

SITUATION UPDATE: MYANMAR FEBRUARY 2026

Five Years After the Coup: Why are Displacement and Suffering on the Rise in Myanmar?

Myanmar is facing one of the most complex humanitarian crises in the world. Five years since the junta seized power from democratically elected members of the country's previous ruling party, the situation continues to unravel. Peaceful nationwide protests have been met with a violent crackdown by the military and have since evolved into a widespread civil war.*

Years of conflict have displaced nearly 4 million people internally, forced 1.5 million to seek refuge in neighboring countries, and left approximately one third of the population in need of humanitarian assistance. Additionally, in March 2025, a devastating magnitude 7.7 earthquake killed over 5,000 people and caused extensive damage, creating a [tragedy within a crisis](#). This update aims to provide an overview of the conflict and the resultant humanitarian crisis, with a look at some of the key issues and recommendations to support the people of Myanmar.

***Two Names, One Country**

The military government changed the country's name to "Myanmar" in 1989, but the U.S. Government continues to use the name "Burma." The regime argues that Myanmar is more inclusive to the country's myriad ethnic groups, in part because "Burma" refers to the Burman ethnic majority. Many activists continue to use "Burma", as the name "Myanmar" was imposed by the junta.

Aftermath of the 2021 Coup: Conflict and Displacement

In November 2020, Myanmar held parliamentary elections that saw the National League for Democracy (NLD) win in a landslide, sweeping more than 80% of contested seats. Then, on February 1, 2021, claiming the results were fraudulent, the junta seized power in an attempt to consolidate its control of the country.

Immediately after the coup, Myanmar's armed forces, known as the Tatmadaw, detained civilian leaders, including former State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, President Win Myint, and other senior officials of the NLD. They then named replacement ministers while instituting a curfew and declaring a state of emergency.

When pro-democracy protests erupted across the country, the military repressed dissidents with lethal force. As the months passed, former NLD members and other civic leaders formed a

decentralized government in exile known as the National Unity Government (NUG). At the same time, ethnic armed organizations (EAOs)—already familiar with fighting the Tatmadaw—reactivated their militias, some under the banner of the NUG. Another important actor that emerged following the coup was the People's Defence Force (PDF), an armed wing of NUG that is attempting to unify various militias under a common command structure.

In the last five years, the junta has committed [a wide range](#) of crimes and abuses against its population, including repeated aerial and artillery attacks on civilians, the use of internationally banned antipersonnel landmines, the forced recruitment of child soldiers, obstruction of humanitarian aid, and acts that have rightfully been labeled as crimes against humanity and genocide. In response, the international community has imposed sanctions that further isolate the country. Myanmar, and its junta, have largely returned to its status of international [pariah state](#), a position it previously occupied from 1962 through 2011.

Humanitarian Overview: Growing Protection Risks and Shrinking Aid

A perfect storm of ongoing armed conflict, natural disaster, drastic cuts to foreign aid and economic collapse, has entrenched Myanmar's humanitarian crisis. According to the Myanmar [Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan](#) in 2026, there are an estimated 3.6 million people who have been internally displaced, with expectations that this number will rise to 4 million in the coming year. According to the 2025 [Global Report on Internal Displacement](#), Myanmar ranked eighth worldwide in the number of internally displaced people and had the largest displacement crisis within East Asia and the Pacific.

In addition to those who are internally displaced, up to a third of Myanmar's population needs humanitarian assistance. Families struggle to survive given the ongoing insecurity, with women and girls exposed to heightened risks of violence, and children deprived of education. The World Food Program (WFP) has projected that over 12 million people face [acute hunger](#) in Myanmar in 2026, with one million people at emergency levels. Emergency level food security is phase four on the global standard for measuring food insecurity, and involves large consumption gaps, high acute malnutrition rates and excess deaths. Absent critical lifesaving assistance, especially in areas of active conflict such as Rakhine State, aid agencies warn of starvation.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) [estimates](#) that over 1.5 million refugees have fled the country. The majority of these are Rohingya, a long-persecuted ethnic minority, who now mostly reside in refugee camps in Bangladesh. Cox's Bazar refugee camp, along Bangladesh's coast, remains one of the most densely populated camps in the world, and continual fires there demonstrate the constant danger to its residents. The plight of the Rohingya has also been brought before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), where The Gambia—on behalf of 57 members from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation—has filed a genocide case against

Myanmar. The United States previously [determined](#) in 2022 that members of Myanmar's military junta have committed genocide against the Rohingya.

Protection risks in Myanmar are also shaped by religious and ethnic identity. The majority of the country's population practices Buddhism, with estimates that between 80-90% of the population identify as Buddhist. Myanmar is also a multiethnic nation with 135 distinct ethnic groups. The largest ethnic group is the Bamar, who make up an estimated 68% of the population. Beyond the Rohingya, ethnic groups including the Karen, Kachin, Chin and Shan have faced violent persecution, and been forced to Malaysia, Thailand, and India over many decades. Ethnic Karen populations based in the East, who are primarily Christians, have endured decades of brutal military offenses and have been forced into refugee camps along the Thai border. Kachin and Chin, many of whom are also Christian, have been targeted in counterinsurgency operations. The Shan people, the majority of whom are Buddhists, have had their villages burned and been forced to flee.

Numerous human rights organizations have documented a variety of escalating atrocities across the country. Expanded military operations include indiscriminate attacks on civilians through airstrikes, with the junta targeting schools, hospitals, religious sites, as well as displaced person camps. The military has also made use of drones, as well as motorized [paragliders](#), used to drop bombs.

Myanmar is one of the few countries to continue using banned cluster munitions and antipersonnel landmines and has been at the [top of the list](#) for civilian deaths in recent years. The junta has also been accused of abducting boys into the army and using child soldiers, a violation of international humanitarian and human rights law. Those who resist may be detained, with reports of more than 30,000 political prisoners who face torture, sexual violence, and death.

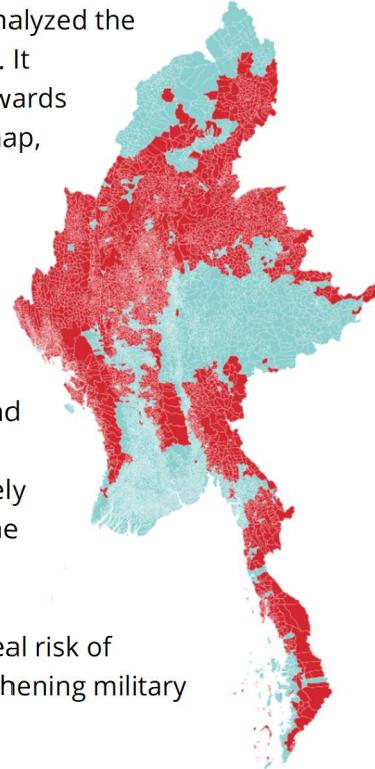
Against this backdrop of escalating protection risks, reductions in international humanitarian assistance have significantly constrained the response capacity. The dismantling of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) effectively canceled millions of dollars in lifesaving programs early in 2025. Still recovering from a 7.7-magnitude earthquake, Myanmar [turned to countries](#) including China, Russia and India to fill the gaps left by the United States.

As Expected, Myanmar's Military-Backed Party Wins 2026 Election

On February 5, 2026, state media announced that Myanmar's military-backed Unity and Development Party (USDP) had won the general elections in a landslide. Most international observers have been clear that the results are illegitimate, and that the election was neither free nor fair. UN Special Rapporteur Tom Andrews described it as "A theatrical performance that has exerted enormous pressure on the people of Myanmar to participate in what has been designed to dupe the international community." The United States has not made any statement after the election results.

One independent media organization, the Democratic Voice of Burma, analyzed the election results using data provided by the regime's election commission. It reports that elections could not be held in 67 townships, and that many wards within the remaining townships were ineligible for the election. On the map, red represents areas that did not vote, illustrating just how limited the election was.

Maung Zarni, a Burmese activist based in the United Kingdom, has argued that the junta primarily held the election to "[improve the optics](#)" and gain more legitimacy. Others have cautioned against putting too much stock in the elections and the media commentary they generate and rather focusing on the [military reality](#) on the ground in Myanmar. China has been quick to congratulate the junta on its election and is widely seen as the country with the largest stakes and influence in Myanmar. The election provides an opportunity to maintain the military power of the junta [behind a veneer](#) of civilian rule. In fact, analysts have pointed out that were it not for China's direct intervention in 2024, the junta was at real risk of losing ground to the resistance. Russia, for its part, has also been strengthening military ties with the junta.



Regionally, the 11-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has not endorsed the recently held elections. It is unclear how the regional bloc's stance will evolve under the current chairmanship of the Philippines, but it is likely they will stick to the Five-Point Consensus agreed to by ASEAN in 2021. Regardless of the influence of external powers, Myanmar's people [continue to resist](#) and have repeatedly demonstrated agency over their own future. There are powerful civil society voices among Myanmar's diaspora operating inside the country, regionally, as well as within the United States.

Key Issues to Watch in 2026

In addition to the conflict, humanitarian crisis, and 2026 election, there are several other key issues worth watching in the coming months.

1. **Scam centers and human trafficking** – The coup and ensuing civil war has created fertile conditions for organized crime. The centers, run by criminal gangs, recruit jobseekers through false advertising. These victims of human trafficking are then pressured to work in a variety of fraud operations, and these have grown into one of the most lucrative criminal enterprises in the world. Scams directly target wealthy individuals, as well as other technologically connected nations and Chinese citizens. The U.S. Treasury has said that in the United States alone, in 2024, at least \$10 billion has been stolen via [cyberscams](#) run out of Southeast Asia. The U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime estimates nearly \$40 billion in annual

revenue. The Dismantle Foreign Scam Syndicates Act ([H.R. 5490](#)) has been introduced to address the issue.

2. **Rohingya Genocide Case** – The Gambia originally lodged an application with the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 2019. The case alleges that Myanmar had committed mass murder rape and destruction of communities against the Rohingya in Rakhine state. Several other countries—including two U.N. Security Council members, France and the United Kingdom—formally asked the court for permission to join the case. The hearings concluded on January 29, 2026, and a final ruling is expected within three to six months. Myanmar’s counsel has focused primarily on jurisdiction, standing and representation, rather than the evidence of the case. Not only is justice on the line for the Rohingya people, but if the ICJ allows the proceedings to indefinitely stall, it [risks creating a template](#) that other perpetrators of genocide and crimes against humanity could follow.
3. **Temporary Protected Status in the U.S.** – [TPS](#) is an immigration status that the U.S. Government grants to people from certain countries that are unsafe for individuals to return to. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced in 2025 that it would terminate TPS for Myanmar, citing the junta’s plans for elections. If terminated, thousands of refugees from Myanmar would have been at risk of being forced to return. To counter this decision, six Burmese TPS holders, acting on behalf of 4,000 individuals, filed a class action lawsuit against the Trump Administration. On January 23, 2026, a federal court ordered the administration to delay its termination while the lawsuit moves forward. For the latest updates on the case (*Doe v. Noem*) visit [CourtListener](#).
4. **Iran’s Ghost Fleet Fueling the Junta** – An [investigation](#) by Amnesty International found that shipments of jet fuel have entered the country from Iran. Despite sanctions, an Iranian shadow fleet continues to provide illicit deliveries to power the junta’s air war, giving it a critical advantage over the resistance. 2025 was the deadliest year for aerial attacks since the coup in 2021, and the junta has struck thousands of civilian locations. The fuel deliveries not only prolong the brutal civil war in Myanmar but also provided new revenue for Iran’s government.
5. **Key Legislation and U.S. Policy** – On February 3, 2026, the United States extended the national emergency with respect to the situation in Myanmar for one year ([91 Fed. Reg. 5663](#)). The statement recognizes the situation, “Continues to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States.” The notice ensures that the U.S. is not lifting sanctions and is not normalizing relations with the junta. Other key legislation is the BRAVE Burma Act ([H.R. 3190](#)), which, if adopted, would designate a special coordinator for Myanmar policy. Additionally, [H.R. 7014](#) would redesignate TPS for designation of Burma for Burmese who have legally taken refuge in the United States. Lastly, the Burma GAP Act [H.R. 4140](#) is a bill that seeks to improve the humanitarian response and would aid Rohingya refugees and internally displaced people in Myanmar.

USCRI Recommendations

With severe underfunding, the complex humanitarian situation in Myanmar is only projected to get worse in the next year. The recent Continuation of the National Emergency recognizes this, and that the situation in Myanmar remains unsafe.

The constellation of problems facing Myanmar is an enormous challenge for humanitarians and policymakers alike. The interlocking crises also present a rare opportunity for diverse stakeholders to find common ground and work towards meaningful solutions. To mitigate further harm and advance accountability, the following steps are urgently needed:

- Donor governments must meet the requests of the 2026 Humanitarian Needs and response plan, which prioritizes lifesaving assistance for nearly 5 million people.
- The United States and international community should continue to unequivocally reject the military junta's efforts to gain legitimacy through illegitimate elections.
- Stop illicit fuel shipments from Iran and end the junta's bombing campaign against civilians—the United States and its regional allies must close this loophole in sanctions.
- Congress should support bipartisan legislation including the BRAVE Burma Act, the Burma GAP Act, and the Dismantle Foreign Scam Syndicates Act.
- Governments around the world should acknowledge the genocide case (The Gambia v. Myanmar) before the ICJ as a chance for international law to deliver justice, and to set a legal precedent that protects communities from atrocities.
- Congress should work to extend Temporary Protected Status for the people of Myanmar by passing H.R. 7014.

See below for more of USCRI's work on Myanmar:

- [Why TPS Matters: Voices from Burma \(Myanmar\) in the United States July 2025](#)
- [A Glimpse at Camp Life in Cox's Bazar: Examining Aid Response and Distilling Solutions April 2023](#)
- [USCRI Backgrounder: The crisis in Myanmar \(Burma\) July 2021](#)

Suggested Media

- [Iran's shadow fleet is fueling the Myanmar junta's air war \(Reuters, Jan. 26, 2026\)](#)
- [Opinion | My Rohingya People Are Running Out of Time \(New York Times, by Lucky Karim, Jan. 22, 2026\)](#)
- [Scam City, Trafficked with Mariana van Zeller \(National Geographic, 2025\)](#)