

### Summary

On August 18, the Myanmar military junta announced elections for December 28, the first since the 2021 coup. While framed as a return to democracy, the elections are likely the junta's attempt for gaining political legitimacy while remaining involved in a civil war. Continuing clashes and ineffective peace talks make it very unlikely that polling will occur across the whole country. Opposition parties are very likely to remain excluded from elections, fuelling conflict. Civil unrest is likely to affect major cities months before the elections.

### Recent events and developments

On August 18, the Burmese military junta announced that general elections will be held in Myanmar on December 28, namely the first elections since the military junta took power through a coup in 2021. The junta's intention to hold elections is not surprising and over the last year new policies related to the elections were drafted. For instance, in July, the junta implemented a new electoral law imposing severe punishments for those who will be accused of interfering with elections. The Myanmar authorities stated that all 330 townships across the country will be considered as constituencies during said elections. The announcement was made while the Myanmar's civil war continues to affect a large portion of the country and the reaching of a ceasefire agreement between the belligerent parties does not appear to be close. On August 17, at least 24 individuals were killed after the junta security forces launched an airstrike on an hospital in Mawchi town. Similarly, on August 13, at least 21 individuals were killed in the town of Mogok after an airstrike. Moreover, the junta's military claimed to have recaptured the town of Nawngkhio, Shan State, after battle that lasted for almost one year. The town was controlled by the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) since 2024 and became a key highway between Myanmar and China. Contrarily, the Arakan Army (AA), another paramilitary group, claimed to have attacked junta forces in Ngathaingchaung town, located between the States of Rakhine and Ayeyarwady. As of now, most of the armed clashes between junta forces and armed groups are concentrated in the central and southern parts of the country, including the areas between Mandalay, Shan, Sagaing, and Magway States, as well as in Bago, Kayin, and Mon States. Several international observers and UN reports have highlighted that systemic human rights violations, including torture and the killing of civilians, are committed by the junta's security forces. At the same time, right groups and survivors have accused the AA of mass killings and torture in Rakhine State.

### Impact assessment

The Burmese junta's announcement of elections likely represents an attempt to rebrand itself and gain political legitimacy, rather than a genuine effort towards a democratic transition. The introduction of a new electoral law imposing severe punishments for alleged interference, combined with the junta's record of repression, makes it very unlikely that the vote will be free or fair. Furthermore, the ongoing civil war represents a great obstacle to elections. Fighting remains intense across Shan, Sagaing, Mandalay, Magway, and Rakhine, and various armed groups continue to contest the junta's territories. The continued clashes and the apparently ineffective peace talks between the parties make it very unlikely that elections will take place across all 330 constituencies or even at all. It is very likely that large swathes of territory under opposition control will be excluded from the process, giving the junta an excuse to consolidate results from areas it controls. The ongoing violence is likely to escalate in the months before the elections, while major cities will be affected by civil unrest. The recent recapture of Nawngkhio by the military after a year-long battle illustrates both the volatility of the conflict and the fierce determination of the junta and the opposition armed groups in gaining control over the country. These dynamics make it very unlikely that the elections will bring stability. Instead, they are likely to deepen divisions, as the election's outcome could be contested by opposition militias. Furthermore, the international community's perception of the elections will also determine their legitimacy. Given the extensive documentation of human rights abuses by both the junta and some armed groups, it is very unlikely that the elections will meet necessary standards to be accepted on the international stage. Despite the junta's claims to bring a semblance of democratisation, the elections serve primarily as a political tool for the junta to entrench its legitimacy amid civil war and they are very unlikely to offer a real solution to Myanmar's crisis. Armed conflict is instead very likely to be prolonged.

### Advice from Forth Global

- Continue monitoring the situation through international observers, rather than local news channels.
- Establish clear communication protocols between HQ, local partners, country office, and personnel on the ground.
- Avoid the areas between Mandalay, Shan, Sagaing, and Magway States as well as Bago, Kayin, and Mon States.
- Do not share political and ideological opinions publicly or online during the stay.

### Customized advice

Please contact us for specific advice:

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