the results of the 2020 election. At the same time, respondents expressed a desire for reforms that would enable NUG to fully represent them.

Among Myanmar migrants who became more engaged and motivated by the emergence of NUG in the early days of the Spring Revolution, experiences over the five-year revolutionary period revealed mixed perceptions of NUG’s capacity and performance. Respondents noted that while NUG represents them to a significant degree, it remains challenging for them to fully delegate their representation to NUG as a federal government they can reliably depend on. Some respondents expressed the aspiration for NUG to evolve into a government that incorporates other revolutionary forces in a collaborative administration. Overall, the majority continue to believe that systemic change in the country, and the NUG itself, remain essential for the ongoing Spring Revolution.

“I feel that there should be at least one strong organisation in the country. Even if I am not fully satisfied with NUG, I still choose them because armed groups are too powerful. If I were to pick from among the fragmented groups, I would support the one that unites them.”

A young female journalist who moved from Ayeyarwady to Chiang Mai in November 2021 due to security concerns explained

“The legitimate government is the NLD, which we had previously elected. On the revolutionary side, NUG is leading, so we recognise NUG as the legitimate government.”

A young male general labourer who migrated from Tanintharyi to Bangkok for work since 2015 stated

“This is a group that emerged in opposition to an organisation that has suppressed the people, committing daily killings and oppressions. NUG emerged as a counter to that, so I consider NUG to be my representative organisation for the revolution.”

A young male who moved to Bangkok in December 2024 to continue his studies commented

2. (b) Representation and the Lack of Alternatives

At present, 25 percent of respondents assessed that there is no organisation that closely represents the public, citing factors such as the proliferation of groups, lack of confidence in the leadership and performance of existing organisations, and insufficient accountability and responsibility. This group fully trusted the National Unity Government (NUG) and other revolutionary forces as their representatives in the past. However, they now stated that there is no organisation to delegate their representation to, due to the difficulties and constraints they face not being addressed by the NUG as a government, the deprivation of their rightful entitlements, and the unmet conditions they had hoped for regarding systemic change in the country, as well as depending on the developments and progress of the revolution. What remains similar to the group that supports the NUG is that these respondents expressed a desire for the swift emergence of an organisation or a collaborative government capable of leading and representing the public.

Reasons Behind Lack of Alternatives

- 1 The inability to address the ongoing hardships and crises in the capacity of a governing authority
- 2 Continued deprivation and hardship resulting from the denial of rights to which citizens are entitled
- 3 The failure to achieve the conditions hoped for in relation to systemic governmental change
- 4 Dissatisfaction with the pace and trajectory of developments within the revolution
- 5 A desire for restructuring toward a collective leadership model

“ At first, we rallied around the NUG to form collective leadership. But gradually, NUG didn't get things done. NUCC didn't get things done either. They merged unnecessary ministries, misused power, made mistakes, and once they escaped and reached a comfort zone, they stopped putting effort into the rest. Militarily, they still haven't properly established an Alliance Policy. Nothing remarkable has happened; when we talk about NUG, we have just to address individuals. Looking at the main leaders individually—Dr. Zaw Wai Soe, U Ye Mon—it's not very reassuring. No good results have emerged. Time has passed, four to five years, and nothing remarkable has happened.

—”
A young male CSO worker who moved from Tanintharyi to Ranong in 2002 explained

“ Right now, it's a bit difficult to say. There are so many groups. If all the ethnic armed groups come together and unite as one, then I would trust them.

—”
A young general worker who moved from Yangon to Pattaya in March 2024 due to the forced conscription law remarked

“ I supported the NUG. But now I don't trust them. Everyone is still clinging to their egos. The groups they have formed are ego-driven, so I don't trust them. I only trust those who are actually fighting on the ground and genuinely providing support. Even though those groups are small, I rely on them because they are really persistent. Most groups have lost their direction, so I don't trust those individuals or organisations much anymore.

—”
An elderly woman who moved from Yangon to Ranong before 2000 remarked

2. (c) Representation and Ethnic Revolutionary Organisations (EROs)

Twelve percent of respondents considered the ethnic revolutionary organisations (EROs) to have the delegation of representation by the people. They viewed EROs as having representative legitimacy because these organisations can provide support, protection, and security to the people, as well as establish administrative systems capable of delivering public services such as education and health in accordance with the needs of their respective regions. Among the respondents who affirmed that EROs have representative authority, individuals from all ethnic groups and regions were included, indicating widespread acknowledgment of this view. All respondents recognised that EROs currently possess strong regional representational capacity. However, they did not perceive EROs as holding authority equivalent to a federal or national government; rather, they viewed them as regional or ethnic representatives. Nevertheless, respondents expressed a desire for EROs to participate in and collaborate on the formation of a federal or national government. These perspectives were evident both in individual responses and in group discussions conducted in Mae Hong Son and Ranong.

“

If the people need something, we can bring it to their attention. When we report matters to them, they are able to provide help and protection. That is why I trust them.

”

A young student migrated in 2023 to Mae Hong Son for Continuing Education



A middle-aged displaced woman who relocated to Mae Hong Son in May 2023.

“

The reason I trust this IEC is that, even under the current circumstances, they act on behalf of the public. No matter the difficulties they face, they exert as much effort as possible to ensure the safety of the people. In terms of protection and justice, I see them as a government that can stand more firmly for the people.

”

“

I like each of the EAOs and respect them as individual organisations. However, although I support them, the way they operate is largely based on prioritizing their own ethnic group. That approach may work well for their respective states, but I am not sure it is suitable for the entire country. That is how I see it.

”

Statement by a young female journalist who relocated from Ayeyarwady to Chiang Mai in November 2021 due to security concerns

2. (d) Representation and Public Leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

When asked about representatives, respondents typically refer to organisations, power groups, or political parties. However, the majority of Myanmar people also mention their public leader, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. In this survey, 9 percent of respondents, representing various ethnicities, migration backgrounds, and other demographic characteristics, identified Daw Aung San Suu Kyi as their representative. Currently, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has been detained by the military junta, and her place of detention has been unknown for nearly five years.²² Despite her detention, respondents perceive her as the closest representative due to her selfless actions for the public and the improvements in social and economic conditions achieved during her administration. Additionally, respondents expect that she could potentially overcome the current circumstances and act effectively on behalf of the people.



In 2016, State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, in her capacity as Union Minister for Foreign Affairs, visited Thailand, where she was warmly welcomed by large numbers of Myanmar migrant workers. Photo: Reuters / Sukree Sukplang

“ I only rely on and hope in Daw Suu. There’s no other group we trust. She came here because she loves Myanmar and she wants to help bring change, enduring hardships to come to her own country. She left her family to do this for us, out of love. If she didn’t care, there would be no reason to come. That’s why our trust is only in her, not anyone else.

“ A young male general worker who moved from Ayeyarwady to Pattaya in 2022 in search of employment

“ Since I was young, the country has been under military rule. After Amay Suu (Mother Suu) took leadership, roads in the village improved, the economy got better, and living conditions improved. That’s why I respect and support Amay Suu (Mother Suu).

“ A young male general worker who moved from Naypyidaw to Mae Sai for employment in 2023

“ I feel free. I have equal rights. I don’t need to go to work elsewhere. I can live and work right here in my country (Myanmar).

“ A young male general worker who relocated from Bago to Chonburi in 2022 due to security concerns

2. (e) Representation and De facto/De Jure Legitimacy

When responding to questions about representation, migrant respondents considered both the practical ability of organisations to govern and the authority conferred upon them through their selection. Some respondents viewed organisations formed based on the mandate granted by the 2020 elections as having legitimate representation. Approximately 4 percent of respondents identified the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) as their representative. Similarly, an equal proportion viewed the People's Defense Forces (PDF) as closely representing the people because they stand alongside the public and act in support of the revolution. Respondents indicated that these groups could legitimately act on their behalf.



Committee Representing the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH).
Photo: CRPH



The Interim President of the National Unity Government, Duwa Lashi La, inspecting a unit of the People's Defence Force (PDF).
Photo: Interim President's Facebook page

By combining both de jure and de facto legitimacy, around 10 percent of respondents considered all revolutionary forces including NUCC, CRPH, NUG, and ethnic revolutionary organisations (EROs) to possess both legitimacy and representative authority. The discussions revealed that public representation exists in different kinds of organisations and these responses still emphasised the need to transition toward comprehensive representation or establish a robust and effective system for governance.

“

There is the NUG (government), emerging from the CRPH which includes the representatives elected in the 2020 elections, along with the NUCC. Moreover, currently we have EAO-administered territories under control, so in terms of performance legitimacy, I believe these ethnic revolutionary organisations can represent the people. When discussing representation, it is important to clarify whether it is geographic or ethnic representation. For instance, in Kachin, the KIO administration is recognised as a government and represents the people there. They are considered representative because a large portion of the ethnic population acknowledges the KIO as the governing authority, and the KIO itself is a controlling organisation in the region.

”

A young male CSO worker who moved from Kachin State to Chiang Mai in December 2023 for continuing education said

When asked about representation, political parties directly related to elections and public legitimacy were mentioned least frequently as representative entities. Among the respondents, 4.5 percent specifically identified the National League for Democracy (NLD) as a political party. The NLD is perceived as the closest representative organisation because it governed according to democratic principles, contributed to social and economic development, and was led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Within this group of respondents, there was also a general worker who indicated that they would vote in the 2025 elections, expressing a desire to bring an end to the current circumstances as soon as possible.

“

It's very different. The current government is not the same as the previous government led by Mother Suu. Back then, people's basic needs, livelihoods, and living conditions were well cared for. Under the current rule, both the people and children have suffered greatly. They have suffered and even died because of this misuse of power. During Mother Suu's administration, we never saw or experienced anything like this. That's why I trust Mother Suu as a just leader and support her wholeheartedly.

”

A young female vendor who moved from Yangon to Mae Sai in February 2025 for job opportunities said

“

The reason I support the NLD is because of how they governed. During their administration, the system and the democratic party framework were implemented, and we liked that. Our country experienced significant progress and change, and all the people appreciated and respected that. Because of all this, we also admire and hold our leaders in high regard.

”

A young student who moved to Mae Hong Son in 2025 to continue their education due to ongoing internal conflict said

Additionally, only one respondent mentioned that “U Ko Ko Gyi’s party” holds representative legitimacy. Although this respondent mentioned that he would not participate in the 2025 elections, he noted that the 2025 election is considered legally legitimate due to the military’s de facto control. However, he also expressed skepticism that the election would be conducted freely and fairly or that it could resolve the country’s pressing crises. Nevertheless, he perceived that U Ko Ko Gyi’s party possesses representative legitimacy because it has continued to operate politically since the military coup.

“Politically speaking, I think it’s U Ko Ko Gyi’s party. Since the military coup, their party has continued along an uncompromising path. Even though the public criticises them at present, they are proceeding along their own strong path, and at the very least, in my view, they remain principled and steadfast. So, at the very least, how should I put it... in this mess, they’re at least ‘decent people.’ That’s just how I see it.”

A young LGBTQIA+ respondent who had moved from Yangon to Mae Sot In December 2024 due to the forced conscription law stated

2. (e- 1) Denial of Representation and De facto Control

Not only displaced populations but also the broader Myanmar public have, in every way they could, repeatedly expressed over the five years following the military coup their desire for those who govern them to be the representatives they had chosen.²⁰ In practice, both Myanmar citizens and displaced populations remain dependent on services administered under the military junta’s governance. These include the junta’s continued interactions with other governments, issuance of critical documents such as passports and Certificates of Identity (CI), provision of employment verification letters for migrant workers, and collection of taxes, as well as the enforcement of laws that unjustly suppress the population. Consequently, around 6 percent of respondents perceive that, even if they may not willingly accept it, the military regime effectively possesses representation in practice.

Under these circumstances, the public is compelled to cooperate and comply in situations where they cannot freely express their preferences or oppose policies, even if they disagree, due to the practical constraints imposed upon them. Such situations are often interpreted as evidence that the military continues to govern the population and operate administrative mechanisms within the country.²³

A young male general worker who relocated from Tanintharyi to Ranong in February 2022 due to security concerns stated

“ No matter what the MAL’s group says, right now they are the ones in power who are legitimate. Even if people don’t accept it, they are the ones who can handle things like passports, so we have to rely on them. ”

“ The truth is, in the current situation, no matter what we say, we have to endure conditions that are difficult to accept. Some people remain inside the country, and when the military governs certain areas, the residents there must follow the laws it enforces. For example, even my own parents are in those areas. I don’t like it—there’s nothing about it I like—but under circumstances where we cannot leave, we have no choice but to comply with the law. If we don’t, we risk being arrested. ”

A young male journalist who moved from Mon State to Sangkhla Buri in 2022 after facing security threats

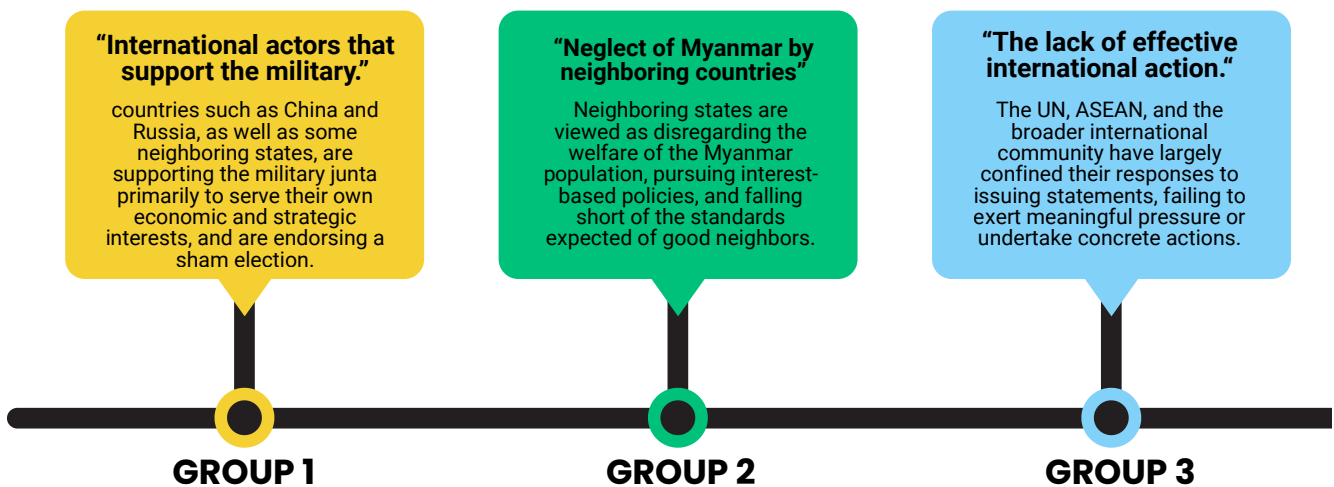
When asked about representatives, the majority of respondents tend to refer to those in power, particularly those who got legitimacy through elections. In this study, the least frequently mentioned group among discussants was political parties. Although questions related to the 2025 elections were posed, respondents showed very little reference or delegate representation to parties registered under the election laws currently declared by the military junta. This situation indicates that, in practice, the conditions in Myanmar require more than a conventional electoral framework, and there is a clear perception that the political arena needs to be broadened and strengthened to meet the country’s evolving demands.

“ It is Ko Ye Min. From the outset of the book-related work, he has been the one providing support in all matters. He is regarded as someone capable of genuine representation, as he has been taking responsibility for addressing and resolving all issues. ”

A general worker in Mahachai

3. Perspectives of migrant people on the Current Situation of Myanmar and International Engagement

Migrant people clearly expressed their views and attitudes regarding the 2025 elections conducted by the military junta, including both their concerns and the positions they wished to see realized. In this section, respondents’ perspectives on international responses to the situation in Myanmar were explored. It was observed that migrant Myanmar populations tend to categorize international actors into two broad types - International and neighbouring countries. When evaluating further, respondents’ opinions coalesced into three distinct groups.



The largest and most cohesive group of respondents (Group 1) assessed that countries such as China and Russia, as well as some neighboring states, are supporting the military junta primarily to serve their own economic and strategic interests, and are endorsing a sham election. This group comprised over 68 percent of participants.

The second largest group, representing more than 35 percent of respondents, expressed the view that neighboring countries are neglecting the Myanmar people, prioritizing their own economic interests, and are not genuinely supportive neighbors.

As the third most common opinion, over 33 percent of respondents stated that the UN, ASEAN, and the international community are only issuing statements and not exerting effective pressure or taking concrete actions. A similar critique noted that the international community does not fully understand or acknowledge the root causes of the Myanmar conflict, instead prioritising superficial stability and viewing the election as an outcome while passively awaiting its consequences. Consequently, more than 50 percent of respondents highlighted that the Myanmar conflict remains neglected under the global agendas, and no substantial measures have been taken.

Given these circumstances, they openly discussed their low expectations of the international community and expressed the view that they must rely on themselves rather than await external support. On the other hand, respondents acknowledged that there are still international actors opposing the military junta and its planned elections.²⁴ They recognised that the positions and actions of neighboring countries have a significant impact on the situation in Myanmar and expressed the belief that if neighboring and international powers were to actively acknowledge and exert immense effort, it could help resolve the Myanmar conflict and potentially bring about meaningful change. Over 40 percent of respondents conveyed this expectation and hope.

3. (a) Clear Messages from Myanmar Migrant People to the International Community

Myanmar’s migrant populations have clearly communicated to the international community, based on the daily hardships and pressures they face, what actions they believe the international community should take regarding the Myanmar situation:

1

The upcoming election organised by the military junta is not an election accepted by the Myanmar people. Allowing it to proceed would implicitly legitimize the junta and further strengthen the military regime. Therefore, they urge international actors to completely reject, obstruct, and prevent this election.

2

They emphasise that elections can only be conducted under normal circumstances, which require the release of political prisoners and detained leaders, and an end to daily violence, including bombings and attacks targeting civilians. Only then can elections reflect genuine participation by the people.

3

They request that the international community listen attentively to the voices of the Myanmar people and provide the assistance and support they urgently need.

4

They call on international actors to take effective measures to block the military junta, which continues to commit war crimes, without distinguishing between civilian and military spheres, and to actively and collaboratively assist in resolving the Myanmar conflict.

5

The military junta’s involvement in politics, despite only having responsibilities for national defense, is a root cause of the ongoing crises. They request international actors to cooperate with the people in building a federal democratic system that can genuinely address the daily economic and social hardships faced by the population and to work together toward transformative change.

3. (b) Clear Messages from Myanmar Migrant Populations to the Royal Thai Government and Thai people

This research focused on Myanmar migrant people residing in Thailand. The experiences, hardships, and messages of these migrant populations have been conveyed to both the Royal Thai government and the Thai public. Myanmar migrant people requested that, in light of the difficulties they face—particularly their inability to return home—assistance and support be provided, as outlined in the following messages.

(1) Deep Gratitude and Recognition

When conveying messages to Thailand, the first and most frequently expressed sentiment by Myanmar migrant people is their gratitude to Thailand. They expressed deep gratitude to the Royal Thai government and Thai people for accepting them when they were forced to flee due to conflicts in their home country. They also acknowledged that life in Thailand may come with challenges and hardships, yet they remain appreciative.

“

They provide shelter to Myanmar nationals, and I have also heard that there are plans to issue refugees the necessary documents to work. That is why we are grateful to Thailand.

”

A female general laborer who relocated from Kayah (Karenni) State to Mae Hong Son in 2022 stated -

“

We are thankful that they have welcomed us, Myanmar nationals, in the best possible way. I believe they will also continue to support fellow Myanmar citizens.

”

A male general laborer who relocated from Mandalay to Chonburi in September 2021.

(2) To strongly condemn the 2025 election and refrain from pressuring Myanmar migrants on behalf of the military junta

Since the 2025 election organised by the military junta will not be an election in which the Myanmar people actively participate or consent, the majority of Myanmar citizens strongly call on the Royal Thai government to firmly oppose and reject the election without supporting or cooperating with it. They emphasise that, given the widespread distrust of the 2025 election among Myanmar people, the junta may exert pressure by conditioning residency, employment permits, and documentation in Thailand on participation. In such cases, they request that the Thai government refrain from cooperating with the military junta and, within its capacity, continue to provide migrant people and workers with residency extensions, employment rights, and documentation without giving in to coercion. Respondents highlight that arresting, deporting, or handing over migrant Myanmar people to the junta would endanger their lives and security, and they emphasise that any necessary action by Thailand should be carried out strictly according to its laws, with Myanmar people expected to comply.



Air strike on a village school in the morning killed 20 children and 2 teachers even though the junta had promised a ceasefire after a magnitude 7.7 earthquake that killed thousands. (AFP)

PERCEPTION OF MIGRANT PEOPLE ON INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Myanmar migrants in Thailand report that the challenges they face—including coercion, discrimination, workplace hazards, and other risks—arise from the absence of a government capable of protecting them. They note that, despite these difficulties and the ongoing pressures they experience, remaining in Thailand is far safer than returning to Myanmar. Consequently, they strive to stay in Thailand, even amid these hardships.

Given that the military-run 2025 election is unlikely to resolve the country's crises, respondents fear that claims of a new governing authority or the restoration of peace and stability will be used as justification for forced repatriation. The majority repeatedly call for measures to prevent the return of Myanmar nationals under such circumstances, citing the threats to their safety and livelihoods.

Respondents request that, even while legally residing in Thailand, Myanmar migrants be protected from coercive inspections, discrimination, and human rights violations, and that full respect for their human rights be ensured. They also stress that labour rights violations against Myanmar workers should not be ignored and should be addressed with empathy and fairness. As many migrant people remain unable to return home, respondents request systematic reception and humanitarian assistance for refugees. They further mentioned the need for structured arrangements for the education, healthcare, and employment of the thousands of migrants residing in Thailand. Respondents note that proper management of policies and programs concerning Myanmar migrants not only benefits the migrants but also allows Thailand to secure valuable human resources and tax revenue, and they express confidence that such measures will create mutually beneficial outcomes.

PERCEPTION OF MIGRANT PEOPLE ON INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

“

Here, getting legal documentation and residency is something we are supposed to do according to this country's law. While doing it, there is some minor and occasional impact on us from interacting with the military regime on the other side. But if the Thai government could provide coverage by issuing documentation that is free from the military regime's influence, that would be better. If we could just get one document proving we are Myanmar citizens, I think that would be better. Otherwise, as long as everything continues in coordination with the military regime, these issues will appear, I think.

A young deserter who relocated to Mae Sot

”

“

Statement from a female CSO member who relocated from Kayah (Karenni) State to Mae Hong Son

Even when we do passport work or go to work, I personally had to go through questioning and examination, almost like being treated as a defendant. It's very inconvenient. As a human being, one's basic rights are not respected, and we have to live in poverty in another country. Even in our own country, we are constantly living under stress. Even those inside the country live like that amidst airplane and bomb sounds. Those living abroad are also oppressed just because they are Myanmar. There is discrimination and differential treatment—we experience it a lot.

”

“

Without focusing on the election outcome itself, I just want them to consider the situation of ordinary people and approach it with human compassion. Please do not send us back. Please provide the necessary arrangements so that we can live here safely. We, too, will do our best to live properly and responsibly while staying here.

A female journalist residing in Chiang Mai

”

“

A male Akha ethnic who relocated from Shan State to Mae Sai in 2022:

I want to ask for respect for the freedom of Myanmar citizens and for no pressure to be applied regarding the 2025 election. There should be no coercion forcing displaced Myanmar people to vote in advance. I am asking for the people's freedom to be respected.

”

“

Since the coup, our visas have been facing one problem after another, constantly changing. Prices have risen significantly, taxes have increased, and various documents have been changing repeatedly. There have been many changes and adjustments.

A young general laborer from Ayeyarwady Region who relocated to Ayutthaya and is currently working there

”

Analysis

In this survey, when exploring the attitudes of displaced Myanmar people, their views regarding democratic elections can be clearly observed. The people of Myanmar perceive elections as a crucial process for the country and also as a key activity in which they should actively participate. As a result, they demonstrate a strong willingness to engage in elections conducted according to democratic standards and have actively participated in previous elections as well. This clearly indicates that the people of Myanmar are not opposed to democratic elections.

Based on their experiences, the people of Myanmar believe that the 2025 elections to be held by the military regime will not be free or fair. They point to factors such as the lack of full participation rights for the public, the inability to freely express their opinions, the dissolution of parties they wish to participate in, the arrest and imprisonment of individuals, and the fact that other parties are also prevented from full participation. These issues are evident when examining the laws on political party registration⁴ and cybersecurity⁵, which were enacted and imposed by the military regime.

The regime's efforts to dissolve parties it does not want to participate, destroy party offices, and arrest and detain party members⁴ further demonstrate the absence of freedom and fairness, as reported by the public. Although the process is called an election, the public is denied the right to critique or freely express opinions about it. Incidents of individuals being arrested for criticizing the election on social media provide additional evidence^{6,7}. These events are observable not only by the people of Myanmar but also by the wider public.

Regarding the military regime's right to hold elections, opinions are closely linked to the level of public trust in the regime and the degree of popular desire for such elections. The majority view is that the military should only perform the duties of national defense and should not have a role in political governance. The regime's disregard for the will and opinions of the public, its coercion to maintain its powers, and its use of force, including attacks and killings, generate widespread public distrust and rejection. These actions have strengthened the belief that the military's brutal and oppressive practices must be actively resisted.

These points indicate that the authority granted by the public is not held by the military regime. However, it can be observed that the regime does exercise de facto administrative power. Yet, if those controlling armed forces and administrative mechanisms are considered to have the right to govern, it would eliminate any expectation of establishing a politically civilized and socially organized governance system in Myanmar. Furthermore, this raises questions about the democratic standards and quality of the elections that the current military regime is attempting to conduct.

If the military regime's de facto control is taken to imply legitimate authority, it is clear that even those citizens who acknowledge this do so not out of recognition of the regime's rightful power, but because of coercion and oppression. This clearly demonstrates widespread public disappointment and frustration. Therefore, for an election to be conducted in a stable and inclusive manner where all citizens can freely participate, and where national conflicts can be temporarily set aside to seek collective solutions a genuine democratic framework is required. Importantly, when the results of an election conducted according to the will of the people do not align with the military's preferences, practices of annulment and overreach must be eliminated.

To achieve this, it is crucial to establish a system and constitutional framework that is universally agreed upon and capable of reform. Any election attempted without such reforms will not only fail to resolve the ongoing conflicts but will also likely exacerbate the country's crises and create further instability.

Displaced people have indicated, both individually and in group discussions, in various ways that they have no interest in participating in the military regime's elections. Citizens who value and hope for a democratic system were actively engaged in advance voting for the 2020 elections within Thailand.²⁵ However, for the 2025 elections, their lack of interest is evident in their reluctance to follow election-related news and their refusal to obtain advance voter registration forms (Form (15)).

On the other hand, the military regime has shown limited effort to provide clear and transparent information to the public about the elections. They have only issued minimal announcements about the electoral procedures and formats, without genuinely enabling the public to understand or engage with the process. This lack of access to information makes it clear that citizens are not being effectively informed or encouraged to participate.

It is observed that displaced people experience stress and anxiety as a result of their boycott and non-participation in the military regime’s elections. They fear that their families remaining inside the country may face threats and coercion due to their non-participation. Although the Thai government officially recognizes documents such as CI cards and passports that confirm Myanmar citizenship for residency, employment, and continued education, this recognition exists only in relation to the military regime. As a result, displaced people worry that their refusal to participate in the elections may lead to a denial of such documents and force them into undocumented or overstayed status within Thailand. They are particularly concerned that, if this occurs, the Thai authorities might detain them and hand them over to the military regime.

Consequently, they are requesting access to residency documents that are free from the military regime’s control and influence.



Myanmar migrant workers being handed over to the military regime by officials in Ranong, Thailand.
Photo: Ranong Immigration Office Facebook page

Following the 2021 coup and after the military regime enacted the unlawful Conscription Law in February 2024, Myanmar citizens especially young people began crossing into Thailand in increasing numbers to evade military conscription, both with and without proper documentation. As a result, the Thai government intensified inspections at factory workplaces. According to the latest data as of September 2024, nearly 200,000 Myanmar migrant workers had been arrested.²⁶

From April 2023 to November 2025, official records indicate that more than 3,535 detained Myanmar migrants were legally repatriated to Myanmar. Comparing data from April 2023–March 2024 and June 2024–January 2025 shows that the number of repatriations increased approximately threefold.²⁷

Migrant Myanmar individuals who are repatriated by the Thai government are subjected to forced conscription as soldiers by the military regime and sent to frontline combat positions. This was evident in September 2024, when those transferred to the military attempted to escape conscription after being handed over by Thailand.²⁸ On April 1, 2023, three undocumented young Myanmar pro-democracy activists arrested in Mae Sot, Thailand, were handed over to the military regime by the Thai authorities.²⁹ Subsequently, one of these three individuals was confirmed killed, while the remaining two remained detained.³⁰ These circumstances have also led some respondents to indicate that, if repatriated to the military, they would rather die than return. This clearly demonstrates that the displaced Myanmar people's requests not to be sent back are not solely based on a desire to leave the country or to pursue personal development, nor simply on a wish not to cooperate with the military. Their appeals are primarily motivated by the violence, insecurity, and threats to life they face under military rule.

These conditions highlight the urgent need for collective humanitarian responses, recognising the risks not only as matters of compassion but also as threats that could spill over regionally and back into Myanmar itself.³¹ International actors must acknowledge the human suffering caused by systemic and governance failures and urgently engage in coordinated efforts with the people of Myanmar to address these issues.³² Despite facing severe hardships, displaced Myanmar people continue to actively seek leaders and governance capable of reforming the country and serving the national interest. This determination is clearly reflected in their discussions and analyses of Myanmar's political situation and the challenges they face.

Their expectations for leadership are also shaped by concerns that, due to prolonged dysfunction and deterioration in state institutions, the country could suffer even greater nationwide losses, and recovery would be more difficult and prolonged. Consequently, when asked about the kind of representatives they would like to have during this interim period, they base their responses on experiences accumulated over the past five years. While they acknowledge the existence of the National Unity Government as a revolutionary administration, they emphasize the need for reforms to improve its quality and performance. Ethnic Revolutionary Organisations (EROs) are able to provide representation and protection support for their respective regions and communities according to local needs. However, they are not yet in a position to be relied upon as comprehensive representatives for the nation as a whole.

Ethnic revolutionary organisations themselves are also engaged in movements aimed at national liberation. In the current context, relying solely on the NUG is considered insufficient to ensure comprehensive representation. Discussions emphasise the necessity of broader reforms, envisioning the establishment of a federal union government formed with the consensus of all parties. These expectations reflect a desire for transformative changes that would enable inclusive governance and equitable participation.

A notable observation is that the migrant population often designates labor organisers in their vicinity as their representatives. These individuals and organisations are able to provide close, practical support regarding labor needs, workers’ rights, and employment opportunities, effectively addressing the services required by the community. This finding highlights that Myanmar people tend to rely on proximate actors and organisations for essential services. It also highlights the potential risk that, under the current circumstances, services operating outside formal or traditional channels including informal or illegal activities could expand more widely.



In 2016, State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, in her capacity as Union Minister for Foreign Affairs, visited Thailand, where she was warmly welcomed by large numbers of Myanmar migrant workers residing in the country.
Photo: Reuters / Sukree Sukplang

Among Myanmar migrant communities, a significant number express hope and anticipation for the leadership of public figure Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, particularly among the working-class population. These communities demonstrate confidence in her capacity to mediate and resolve issues efficiently, expressing a desire for swift improvements in their circumstances. The expectation placed on her leadership is also grounded in her prior experience under the civilian government, during which public services and community needs were closely observed and addressed with care and responsiveness. Migrant populations view her leadership as capable of addressing the hardships and challenges they currently face, providing both guidance and practical support.

The international role in the Myanmar issue is currently in a situation where it cannot be ignored, and the people of Myanmar are in urgent need of international assistance.³³ When referring to the Myanmar and international issue, it is also important to analyze it by considering various actors, including international governments, neighboring states, and ASEAN member countries. Just as the people of Myanmar receive support and assistance according to the goodwill or lack of action of neighboring countries, these neighboring states' actions whether positive or negative also directly impact the stability and well-being of Myanmar and its people. Consequently, issues occurring in Myanmar's border areas, such as human trafficking, illegal trade, and online fraud networks, directly affect both neighboring countries and the international community. These phenomena are closely linked to the current political instability and ongoing conflicts in Myanmar.³¹ Therefore, it is particularly necessary for international governments and neighboring countries to actively engage in efforts to resolve the Myanmar issue and its associated conflicts.³²

A spontaneous response observed among participants in this research regarding the question of Myanmar's situation and international response is that, aside from a small number of politically engaged youth and students, most were reluctant or unwilling to comment. While they acknowledge the important role of the international community in Myanmar, they perceive that the positions, actions, and policy changes of foreign actors often indirectly support the military through various alignments, making it difficult to rely on international actors. China, Russia, and neighboring countries are seen as directly strengthening the military for their own economic interests, while the UN, ASEAN, and Western powers lack effective measures and respond slowly, thereby indirectly providing the military with opportunities.

As a result, Myanmar's displaced population primarily focuses their discussions on self-reliance. They believe that neighboring and international actors have not only failed to resolve the conflict but have also neglected the Myanmar people, prioritizing economic interests while effectively backing the military. This situation is seen as a key reason why the conflict in Myanmar continues to persist. Consequently, it is now urgent for the international community to genuinely assist in addressing the root causes of Myanmar's political crisis and support systemic political reforms, while ensuring long-term guarantees for regional stability and the interests of all concerned parties.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above findings and analysis of BACS, the following recommendations are proposed to the revolutionary forces, international stakeholders, the Royal Thai government, and the general public.

To the Revolutionary Forces

Nearly five years into the revolution, the hardships and constraints experienced by the people have reached a point requiring urgent recognition and response. Therefore, it is important to underscore that tensions and misunderstandings among revolutionary actors—while challenging to reconcile—do not constitute burdens as severe as those borne daily by the general public, who are directly facing life-threatening difficulties.

Revolutionary forces are urged to draw upon the core aspirations and values of the Spring Revolution, which are grounded in the pursuit of a free society, a federal democratic system, and human dignity and social justice. Strengthening leadership through mutual listening, dialogue, and coordination among revolutionary forces and prioritising to solve public suffering with compassion is essential.

Findings from the views and attitudes expressed by Myanmar migrant people show that their perceptions and expectations regarding the election do not fall neatly into binary categories of “good versus bad” or “black and white.” Although they oppose the junta based on values and principles, they simultaneously seek peace, stability, and livelihood opportunities necessary for survival in their day-to-day lives. This complexity highlights the need for revolutionary forces to fully understand the people’s multifaceted physical and psychological conditions and to formulate strategies that provide both legitimacy and practical solutions.

Accordingly, it is time for all revolutionary actors whether holding de jure or de facto authority to work together toward urgently reforming and transforming the country’s governance structures and systems. Such unified efforts are essential to meet the public’s urgent expectations and to advance meaningful political change.

To all the International Actors

The international community is strongly urged to give serious consideration to the five key demands raised by Myanmar migrant people and to take corresponding action

- 1 International actors should unequivocally acknowledge that the junta-organised 2025 election conducted amid ongoing conflict and without genuine public participation lacks any democratic legitimacy. The international communities are urged to reject, condemn, and prevent recognition of this sham electoral process in all forms.
- 2 An election cannot be considered feasible while the people continue to face daily airstrikes, violences and targeted killings, and while political prisoners and leaders remain arbitrarily detained. Their release and a return to normalcy are essential preconditions for any credible electoral process.
- 3 The international community should meaningfully engage with and listen to the voices of Myanmar people, ensuring that support is aligned with their needs and priorities.
- 4 The international community is urged to exert coordinated pressure on the junta including isolation measures and effective accountability mechanisms to help resolve the Myanmar conflicts.
- 5 The military junta, which should only be responsible for national defense and not political affairs, is currently involved in politics and governance, creating the root cause of ongoing conflicts. To genuinely resolve these conflicts, international actors are urged to work alongside the people of Myanmar in supporting the establishment of a federal democratic system, helping to implement reforms and achieve meaningful change together.

To the Royal Thai Government

It is strongly recommended that the Royal Thai government give serious consideration to the following requests made by Myanmar migrant communities:

- 1 Stand with the people of Myanmar by firmly rejecting the illegal election planned by the military junta.
- 2 The Royal Thai government is urged not to cooperate with actions that pressure Myanmar migrants into participating in the junta's unlawful election such as suspending visa and work-permit extensions or using their personal data to compel voting.
- 3 Within its administrative capacity, the Thai government should ease restrictive measures and facilitate visa extensions and work-permit renewals for Myanmar migrant workers, as difficulties in obtaining legal documentation are a primary source of their insecurity. Migrants expressed a desire to live with documentation that is independent of the junta's control and does not require them to pay taxes or remit funds to the military authorities.
- 4 Despite holding valid legal documentation, many Myanmar migrants continue to face harassment, excessive scrutiny, and discrimination. The Royal Thai government is urged to reduce such practices and ensure that migrants can live with full protection of their human rights.
- 5 Reports of labour rights abuses and human rights violations against Myanmar migrant workers should not be overlooked. The Royal Thai government is encouraged to take effective action to investigate and resolve these issues.
- 6 Given the severe repression and hardships currently faced by people in Myanmar, humanitarian assistance coordinated in partnership with pro-democracy forces should be provided. The government is also encouraged to systematically accommodate Myanmar civilians fleeing conflict.
- 7 With more than a million Myanmar migrants residing in Thailand, systematic arrangements for their education, healthcare, and employment will not only support their wellbeing but also benefit Thailand through strengthened human capital and tax revenue. The Royal Thai government is therefore encouraged to reform and improve migrant-related policies and programs.
- 8 As the junta-organised 2025 election is not a viable solution to the crisis in Myanmar, Thailand is urged not to forcibly repatriate Myanmar nationals in the post-election period.

Acknowledgement

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Abbreviation and Glossary

- **NUG** - National Unity Government
- **SAC** - State Administration Council
- **ERO** - Ethnic Resistance/Revolutionary Organisation
- **EAO** - Ethnic Armed Organisation
- **CRPH** - Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw
- **NUCC** - National Unity Consultative Council
- **PDF** - People's Defence Force
- **NLD** - National League for Democracy
- **Legitimacy** - The state of possessing legal authority and simultaneously gaining the trust and acceptance of the citizens
- **Authority** - The legitimate right to issue commands/orders, make decisions, and secure compliance.
- **CDM** - Civil Disobedience Movement
- **Purposive Sampling** - A research methodology (sampling based on purpose) in which sample units that can provide the best, most appropriate, and most relevant information are selected based on the research objectives.
- **IDI** - An interviewing method where interviewees are met with to deeply express their perspectives and opinions regarding a specific topic. (In-depth Interview)
- **FGD** - A research method where individuals from diverse backgrounds are grouped together to discuss and share their perspectives and opinions regarding a specific topic. (Focus Group Discussion)
- **LGBTQI+** - An umbrella term used to collectively refer to individuals who are diverse in terms of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.
- **IOM** - International Organisation for Migration
- **KIO/KIA** - Kachin Independence Organization/Kachin Independence Army
- **CI** - An identification document (or temporary travel document) officially issued by the Thai Government to foreign migrants (including those from Myanmar) residing in Thailand. (Certificate of Identity)
- **KNU** - Karen National Union
- **Cloud-based Computing and Simulation** - A technology that utilises internet-based computer technology systems to analyse large-scale datasets or to model and calculate future possibilities.
- **CSO** - Civil Society Organisation
- **UEC** - Union Election Commission
- **IEC** - Interim Executive Council of Karenni State

Abbreviation and Glossary

- **UN** - United Nations
- **ASEAN** - Association of Southeast Asian Nations
- **Form (15)** - The official document form, imposed by the military junta's election law, required for pre-registration to vote in the election, primarily for citizens residing overseas.
- **Nargis (Constitution)** - A derogatory term used by the public to refer to the military junta's self-drafted 2008 Constitution, which they rushed to approve through a fraudulent referendum shortly after Cyclone Nargis struck in May 2008, prioritising the vote over essential relief and rehabilitation efforts. (Nargis is originally the name of the powerful cyclone that severely struck lower Myanmar, including the Ayeyarwady Region, in May 2008, causing hundreds of thousands of deaths.)
- **FPTP** - First Past the Post - An electoral system in which the candidate who receives the most votes wins.
- **PR** - Proportional Representation - An electoral system of proportional representation in which each party receives a number of seats proportional to the overall percentage of votes it receives.
- **Mother Suu** - A term of respectful affection used by the people to honour Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the State Counsellor, whom they regard as a mother figure.

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