

CYBER
THREAT
ANALYSIS

Recorded Future®

By Insikt Group®

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**Myanmar Coup and Internet
Censorship Pushes Civilians to
Underground Forums, Dark Web**

This report introduces international readers to the current geopolitical situation in Myanmar, including but not limited to the military coup and effective takeover of the government in Myanmar, violent crackdowns on pro-democracy protesters, limitations and forced blackouts of the internet service within Myanmar, and the effects of these crackdowns. The focus of the analysis is on the change in internet use among the population of Burmese civilians, the change in the internet landscape, and the overall trends including the use of encrypted messaging applications and access of the underground web, also known as the dark web. Insikt Group used the Recorded Future Platform®, proprietary tools and sourcing, as well as open sources such as international news, global non-governmental organization statements, social media accounts of the incidents occurring in Myanmar.

To protect the people of Myanmar from further persecution and violence, this report does not reveal sensitive details and forum links where the pro-democracy groups collaborate and share information.

Executive Summary

On February 1, 2021, the Myanmar military staged a government coup, arresting the democratically elected leader, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, as well as other members of her National League for Democracy (NLD). Min Aung Hlaing, the leader of the military junta, stated that the November 8, 2020 election was fraudulent and that Aung Sang Suu Kyi and her elected party members were not the rightful leaders of the country. Hlaing imposed a 1 year state of emergency which would be followed by another election. The detainment of Aung Sang Suu Kyi, a popular figure within Myanmar and a symbol for Myanmar's democracy, has led to mass protests by her supporters, with thousands of individuals taking to the streets to protest against her arrest, and other individuals taking part in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM). The protesters have been in direct conflict with security forces, and there has been escalating violence and use of force by the military in recent weeks, with over 200 civilians [reported](#) killed and over 2,100 detained at the time of writing. The military has also imposed strict rules, such as curfews and censorship laws, aimed at preventing the mass coordination of protests within the country. The initial days of the military coup saw the shutdown of Myanmar's internet entirely and the ban of many popular social media applications such as Facebook. While Facebook and other social media applications have since been reinstated, there are still nightly blackouts imposed by the military when Burmese are unable to access the internet. The military censorship has not deterred Burmese from finding alternatives to amplify their pro-democracy messaging, with many turning to alternative media sources, underground networks, and downloading tools to bypass censorship restrictions to amplify their narrative.

Key Judgments

- Myanmar's military takeover of internet and telecommunications, and subsequent internet censorship, has led to a sharp increase in dark web use by Myanmar citizens looking to circumvent government restrictions.
- Pro-democracy protesters and activists within Myanmar have migrated from social media platforms to fringe communication platforms in an effort to circumvent censorship.
- Hacktivist groups are driving efforts to raise awareness of alternative technology to circumvent government controls and organize pro-democracy gatherings.
- Foreign influence will play a large role in the future of the Myanmar government and its people, including that of China, the US, and the UN.

Background

Myanmar's pro-democracy movements have faced heavy opposition from the Myanmar Armed Forces, also known as the Tatmadaw, for the last half century, with historical movements culminating in the death of countless protesters. Since 2008, the country has operated as a [constitutional republic](#), with Myanmar's representatives elected by the general population and the president and cabinet having a term limit of 5 years. Prior to 2011, the country was ruled under a military dictatorship, a force that continues to be heavily involved in Burmese politics to this date. Pro-democracy movements in Myanmar are becoming increasingly more vocal about their dissatisfaction with government policies, military control, and other domestic policies such as the anti-Rohingya sentiment. Furthermore, the proliferation of social media use within Myanmar, specifically Facebook and its affiliated applications, has made it easier for these pro-democracy participants to coordinate gatherings and demonstrations as well as share their ideologies to a larger audience. However, the increase in social media use is also paired with the increase in dis- and misinformation surrounding the aforementioned topics.

Myanmar, officially known as the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and formerly known as Burma, was historically composed of several territories containing sovereign states, which were united under British colonial rule from 1824 to 1948. In 1947, prior to the country gaining its [independence](#) from British rule, Bogyoke Aung Sang — the father of the pro-Democracy leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi — met with the various ethnic leaders of the territories to unite them under one country through the signing of the Panglong Agreement. However, Bogyoke Aung Sang was assassinated before the completion of the agreement, causing domestic disputes between the territories. During this time, U Nu became prime minister and presented an ethnic mix in his party to present a united front: a Shan president, a Bama prime minister, and a Karen commander-in-chief and air force chief. This cabinet lasted until 1962, when General Ne Win — the former prime minister of Myanmar from 1958 to 1960 — [led a military coup](#) to take control over the government, thus leading the nation to be under the control of the Burma Socialist Programme Party, a one-party totalitarian state, until 1988.

Myanmar has created three constitutions, officially known as the Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, in the history of the country — 1947, 1974, and 2008. The first two constitutions outlined the branches of government and outlined the responsibilities of the legislature. However, both of these constitutions were overridden by the military in the 1962 and 1988 coups, respectively. The [latest](#) iteration of the constitution paved the way for the democratic proceedings in recent years; however, as part of the regulation, the Tatmadaw was automatically provisioned 25% of the seats in regional parliaments, giving them effective veto power for any proposed bill and total control of the Ministries of Home Affairs, Defence, and Border Affairs.

Introduction of a New Cybersecurity Law

On February 9, 2021, the State Administrative Council, which was created after the February 1, 2021 coup, released a [draft cybersecurity law](#) to telecommunications providers that operate within the country. The proposed bill immediately sparked backlash from telecommunications providers, social media companies, [journalists](#), and human rights organizations due to its allowance for the Myanmar military to have access to user data and its vague verbiage that could allow the military to prosecute users for purported infractions, such as speaking out against the government or organizing pro-democracy movements. We were unable to view an original copy of the bill; however, according to Human Rights Watch and Reporters Without Borders, the bill contains the following components:

- **Article 29** [allows](#) the government to order an account's "interception, removal, destruction or cessation" in the event that the account content is "causing hate or disrupting unity, stabilization and peace", has posts related to "disinformation", or contains comments going "against any existing law".
- **Article 30** [states](#) that online service providers would be required to keep user data, including the user's "name, IP address, phone number, ID card number, and physical address, for up to three years".
- **Article 51** of the bill [allows](#) the State Administrative Council to "temporarily prohibit any online service provision, including shutting down communication networks, temporarily control devices related to online service provision, and issue a final ban on any online service provider in Myanmar".
- **Article 65** of the bill [states](#) that "anyone who posts 'misinformation or disinformation' faces up to three years in prison ... if they are found to have done so with the intent of causing public panic, loss of trust or social division". This also extends to users who were found to have created a "fake account, website, or web portal".
- The bill also allows the military to conduct unspecified "[interventions](#)" in order to keep public order, investigate crimes, and safeguard public life, property, and public welfare.

Despite these censorship laws, and attempts by the government to require social media users to enter their personally identifiable information when registering accounts, internet users in Myanmar have continued to use social media to share news, stories, and content related to pro-Democracy movements. The proliferation of social media in the country, especially [Facebook](#), has led to the government cracking down on Facebook and their subgroups in an attempt to remove statements of anti-military sentiment during the coup.

Government Control of Internet Connectivity

Starting on February 1, 2021, internet connectivity nationwide was limited and internet activity dropped by approximately 50%, as the coup unfolded and government leaders were taken into custody. By February 13, nationwide internet blackouts were implemented from approximately 1:00 AM to 9:00 AM, local time. During this time period, internet use was reduced to approximately 15% of its normal traffic.

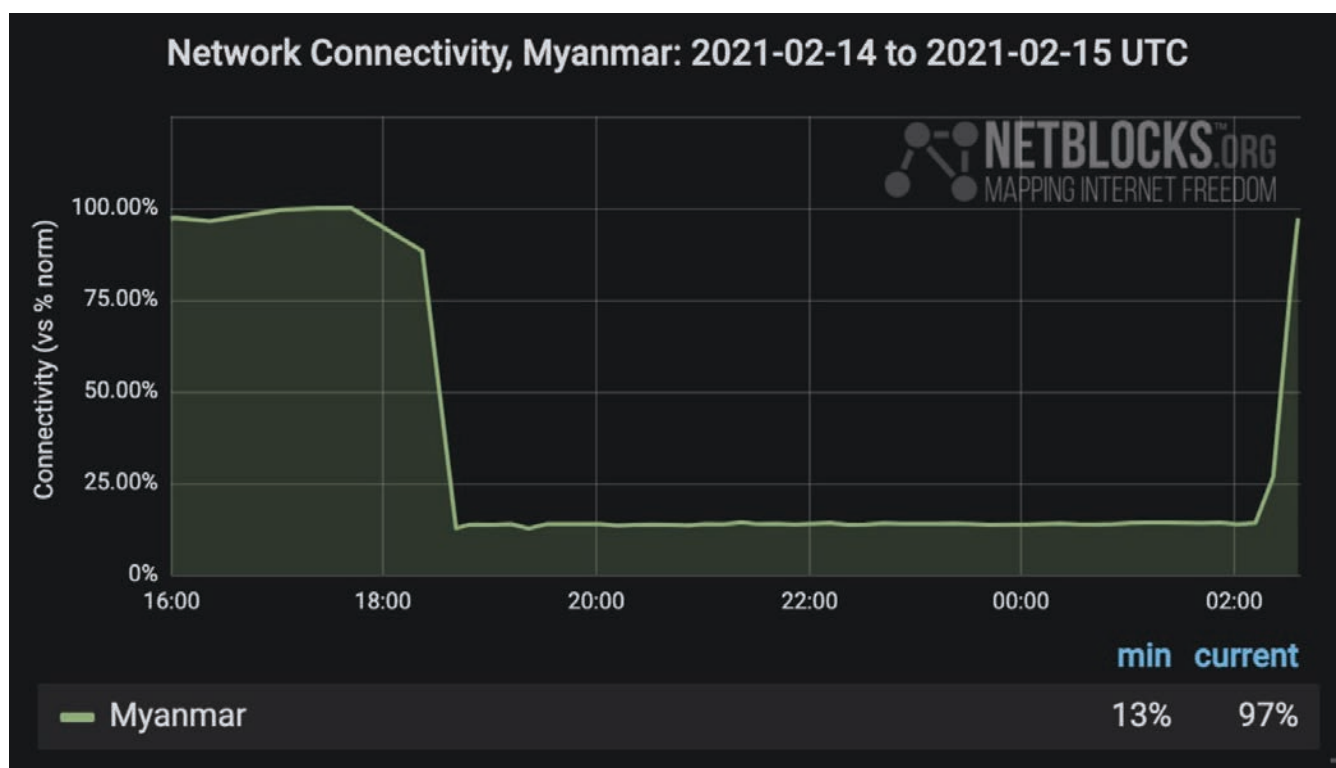


Figure 1: Internet connectivity dropped to 13% overnight. (Source: [Netblocks.org](https://netblocks.org))

Due to this, Myanmar netizens posted on forums that they were looking at alternatives to bypass the internet shutdown. One such alternative, an application called Bridgefy, was [downloaded approximately 600,000 times](#) in the hours after the coup was announced. Bridgefy is an offline messaging application that uses Bluetooth mesh networks to transmit communications, allowing for users within a certain proximity to exchange messages without needing internet connection. The application rose to [prominence](#) after it was used in the 2019 pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong.

Tor Traffic Spikes Following Internet Crackdowns

Recent increases in Tor browser use in Myanmar reveal that citizens are turning to the dark web to bypass censorship and hide their internet traffic from the military regime. Tor, or The Onion Router, is a browser that enables users to access the anonymized underground internet, also known as the “dark web”. Although the dark web is known for hosting criminal activity because of its inherently anonymous nature, the dark web is also used by censored populations that seek freedom of information. Tor and dark web use was historically low in Myanmar; however, in February 2021, Insikt Group observed a spike in Tor use in Myanmar, which is likely a direct response to the new censorship and internet control policies implemented by the Tatmadaw. Prior to the coup, Tor use was virtually nonexistent. However, as the junta increased restrictions on the population and activists began promoting the use of Tor on various social media platforms, use jumped from nearly zero to over 3,500 Burmese users between February 1 and February 18.

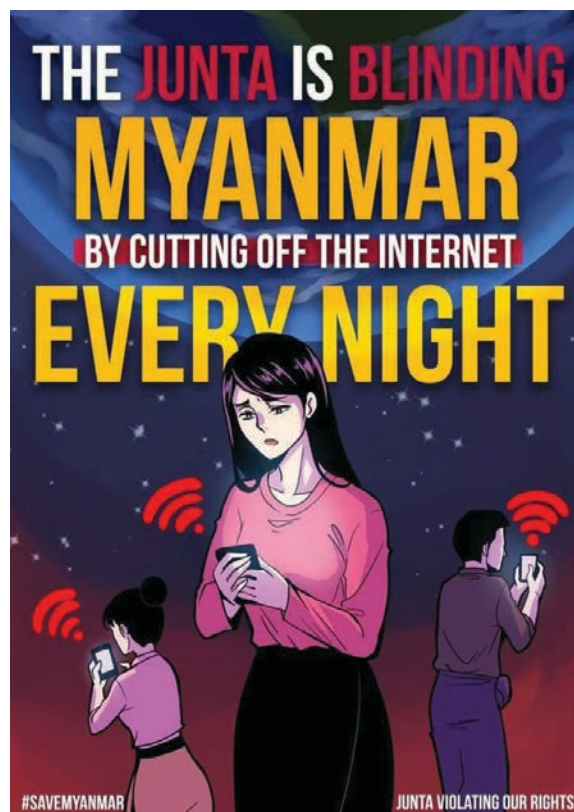


Figure 2: Graphics used to raise awareness of Myanmar's nightly internet blockage. (Source: [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com))

Bridge Users From Burma

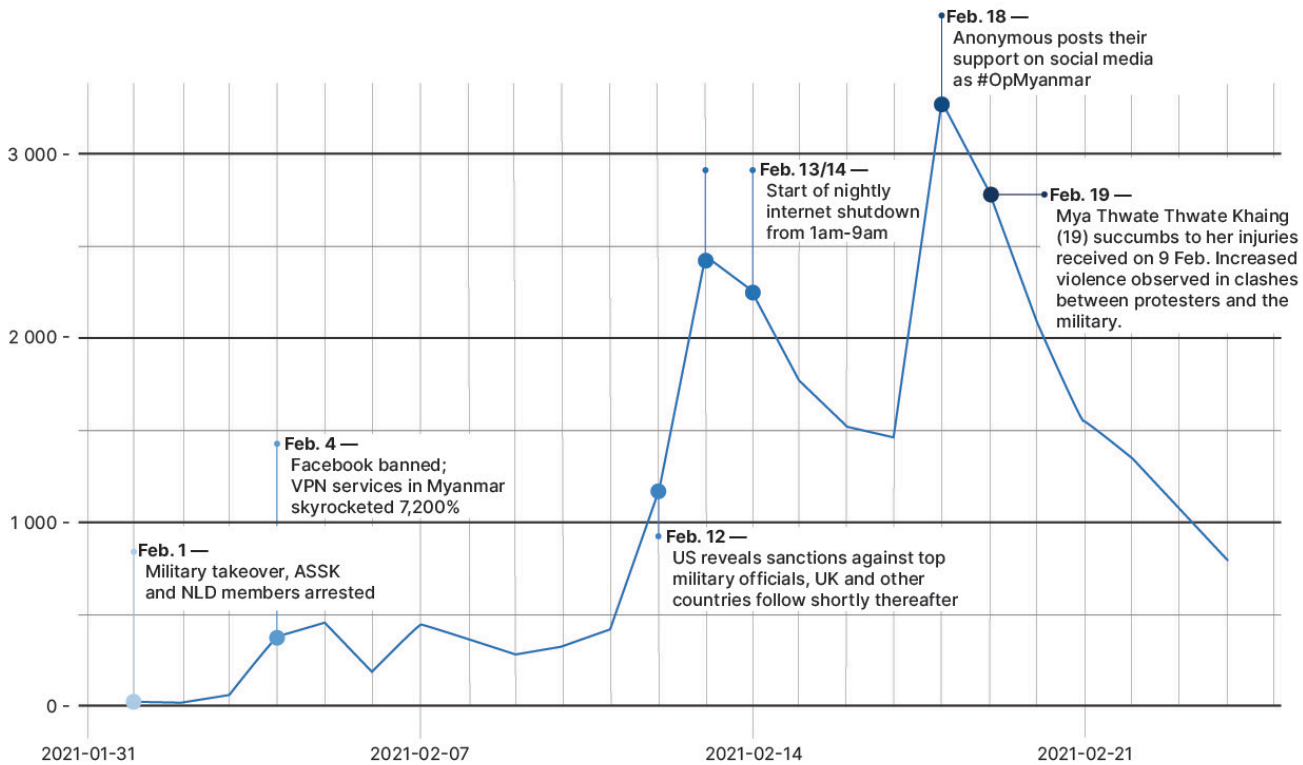


Figure 3: Annotated timeline of Tor use in Myanmar, February 1 to 24, 2021 (Source: [Tor Project](#))

Following the use of Facebook by activists in the country to raise awareness and avoid censorship, the junta banned Facebook, Myanmar's most used social media platform, on February 4, resulting in a 7200% [increase](#) in VPN use throughout the country. On February 7, use of Facebook was reinstated by the junta.

Users on various forums indicated that the Myanmar military was likely searching for those who have Tor installed on their devices, which could explain sudden decreases in use between February 18 and February 21. Many alternative applications were also recommended by hacktivists so that people can bypass censorship restrictions, including Signal, Briar, TailsOS, and the Brave Browser. Forum users also shared the Mysterium Internet BlackOut Toolkit, which includes a myriad of tools to unblock websites and applications, anonymize activities, and keep communication channels open when networks are shut down, among other things.

Censorship and Media Control

According to a 2020 Freedom House [report](#), Myanmar has a total score of 31 in regards to internet freedom (on a scale of 0 to 100), indicating that the country is not free. The country's netizens have encountered obstacles to access, limits on content, and violation of user rights. Furthermore, the country has a total score of 30 on a global freedom scale, with political rights and civil liberties scoring 14 and 16 (on a scale of 0 to 100), respectively. Historically, Myanmar netizens were able to use a virtual private network (VPN) to [circumvent](#) these restrictions; however, in early February 2021, after the military's takeover of the government, it was reported that Myanmar's military [blocked access](#) to VPNs in an effort to stop opposition to the coup and pro-Democracy movements. At the time of writing, access to VPNs has been restored in the country, but the planned cybersecurity bill mentioned above does have a clause which would [ban the use](#) of VPNs to access restricted content.

During the historical protests, the government restricted what the Burmese media could report on. A similar censorship has emerged within recent months as the military coup has been underway in Myanmar. On February 2, 2021, the second day of the coup, one of Facebook's directors of public policy in the Asia-Pacific region [stated](#) that the company would be taking proactive actions to moderate content posted on Facebook in Myanmar in an effort to curb hate speech and misinformation, with one of their first actions being the [removal](#) of a page for Myanmar's Myawaddy Television Network, which posted photos to promote Myanmar's military efforts. Furthermore, on February 25, 2021, Facebook [announced](#) that they were banning all "Tatmadaw-linked commercial entities" from advertising on its platforms, as well as any pages linked to the military, its units, and any other organizations that are under direct military control, such as army-controlled media, and the Ministries of Home, Defence, and Border Affairs. On March 4, 2021, [YouTube](#) also announced that it had removed 5 channels that were found to have been hosted by military-affiliated television networks.

This operation is similar to the [measures implemented](#) by Facebook in 2018 after the killings of the Rohingya minorities were reported in Myanmar. At that time, Facebook removed over 400 Facebook pages, 17 groups, and 135 accounts, as well as 15 Instagram accounts, for engaging in coordinated inauthentic behavior, with many of the pages having been operated by, or closely affiliated with, the Myanmar military — including the Facebook account of then-Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, commander of the current military junta. On February 4, 2021, it was [reported](#) that internet providers operating in Myanmar were told to block access to Facebook and Facebook-owned services such as WhatsApp from February 4 to 7, 2021. The military claimed the block of the social media platforms was to decrease the amount of disinformation and misinformation surrounding its actions; however, critics of the putsch have theorized that the real reason was to prevent pro-democracy movements and protests.

Historical Censorship

According to a [report](#) produced by the Open Observatory of Network Interference (OONI), the state of internet censorship in Myanmar has historically been restrictive and there have been several attempts by Myanmar's government to limit online speech. For instance, there have been reports of the government historically using spyware to target activists, dissidents, journalists, and human rights advocates. These spyware variants include the [FinSpy spyware](#), [Pegasus Spyware](#), and the [Unlimited Interception System \(ULIN\)](#) created by the Tel Aviv-based spyware firm Ability, which allows users to intercept GSM, UMTS, LTE, and CDMA networks.

On March ,2021 ,1 The New York Times [reported](#) that the Myanmar military had once again increased their arsenal of surveillance equipment ,which included Israeli-made surveillance drones ,iPhone cracking devices ,Swedish forensic data tools, and American software that could compromise computer systems and exfiltrate content .The advocacy group ,Justice for Myanmar ,was able to [obtain](#) government budgets for the last 2 years ,which included tens of millions of dollars allocated for technologies that could allow the military to mine phones, track live locations ,and listen to conversations.

The country's censorship activities also include several cybersecurity laws that restrict what users can access, say, and do within the country. These laws are vaguely worded and open to a broad interpretation, allowing the government to freely set and change the parameters for these laws. For example, Section 66D of the [2013 Telecommunications Law](#) prohibits users from the "extortion, coercion, wrongful restraint, defamation, undue influence or threatening of any person" while using telecommunication networks within the country. Additionally, the [Myanmar Penal Code](#) contains several subsections, notably Sections 124A, 505B and 499-502, that prohibit content that could "bring into hatred, contempt, attempts to excite, or disaffection towards the government", "the creation, publication, or circulation of any statement or rumor with the intent to cause fear or alarm to the public which may induce them to commit an offense against the State or against public tranquility", and "allows the State to prosecute an individual for defamation", respectively.

Prominent Social Media in Myanmar

Social media use has exploded in Myanmar in the last decade, particularly with the use of Facebook and affiliated applications, such as Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, and Instagram, with estimates that [approximately 50%](#) of individuals in Myanmar are active on Facebook. The rise of social media is coupled with the fact that Myanmar has a [younger](#) population, with the median age being 28.2 in 2021 in a population of approximately 54 million. The younger generation is more actively involved in politics, from organizing pro-democracy movements on social media to spreading news of the situation in Myanmar internationally. Prior to the shutdown of applications such as Instagram, social media "influencers" had also taken a stand against the military coup and [shared content](#) to their millions of followers regarding the situation within the country.

Facebook and Facebook-Owned Applications

Active use of Facebook in Myanmar has significantly increased over recent years. In 2014, it was [estimated](#) that there were only 4.7 million active Facebook users in Myanmar, [increasing](#) to 20.2 million users in September 2018, 22.3 million [users](#) in January 2020, and 28.7 million [users](#) in January 2021 — a growth of almost 6 million users within the last year. This growth was likely spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has halted travel and led users globally to turn to social media platforms to keep in touch with friends and family. Instagram and Facebook Messenger had similar growth rates within the last year, with Instagram growing from 640,000 to 1.4 million users and Messenger increasing from 11.5 million to 26.9 million users.

Hashtags have also been used by the protesters across multiple forums and social media platforms to amplify awareness of their cause. A sampling of these hashtags has been listed below:

- #whatshappeninginmyanmar
- #civildisobediencemovement
- #savemyanmar
- #rejectmilitarycoup
- #fightfordemocracy
- #stopmilitarycoup
- #militarycoupinmyanmar
- #milkteaalliance
- #freeaungsansukyi
- #respectourvotes
- #freeourleader
- #cybersecuritylawmm
- #opmyanmar
- #opccp
- #everythingwillbeok
- #[insertdate]coup
(ex: #mar8coup)

Reddit

Other pro-democracy conversations have also spurred discussions on forums (such as Reddit and 4chan and 8chan), where subreddits such as [r/Myanmar](#) and [r/SaveMyanmar](#) have been used to share articles on how to bypass censorship, stay safe during riots, and share videos and images of the ongoing protests to the rest of the world. Other items shared include things like [Protesting Life Hacks](#), which contains 14 PDFs on topics ranging from how to deal with tear gas, how to promote events, first aid resources, as well as PDFs detailing items such as the Anarchists Cookbook and how Egyptian activists organised during Arab Spring. Recently, there was a [post](#) made in Burmese that detailed the Do's and Don'ts of Reddit, and how to stay safe on the platform, since the post author acknowledged that there was a large migration of users from traditional social media sites to other forums.

Telegram and Discord

An examination of Telegram showed a higher user rate, with an average of over 1,000 users per examined groups. Similarly to other platforms, the Telegram group was used to share videos and other daily content related to the protests as well as resources for those who were within the country and who wanted to join the protests. We found similar [Reddit posts](#) that detailed how users can set up Telegram to better anonymize themselves and coordinate protests.

Users Per Month

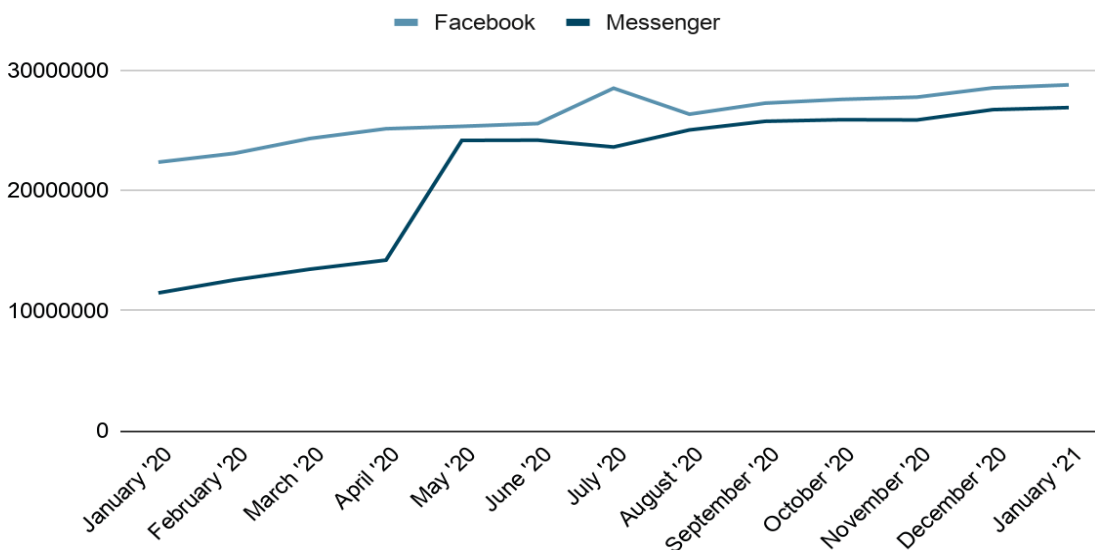


Figure 4: Social media growth between January 2020 and January 2021 (Source: [Napoleon Cat](#))

OPERATION MYANMAR: #OpMyanmar - Letter to the people



Greetings people of Myanmar, We are Anonymous.

We have come to know that your Head of State and military does not care about your freedom and well being. They will take advantages of events and pandemics such as COVID-19 and other issues such as problems with poverty to trick you into believing them.

We believe the military is trying to make Myanmar a TOTALITARIAN state, but we will not let that happen. We advocate for freedom and free state.

Thanks to the people that have taken onto the streets, we understand your bravery and passion to stop such corrupt government. Keep up the good work and remember your government wants you to think you do not have support and that they are your only choice but WE ARE HERE.

We will try to use peaceful methods of hacktivism and demonstrations to expose your government even more and the problems surrounding the Rohingya People have not been forgotten and neither will you.

Min Aung Hlain and the military, has disturbed the hivemind and now they shall pay back.

We are Anonymous. We are Legion. We do not forgive. We do not forget. Expect us.

Server: irc.anonops.com
 Port: 6697
 Webchat: <https://webchat.anonops.com/>
 Channel: #OpMyanmar

Figure 7: Anonymous' #OpMyanmar Letter to the People (Source: YourAnonCentral)

Furthermore, the group also created an #OpMyanmar channel on their webchat, [https://webchat.anonops\[.\]com](https://webchat.anonops[.]com), for interested individuals to have discussions in a protected environment. This movement appears to be part of a larger initiative, #OpCCP, which shows Anonymous' actions against the Chinese Communist Party and their support of the pro-democracy movements seen in East and Southeast Asia. Additionally, Anonymous released a Burmese translation of their memo on "Bypassing Internet Censorship" that could be downloaded by members of the public.

The #OpMyanmar web chat channel encourages followers to conduct distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks against websites that are associated with the Myanmar military. On [February 18, 2021](#), another group known as Myanmar Hackers disrupted websites belonging to the Central Bank of Myanmar, a Tatmadaw propaganda page, the state-run broadcast Myanmar Radio and Television (MRTV), the Port Authority, and the Food and Drug Administration. Later, on March 8, 2021, an Indonesian hacking team called One Hat Cyber Team defaced the Myanmar government trade website, [myantrade.gov\[.\]mm](#), on behalf of the Anonymous collective and #OpMyanmar.

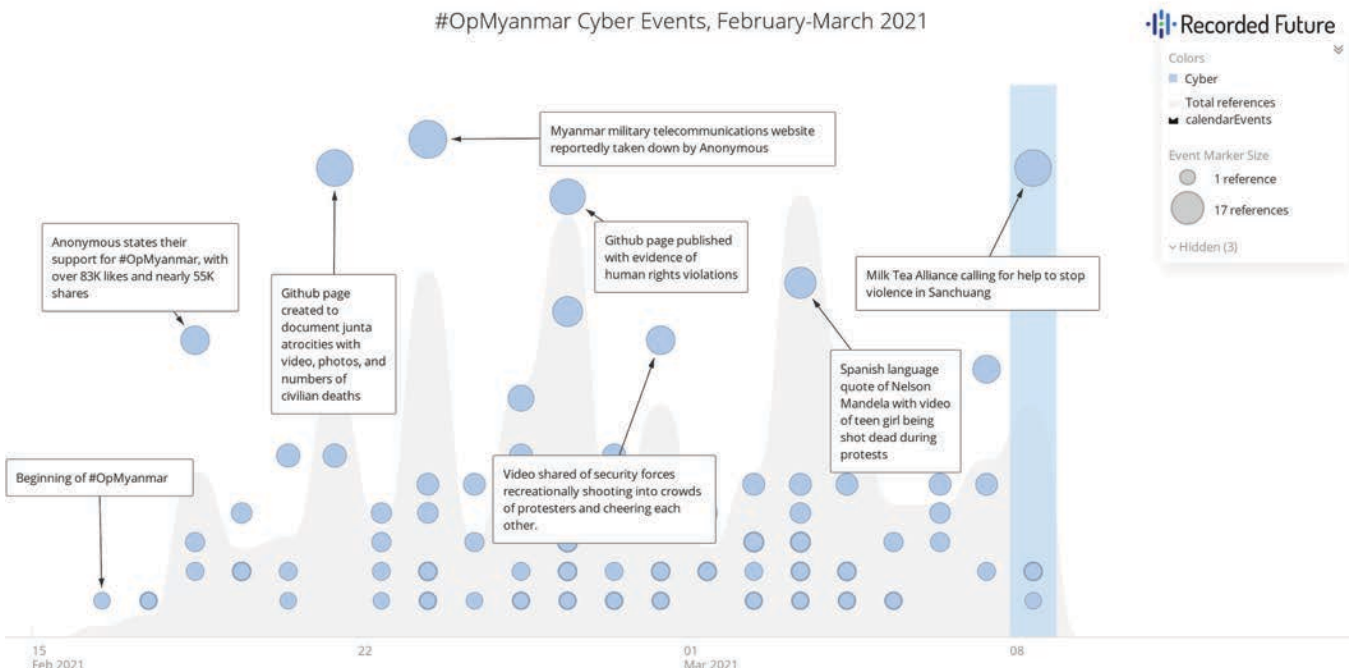


Figure 8: Timeline of #OpMyanmar cyber events February 15 to March 8, 2021 (Source: Recorded Future)



Figure 9 (Left): Graphic showing solidarity between the "Milk Tea Alliance" countries. (Source: Sina Wittayawirok, [Reddit](#))
 Figure 10 (Right): Photo showing umbrella movement participants in Myanmar. (Source: [Reddit](#) (2))



Reddit forums are also being used to identify military-operated websites, emails, military related Facebook accounts, or file servers that should be targeted. [Forum threads](#) contain lists of Myanmar military affiliated social media pages and websites that were recommended for targeting by the hacktivist groups in their anti-military campaigns. Another [running list](#) was observed on the open source media site Medium. Furthermore, the protesters have expanded the scope of targeting to [include](#) military-owned businesses and businesses belonging to members of military families. Activist groups such as [Justice for Myanmar](#) were also found to have [launched](#) mirror sites that were used to coordinate efforts and spread news to those within Myanmar after their official site was banned within the country.

Milk Tea Alliance

Crucially, the protesters in Myanmar are also learning lessons from their pro-Democracy counterparts, known as the Milk Tea Alliance, in other East and Southeast Asian countries, namely Hong Kong. A Reddit thread posted on February 17, 2021 [showed](#) a 78-page Google document, titled "The HK19 Manual - Part 1: the Roles", written in both English and Burmese. The manual detailed items such as the various roles that are needed in a pro-Democracy movement and their responsibilities, such as "Front-liners", "Scouts", and "Social Workers". Other resources listed within the document include student activist groups, legal support, and international media resources that could be used to amplify messaging internationally.

Members of the Milk Tea Alliance in other Southeast Asian countries, such as Thailand, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, were encouraged by the group to show their solidarity with the people of Myanmar on February 28, 2021 and [organize their own protests](#) within their respective countries. The rallies took place mostly online, and there were a small number of in-person protests in places such as Thailand and Taiwan, with online participants sharing their artwork, identifying military-owned businesses in Myanmar, and amplifying the Burmese pro-democracy message to the international community.

The History of Political Unrest in Myanmar

1988 Elections and Uprising

In an effort to reduce the nation's debt in 1987, Ne Win announced the withdrawal of the newly replaced currency notes, 75, 35, and 25 kyats, leaving the 45 and 90 kyat notes. This angered many university students as their tuition savings were reduced. As a result, students from the Rangoon Institute of Technology (RIT) protested in the streets of then-capital Rangoon, now known as Yangon, and distributed anti-government leaflets. Other university protest groups set off bombs and organized smaller gatherings in the university campus. This led to an increasing student activist group who had a growing resentment toward the military rule, the economic policies of Ne Win, and the corruption of the government.

The protests started gathering force in March 1988 and eventually culminated in the August 8, 1988 protests, where large demonstrations from students and sympathizers demanded a multi-party democracy. On August 22, 1988, Aung San Suu Kyi became a symbol of the pro-democracy movement after addressing the protesters at Shwedagon Pagoda and encouraged the protesters to keep fighting for their beliefs and a multi-party system of government. However, the military government was able to retain power in September 1988 after they enacted martial law, cracked down on the protesters, and put Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest. Additionally, the 1988 protests led to the [creation](#) of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) from 1988 to 1997. The SPDC was, until its dissolution in 2011, the official name of the military government and was composed of powerful regional military commanders who were given preferential power above other cabinet ministers.

2015 and 2020 Elections

Myanmar underwent their [first multi-party election](#) in November 2015, with Aung San Suu Kyi running under the National League for Democracy (NLD). The NLD won an [overwhelming majority](#) of the votes against the incumbent, and military-favored, Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). The Tatmadaw continued having 166, or the constitutionally required 25%, of seats represented. However, there were [reports](#) that approximately 4 million people were unable to register to vote due to the cancellation of polling areas in regions that were affected by ethnic violence and the inability for Myanmar citizens working overseas to register to vote in time.

Myanmar’s latest election occurred on November 8, 2020, with Aung San Suu Kyi’s NLD again winning a [large percentage](#) of the overall votes, showing that she remained a popular domestic figure. Similar to 2015, there were [claims](#) that overseas voters were unable to register in time, that the COVID-19 pandemic had caused some polling locations to shut down, and that Myanmar’s Rohingya population were excluded from participating in the election or running as candidates. Additionally, in October 2020, Myanmar’s electoral commission [canceled](#) voting stations in large parts of the populous Rakhine, Shan, and Kachin states, citing violence in the region as hindering their abilities to “hold a free and fair election” — thus leaving several million people without the ability to participate in the election. The alleged [election fraud](#) was the justification used by the military for their February 2021 coup, with military officials [reported](#) to have arrested members of Myanmar’s Union Election Commission (UEC) while they conducted their investigation.

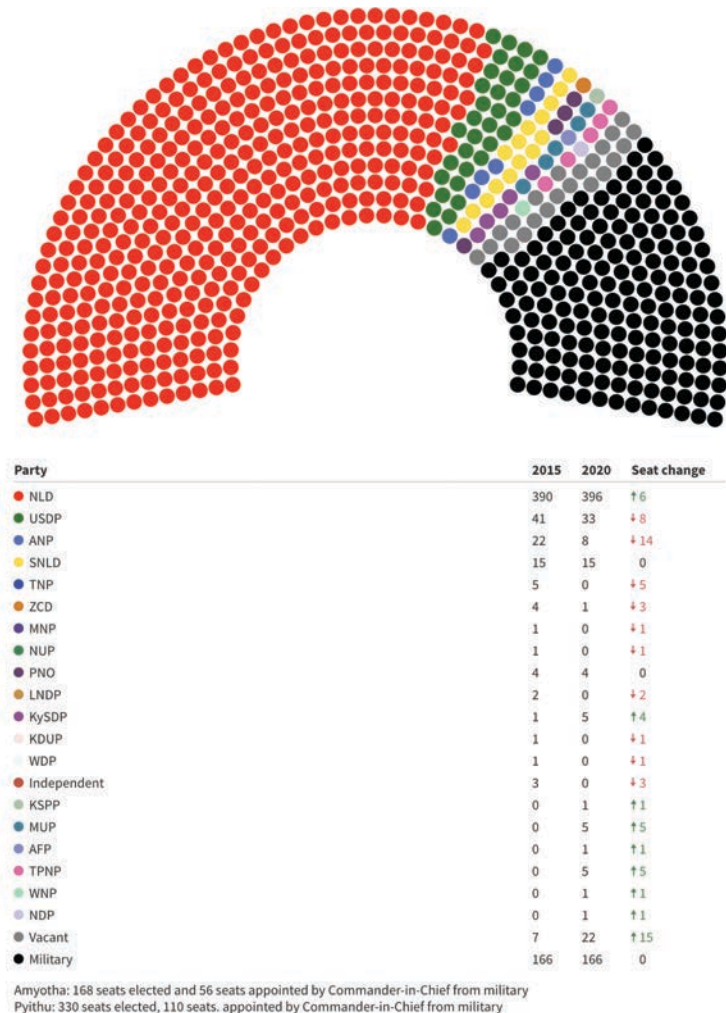


Figure 11: 2020 election results by party and number of seats won (Source: [Merin.org](#))

Outlook

The military coup continues to be underway at the time of writing. International pressure has increased as the [US](#), [UK](#), [Australia](#), and other countries have instituted sanctions against top Burmese military personnel and have also issued trade embargos against the country. Additionally, the United Nations Security Council has called for imposing an [arms embargo](#) against the country while it is in the midst of the coup to prevent it from committing further abuses. Furthermore, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), of which Myanmar is a member, met on March 2, 2021 and [released a statement](#) calling for an end to the violence. However, as the principle of non-interference is one of the cores of the ASEAN agreement, it is unlikely that any of the ASEAN member states will step in if the situation in Myanmar persists, or if violence escalates. At the time of writing, only 4 member states called for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and other detainees: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore.

The coup has become increasingly violent in the last few weeks. At the time of writing, there have been at least 200 protesters reported to have been killed and nearly 2,100 detained; however, actual numbers are likely higher than what has been reported by Myanmar's media channels. There has been at least [2 reports](#) of NLD members — U Khin Maung Latt (chairman of the Pabedan Ward/Village) and U Zaw Myat Lin (an organizer at the Su Institute of Vocational Science in Shwe Pyi Thar Township) — having been tortured and killed by the military junta. The escalating violence has resulted in the UN Special Envoy issuing calls to [put pressure](#) on the country in forms of sanctions. Furthermore, on [March 5, 2021](#), it was reported that, on February 4, 2021, the US blocked Myanmar's military junta from moving approximately \$1 billion USD that was held at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. Similarly, on March 4, 2021, Norway's central bank [announced](#) that they had put Japan's Kirin Holdings on a watch list due to the organization's ties to companies owned or operated by the Myanmar military, such as Myanma Economic Holdings Public Company Limited, and a joint venture between Kirin and Myanmar Brewery that was valued at \$1.7 billion USD.

Despite these sanctions and embargoes, there have been [unvalidated claims](#) that the Chinese government is working with Myanmar's military to strengthen their internet firewalls and increase censorship capabilities, claims that the Chinese government has [denied](#). [Several users](#) have claimed that they have received messages in Chinese from their telecommunications providers, further leading to the theory that China is aiding Myanmar's military in improving their internet censorship. However, analysis by NetBlocks [showed](#) that the

display of Chinese characters was a side effect of the military's restriction of Google's static CDN, which was causing the web font icon load failures and was not in itself evidence that the Chinese were interfering with Myanmar's internet.

Furthermore, there have been reports of [unregistered](#) flights arriving in Yangon from Kunming in southern China, with an average of 5 flights per night making trips between the two countries. Both the Chinese and Myanmar governments have [claimed](#) that these flights are carrying seafood between the countries; however, according to a [report](#) from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), the flights are being conducted in a suspicious manner. For example, the planes' transponders were turned off, which is a violation of international aviation rules, and the flights are missing from international flights databases, including flight numbers, call signs, and destinations. According to ASPI, it is possible that the planes are carrying Chinese troops and cyber specialists to help with the aforementioned strengthening of the country's censorship capabilities, but it is also possible that the planes may be carrying Chinese troops and military equipment, as Kunming is the home base for China's 63rd Base of the People's Liberation Army Rocket Force, which holds a significant artillery unit, signals intelligence units, and cybersecurity units.

The coup is expected to last at least another year, with the military calling for re-elections after the conclusion of the country's one year state of emergency. It is likely that Myanmar's pro-democracy movement will continue on in the coming months and there has been evidence of greater participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement recently by civil servants, such as [doctors](#), [railway workers](#), and [Myanmar's Ambassador to the United Nations](#), and [underground financial support groups](#) have emerged to support those participating in the CDM. Violence has grown steadily in the last few weeks and defected Burmese military policemen have [reported](#) that they were ordered to "shoot 'til they [the protesters] are dead." Pro-democracy supporters have remained steadfast in spite of the increased violence, and have continued to find ways to circumvent the country's internet restrictions to show evidence of the military's brutality to the international community. Despite international calls for peace, and facing the threat of sanctions toward the country, Myanmar's military has stayed on their course, stating that they are prepared to "...[learn to walk with only few friends](#)".

About Recorded Future

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