

Counting Myanmar's Dead: Reported Civilian Casualties since the 2021 Military Coup

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Cover: Protesters use slingshots during a clash with security forces in the Thaketa Township of Yangon, Myanmar, 28 March 2021. Photo: The New York Times / NTB

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Contents

Executive Summary	6
1. Introduction	9
2. Political background	12
3. Methodology	16
<i>3.1. Definition of Civilians in Internal Armed Conflict</i>	16
<i>3.2. Data Sources, Collection Methods, and Source Analysis</i>	18
<i>3.1. 3 Categories of Violence</i>	28
4. Existing Reports on Civilian Casualties in Myanmar	30
5. Findings	33
<i>5.1. Number of civilian casualties</i>	33
<i>5.2. Trends in the Killing of Civilians</i>	37
<i>5.3. Civilians Killed, by Age and Gender</i>	41
<i>5.4. Categories of Violence</i>	41
<i>5.5. Sexual Violence</i>	44
<i>5.6. The Geography of Civilian Fatalities</i>	45
<i>5.7. Identifying Perpetrators and Victims</i>	49
<i>5.8. Multimedia and Social Media Evidence</i>	52
6. Conclusion	54

Executive Summary¹

This study finds that *at least* 6,337 civilians were reported as killed and 2,614 as wounded for political reasons in Myanmar in the twenty months between the military coup of February 1, 2021, and September 30, 2022. This is a larger number than is normally cited in the media, and yet it is only an estimate, based on *reported killings* gathered from reliable media reports. The actual total is surely higher since many killings have likely gone unreported.

Our research indicates that even establishing an accurate total for just the reported civilian killings from any single available dataset is essentially impossible, due to selection bias with respect to sources. This is true of the Township-based Conflict Monitoring System (TCMS) dataset, which is maintained by the Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security (MIPS) and provides the main basis for this study. We have thus combined several datasets to arrive at an approximate total figure.

This report defines civilians as individuals who are neither combatants nor members of armed organizations, and who do not take part directly in hostile actions. The report does not join the debate over what kinds of violence constitute a violation of international humanitarian law. Our study aims to demonstrate that the total reported number of conflict-driven civilian fatalities is higher than the figures cited in reports compiled by various international actors, including the United Nations. The study briefly discusses the reported killings of individuals alleged to have been members of a Pyu Saw Htee or militia force associated with the Myanmar military. Since we have been unable to ascertain the veracity of these allegations, we have taken them at face value and have not counted these particular individuals as civilians.

The escalation of violence against civilians in Myanmar began shortly after the February 2021 coup, when the new military regime suppressed non-violent protests by means of brutal crackdowns, arrests, torture, and killings. The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) identified 884 protest-related killings by the security forces. After the initial phase of repression of the anti-junta protest, political violence continued at a lower level, which then escalated and reached a monthly peak of 492 registered killings in December 2021.

The repression of the non-violent protests led to the formation of local resistance groups, such as Local Defense Forces (LDF) and People's Defense Forces (PDFs), which acquired arms and training from Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs). These groups launched attacks against military units, police targets, and civil servants who allegedly supported the arrest of protesters by actively supporting the military. The media reports also showed that resistance groups themselves killed some civil servants who did not join the Civil Disobedience Movement. The military responded

1. The authors would like to thank Amber Deniz, Marte Nilsen, Patrick Burgess, James Rodehaver, Mark Harris, and Matteo Crippa for their critical and helpful comments on earlier versions of this report. Their constructive suggestions have saved us from errors and improved this report. Any remaining weaknesses or errors of judgment are solely the responsibility of the authors.

with raids against villages suspected of harboring PDFs. The retaliatory violence triggered a wave of politically motivated murders by both sides, with the military targeting suspected PDF fighters and supporters, and the PDFs targeting alleged informers and collaborators. The military then responded by arming local militias. Given this dynamic, political violence is likely to escalate further, and perhaps reach catastrophic proportions. The epicenter of the escalated violence has been the Sagaing and Magway regions, which are mainly populated by Myanmar's ethnic Burman majority population, and which had not experienced armed struggle in decades prior to the coup.

This study finds that politically motivated murders, and not collateral killings in connection with armed clashes, constituted the dominant form of violence against civilians in both urban and rural areas in the 20-month period after the coup. This was especially true in regions populated by the ethnic Burman majority and in the two major cities of Yangon and Mandalay. Sixty-seven percent of the reported civilian fatalities were politically motivated murders.² The four regions—Sagaing, Magway, Mandalay, and Yangon—have seen the highest number of civilian deaths due both to the repression in the first six months after the coup and to politically motivated murders in the subsequent months. In contrast to the aftermath of the 1988 military crackdown against the protestors in Yangon and other places, when the main fighting took place in ethnic minority areas, in the period from 2021–2022, the Burman majority population suffered the most from political violence.

A key purpose of this study is to demonstrate that ample multimedia evidence is available to systematically track the number of civilian killings in Myanmar. Much evidence may be found in the social media, where perpetrators often post images, videos, and accounts of their actions. Additionally, traditional media and local news sources have reported a great number of killings, often with a high degree of accuracy. These reports, compiled by local journalists, are available on Facebook, Telegram, and other social media platforms.

While we emphasize that the Myanmar military holds sole responsibility for instigating the trend of violence when it repressed the non-violent protests, our study calls for more research both to understand the large number of politically motivated murders of civilians that occurred afterward and to identify the perpetrators. The study calculates that the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw), police, and affiliated militia were responsible for 3,003 reported civilian deaths (including protestors), between February 1, 2021, and September 30, 2022. In the same 20-month period, anti-coup resistance groups or EAOs killed 2,152 civilians, and unspecified perpetrators killed at least 1,170 civilians. Our study also shows that determining the category to which some of the unspecified perpetrators belong is possible by identifying their victims. (For categories of perpetrators, see Table 8 below.) One objective of this study is to lay a groundwork for investigating each and every incident.

2. The ratio is likely to be different for the more recent period because of the increasing number of aerial bombings that took place in 2023. From January–May 2023, an estimated 250 civilians were killed by airstrikes.

The military regime plans to hold a sham election in August 2023, which the opposition has vowed to disrupt. Even though the election is likely to be delayed, the risk of election-related violence remains high. There have been media reports of election-related violence and explicit threats against the political parties that decided to register their parties with the Union Election Commission (UEC) and civil servants working on behalf of the UEC. The scale, trend, and acceptance of violence against civilians by supporters of both the military regime and the resistance groups are worrying. There is potential for politicide, with large-scale retaliatory killings should the violence escalate.

On the basis of our research, we would like to suggest that the United Nations (UN) create a system to observe and document the murder of civilians in Myanmar, in accordance with Security Council Resolution 2669. This resolution demands the cessation of all violence and encourages restraint and the reduction of tensions. The proposed system should maintain a current tally of civilian deaths, modelled on the one that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) uses to track civilian deaths in Ukraine. Furthermore, our study urges all participants in the conflict to begin a conversation about safeguarding civilians and halting the continuous killing of civilians in conflict zones and major cities.

1. Introduction

To prevent future killing of civilians, the international community must first acknowledge the severity and nature of civilian killings in Myanmar. This requires detailed, verifiable data about each killing, regardless of who the perpetrator is. For the 20-month period from February 1, 2021, to September 30, 2022, TCMS (the dataset prepared by MIPS), has registered 3,229 killed civilians. This number does not include data from other reliable datasets and sources. If we include them—as explained in the section, Findings, below—we arrive at 6,337 civilians reported as killed, a figure almost twice that of the TCMS number.

The TCMS includes data on killings collected from more than 66 leading Myanmar language media outlets and local-news pages on Facebook. For this report, we also draw on a highly reliable dataset, prepared by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), and on a detailed list established by the pro-military Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) to supplement the data in the TCMS. After removing all overlapping reports and duplicates, we arrived at the figure of a minimum of 6,337 reported civilian killings in the 20-month period from the coup on February 1, 2021, to September 30, 2022. In most cases, the sources reveal the identity of each person killed and the date and place that the death occurred. The AAPP dataset goes a step further and undertakes an investigation and interviews to verify each case. The USDP has also systematically recorded and provided detailed information about the killings of its party members and supporters.

During the first phase of violence after the coup, the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) and police undertook most of the killings as part of their repression of a massive non-violent protest movement. The AAPP data registered 884 protest-related killings in this period. Subsequent killings, especially after April 2021, were mainly politically motivated murders or occurred in the context of armed clashes between the Tatmadaw (army, police, and militias) on one side, and Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) or People's Defense Forces (PDFs) on the other. A key finding of our report is that the number of politically motivated murders has been extraordinarily high compared to the number of deaths from other forms of violence. Politically motivated murders took two major forms: summary executions in conflict zones and targeted killings. In addition to killing and fighting the PDFs and EAOs, the Tatmadaw kills civilians in reprisals or “clearing operations” against suspected villages. On their side, the PDFs and other local resistance groups have resorted to targeted killings of alleged collaborators, local administrators, civil servants, some monks, and USDP members. Since October 2021, in response to these killings, the Tatmadaw has been arming and training local militias. This trend poses a high risk of further escalation.

Although Myanmar has seen internal warfare continuously since 1948, the ongoing armed conflict in ethnic Burman areas, especially in the Sagaing and Magway regions, is new. No comparable fighting has taken place within Myanmar's ethnic majority population since the Burmese Communist Party was driven out of the Burman lowlands in the 1950s and 1960s. After the 1988 military massacre of protestors in Yangon, the All-Burma Student Democratic

Front (ABSDF) attempted to mount an armed struggle, but its effort did not come anywhere near the mobilization success of the anti-coup resistance groups that have emerged since the 2021 military coup.

After the coup, armed fighting intensified between the Tatmadaw and several established Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs), notably in the states of Kayin and Kayah on the border with Thailand, Chin on the border with India/Bangladesh, and Kachin, which borders China. However, fighting de-escalated in the states of Rakhine and Shan, where the local EAOs had been engaged in intense fighting with the Tatmadaw in the years before the coup.

Among the more than three hundred local resistance groups formed in the aftermath of the civilian protest movement, many pay allegiance to the National Union Government (NUG), whereas others operate independently. Both the loosely organized Local Defence Forces (LDFs) and the more structured People's Defense Forces (PDFs) acquired rudimentary firearms and learned how to produce Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). Some received training and weapons from the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), Chin National Front (CNF), Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), ABSDF, or other EAOs. When the PDFs have coordinated their struggle with more experienced EAOs, they have sometimes been able to attack police stations or engage small Tatmadaw units in armed clashes. Mostly, however, they have not yet been sufficiently armed or trained to engage the Tatmadaw directly. Perhaps for this reason, or perhaps to establish safe areas for building and training armed forces for long-term struggle against the military junta, they have resorted to targeted killings of civilian representatives of the military junta and its would-be supporters, such as ward administrators, members of the military-dominated USDP, civil servants, some monks, and alleged collaborators/informers.

This report provides a basis for two main concerns. One is the persistent practice by the Tatmadaw of harming, wounding, and killing civilians in the areas where it faces resistance. Sometimes this violence is blind, as when hamlets are burned, and the local inhabitants are killed or wounded. In other cases, the Tatmadaw targets suspected members or supporters of the resistance. Summary executions are widely reported in conflict zones.

The second concern is the targeted killing of civilians by the anti-coup resistance groups, a practice that risks becoming widespread and normatively accepted. The political contest between the pro-military USDP and the National League for Democracy (NLD) during the 2015 and 2020 election campaigns, which resulted in landslide victories for the NLD, has been transformed into a communal war. Many NLD-dominated villages are fighting a minority of USDP-dominated villages. The NUG issued a vaguely defined "Code of Conduct" that specifies that resistance groups should avoid targeting civilians, and it has in some cases initiated investigations of

violations. Yet the killings continue. The NUG has gained much support from the Myanmar population and considerable sympathy internationally. To acquire full national and international legitimacy, the NUG may need to act to prevent further extra-judicial killings of civilians.

Let us repeat, however, that the escalation of armed conflict in Myanmar was triggered by the military's repression of the civilian protest movement after the coup. The Tatmadaw unleashed a civil war within the ethnic Burman community while at the same time re-igniting armed fighting with some of Myanmar's most important EAOs.

Before summarizing our main findings, we provide here some political background for understanding the escalating violence; we also explain the methods used in our study. We hope the evidence we present will lay the groundwork for civil society organizations in Myanmar and the international community to take initiatives to prevent the killing of civilians. We also hope this preliminary assessment will induce other researchers to provide accurate data on civilian killings. The TCMS dataset that provides the main data for our report is openly available at: github.com/minzawoo88/Civilian-Casualties-in-Myanmar/tree/main/Public%20Release%20Datasets. Any corrections or suggestions for improvement may be sent to minzawoo88@gmail.com.

2. Political background

After 49 years of military rule, Myanmar entered a period of democratic reform in 2011, with multi-party elections and a considerable degree of political freedom. However, the constitution adopted in a sham referendum in 2008 created a hybrid system, allowing the military to appoint 25 percent of all members in elected assemblies, to maintain the secrecy of its business and economic interests, and to hold decision-making power over anything deemed to concern national security. Under President U Thein Sein, the government, which was led by the USDP from 2011 to 2015, pushed a series of reforms and initiated a peace process with many of the country's EAOs. In 2015, shortly before the elections brought the National League for Democracy (NLD) to power in the civilian branch of government, the Thein Sein government and the Tatmadaw signed a so-called Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) with eight Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs). The new NLD-led government was formed in March 2016, with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, as State Counselor. She embraced the reform policies of the previous government and sought to strengthen civilian control of the state. She also sought to build on the NCA by engaging in dialogue with ethnic minority representatives. However, implementing the NCA on the ground proved more challenging than expected, and the tension between the Tatmadaw and the civilian government became an obstruction to the peace process. The government managed to add two small additional EAOs as signatories. Although it was in dialogue as well with EAOs outside of the agreement, the government never managed to make the NCA "nationwide."

The Tatmadaw launched military offensives, which resulted in the expulsion and exodus of more than half a million Rohingya from Rakhine State in 2016 and 2017. The crisis tainted Myanmar's international reputation, including that of Aung San Suu Kyi, who did not openly criticize the military but instead defended it against international accusations.

During the reform period from 2011 to 2020, the armed fighting between the military and EAOs never stopped. Fighting broke out again in Kachin and escalated in northern Shan and Rakhine, where the main EAOs had not signed the NCA. Seven new armed groups in various parts of the country formed or re-armed during this period. The three most important ones were the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and Myanmar National Democratic Army (MNDA), both in northern Shan State, and the Arakan Army (AA) in Rakhine State. A full-blown insurgency initiated by the AA followed the Rohingya crisis in Rakhine, and the government made token concessions to international pressure, accepting the return of a limited number of refugees from Bangladesh.

Before the November 2020 Myanmar general election, the NLD government announced a set of limited political agreements with the ten EAOs that had signed the NCA. Some EAOs expected the agreement would provide a basis for a comprehensive discussion about how to federalize Myanmar. Aung San Suu Kyi's government did not, however, invest significant effort in federal reforms during its five-year tenure.

That November, the NLD won a new landslide victory. A sharp deterioration in already worsening civil-military relations followed as the Myanmar Armed Forces (Tatmadaw) complained of alleged electoral irregularities. Then, on February 1, 2021, just as the newly elected parliament was about to meet in the capital city, Nay Pyi Taw, the Tatmadaw seized state power in a coup d'état. The Tatmadaw abolished the legally constituted government and placed its own State Administrative Council (SAC) in charge of the country. The Tatmadaw's Commander in Chief, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, assumed leadership of the new military regime.

A popular and peaceful uprising immediately emerged to oppose the military coup, led by an unprecedented campaign of civil dissent, known as the Civil Disobedience Movement. The Tatmadaw launched a brutal crackdown against the demonstrators in the miscalculated expectation that people would then cease protesting the new government. However, the regime's suppression of dissent created unforeseen turbulence in Myanmar, characterized by both old and new patterns of resistance. Twenty ousted MPs formed a Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH)—the elected national parliament—and later established the NUG, which most Myanmar citizens now regard as the country's legitimate government, and some Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) decided to join the NUG's ranks.

Under the current circumstances, the EAOs may be divided in three categories: those that maintain the ceasefire, those that actively fight SAC/Tatmadaw, and those that are not party to any ceasefire but are still not fighting. Some members of this third group have de-escalated their fighting since the coup. A majority of the EAOs have not been fighting the Tatmadaw since the coup.

The Tatmadaw's repression and the subsequent arrest of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who had always stood for a policy of non-violence, produced a huge change in activities within Myanmar's ethnic majority population: a new Burman armed resistance movement emerged. Stimulated by news on social media, this movement soon became much stronger than the armed resistance that had grown out of the military's repression in 1988. As the SAC intensified its violent campaign against the protestors in 2021, local squads formed self-defense teams to stave off crackdowns by security forces. The People's Defense Force (PDF) was born out of these street defense teams. Facing the Tatmadaw's relentless repression, in March 2021 the CRPH's call for non-violent resistance turned into "the right to retaliate in self-defense." This marked the first time Myanmar's mainstream opposition departed from non-violence.

Within six months of the coup, the MIPS observed an 866% increase in the number of IED incidents and a 174% increase in the number of armed clashes nationwide. In the Sagaing and Magway regions, free of armed conflict for decades, armed rebellions began, making them the most volatile of the regions. However, although PDFs outnumber the Tatmadaw in these central areas, they are poorly armed and therefore focus on attacking passing military convoys and weakly guarded police posts and stations. Most of the Tatmadaw's deployments are to the ethnic minority

areas. To address its shortage of troops, the Tatmadaw has resorted, since late 2021, to air raids and to arming local militias with automatic weapons. This approach, which follows a long established practice in ethnic minority areas, is likely to fan an already escalating communal conflict with retributive killings at the local level.

In response to the Tatmadaw's crackdown on protestors, extra-judicial targeted killings emerged as a new tactic of the anti-junta forces, part of a broader strategy to weaken the regime's administrative control across the country. In 2022, the TCMS alone recorded an average of 150–200 civilians killed every month in politically motivated murders by one or the other side in the conflict: the Tatmadaw and its affiliated forces, or anti-military resistance groups. In addition, the SAC conducted raids in major cities almost daily to apprehend urban guerrilla operatives and activists.

The SAC is gearing up for a new election in the second half of 2023 and has drafted a new election law based on a system of modified proportional representation. However, the public has shown little interest in the upcoming elections, which are highly unlikely to satisfy the normal requirements for a free and fair democratic vote. People are struggling to survive under deteriorating economic conditions. The NUG claims it will seek to prevent the holding of the military's orchestrated elections. Given the current volatile security and political environment, the elections are unlikely to initiate a new period of democratic reforms. Although the elections in 2015 and 2020 were conducted with minimal violence, considerable election-related violence may be expected if the SAC persists with its plan to stage elections in 2023.

In the years from 2011 to 2022, the pattern of political violence in Myanmar underwent several substantial changes. The 2011–2015 period was characterized by an incomplete peace process leading to the signing of the NCA by eight (later ten) groups, while armed conflict occurred intermittently in Kachin and northern Shan. Two important EAOs, the KIA and the United Wa State Army (UWSA), were engaged in training two new ethnic armies that would be able to engage the Tatmadaw: the AA in Rakhine and the TNLA in northern Shan. Together with the MNDA in Kokang, they formed a Brotherhood Alliance. The Alliance and the two EAOs were never included in the NCA system; they engaged in most of the armed fighting with the Tatmadaw from 2016 to 2020. As mentioned, the coup provoked a change in the pattern of ethnic civil war. Before the 2020 elections, the AA agreed to a ceasefire with the military and sought to consolidate its power in Rakhine, where it is building a parallel state. Rakhine thus suddenly became relatively quiet whereas fighting broke out in Burman majority areas and escalated in areas where the EAOs had joined the NCA, notably in the states of Kayah, Chin, and Kachin. The hugely important Shan State saw no escalation of armed struggle after the military coup. The largest NCA group there, the Restoration Council for Shan State (RCSS), concentrated instead on its struggle in northern Shan against an alliance of two other EAOs: the Shan State Progress Party (SSPP) and the Palaung-based TNLA.

By far the most important of the developments after the coup was the emergence of LDFs and PDFs in Burman areas, centered primarily in the Sagaing and Magway regions and in the cities of Mandalay and Yangon. The young Burman activists who took up the fighting received military training—and some weapons—primarily from EAOs. The NUG declared its intention to form a federation in Myanmar with genuine autonomy in ethnic areas and sought to establish an inter-ethnic alliance with as many EAOs as possible. A National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) was formed, which adopted a road map for establishing a democratic federation. A diplomatic contest emerged between the NUG and SAC, each seeking to persuade EAOs to join their side. Killing of civilians continues both in Burman and ethnic-minority areas, and the numbers killed are likely to increase as these ethno-political struggles persist.

3. Methodology

This section defines our use of “civilians,” and introduces our study’s sources, data-collection method, major variables, and estimation methods. It also compares the Township-based Conflict Monitoring System (TCMS) of the Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security (MIPS) with other datasets and outlines the methods used to incorporate data from these other datasets to calculate the number of civilians killed. We also detail here our processes for incident-vetting, coding, maintaining quality control, cleaning data, and analyzing.

3.1. Definition of Civilians in Internal Armed Conflict

The definition of “civilians” in armed conflict should be juxtaposed to that of “combatants” or “fighters.” Article 43 of the Additional Protocol I of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, adopted in 1977, defines combatants as “members of the armed forces of a Party to a conflict (other than medical personnel and chaplains).”³ Although Article 1 of the Additional Protocol II, also adopted in 1977, mentions “dissident armed forces and other organized armed groups,”⁴ the Geneva Conventions were not originally meant to apply to internal armed conflicts. More recently, however, they have been widely used to define what constitutes “just war” also in internal armed conflicts. The San Remo Manual on the Law of Non-International Armed Conflict suggests that the term “fighters” should be used in lieu of “combatants,” because the context differs between international and non-international conflicts.⁵ The term “fighters” includes members of regular government armies as well as sub-national armed groups fighting against a government or each other. Therefore, members of armed groups, government-affiliated police, military, and militia are considered fighters who may be legitimately targeted in internal armed conflict.⁶ This study defines civilians as non-soldiers/fighters/combatants and non-members of organized armed groups, either state or non-state, as well as those who do not directly take part in hostilities.

Although Additional Protocol II of the Geneva Conventions does not define “civilians,” the protocol uses the term “civilian” to refer to those who are to be protected in armed

3. International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I)*, 8 June 1977, Part III, Section II, Article 43. Accessed on 26 May 2023. Available at: www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/protocol-additional-geneva-conventions-12-august-1949-and-0.

4. ICRC, *Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II)*, Part I, Article I. Accessed on 26 May 2023. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/protocol-additional-geneva-conventions-12-august-1949-and-0>.

5. Michael Schmitt; G. Marshall & C. Garraway (2006) *The Manual on the Law of Non-International Armed Conflict with Commentary*. Sanremo, Italy: International Institute of Humanitarian Law. Accessed on 27 October 2022. Available at: www.legal-tools.org/doc/ccf497/pdf.

6. Members of militias in Myanmar are not a clear-cut category. Many of those killed are accused of being ‘Pyu Saw Htee’ or militia members without explicit identification. However, this study does not count among civilians killed those alleged to be militia members.

conflict.⁷ It implies that individuals or groups who are not members of state armies or of non-state armed organizations are civilians.⁸ Nevertheless, the San Remo Manual on the Law of Non-International Armed Conflict specifies that “civilians who actively (directly) participate in hostilities are treated as fighters.”⁹ The manual points out that Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions mentions the word “active.” On the other hand, Article 13.3 of Additional Protocol II uses the word “direct,” and civilians lose their right to protection if they “take a direct part in hostilities.”¹⁰ The Trial Chamber judgment of the International Criminal Tribunal on Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) mentions that “the term ‘civilian’ refers to persons not taking part in hostilities.”¹¹ Therefore, in accordance with the Additional Protocols of the Geneva Conventions, civilians are defined in this report as those who are not members of any armed organization and do not directly participate in armed conflict.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) puts forward three cumulative criteria to define direct participation in hostilities: “(1) a threshold regarding the harm likely to result from the act, (2) a relationship of direct causation between the act and the expected harm, and (3) a belligerent nexus between the act and the hostilities conducted between the parties to an armed conflict.”¹² These criteria are meant to distinguish between direct and indirect causation of harm. For example, a scout watching an enemy convoy to help attackers know when to trigger an IED is considered a person who actively participates in hostilities. In contrast, a person who provides financial support to sustain war activities is only indirectly participating in the conflict and is considered a civilian.¹³ Civilians lose protection if they directly participate in hostile actions as specified by the three criteria.

In accordance with these usages, this study defines civilians according to two criteria: (1) those who are not members of state or non-state armed forces or groups; and (2) those who do not directly participate in hostilities at the time of a reported incident. Members of armed organizations, either

7. ICRC (2004) What is International Humanitarian Law? Accessed on 28 October 2022. Available at: www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/what_is_ihl.pdf.

8. International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (2003) *Prosecutor v. Stanislav Galić*, ICTY, Judgement and Opinion, Trial Chamber I, 5 December, Section II, para. 47; see also Michael Bothe; Karl Joseph Partsch, Waldemar A. Solf, eds, (1982) *New Rules for Victims of Armed Conflicts* The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 672; see also ICRC (n.d.) Definition of Civilians, Rule 5, International Humanitarian Law (IHL) Rules, IHL Database. Accessed on 28 October 2022. Available at: ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_rul_rule5.

9. Schmitt et al.: 5.

10. Ibid.: 4, 5, and 20.

11. Camille Bissonnette (2016) The Definition of Civilians in Non-International Armed Conflicts, *Journal of International Humanitarian Legal Studies* 7(1): 134.

12. Nils Melzer (2020) *Interpretive Guidance on the Notion of Direct Participation in Hostilities Under International Humanitarian Law*, Geneva: ICRC. Accessed on 28 October 2022. Available at: www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/icrc-002-0990.pdf.

13. Ibid.: 51.

state or non-state, are not considered civilians even if they are neither armed nor engaged in combat at the time of a violent incident.¹⁴ Members of an armed organization who assume an official civilian position simultaneously are not considered to be civilians. A retired member of an armed organization is a civilian if this person is not maintaining the membership.

For example, non-security civil servants, such as teachers, doctors, administrators, and bankers, are civilians; so are private individuals, such as employees of private companies or organizations. Political party members are civilians, unless they are members of a militia or armed resistance group. Police, military, and militia personnel are not civilians; the members and operatives of the PDFs, LDFs, other anti-junta resistance groups, Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs), or affiliated militia are also not civilians. Likewise, leaders of the State Administrative Council (SAC) who are currently serving in the military and occupying civil positions are not civilians. The category of “suspected People’s militia,” (Pyu Saw Htee or Thway Thout hit squad) should be considered carefully since some of those who were killed may have been falsely said to belong to a militia. However, this study excludes from the status of civilians all suspected militia members, if they are reported as such. They belong to a grey classification area.

This study applies the definitions mentioned above when coding civilians reported as killed or wounded. We do not and cannot at present verify the authenticity of the reports published by national and local media outlets. When coding a reported incident, we adhere to the verbatim description of the event and code the event, specifying actors or perpetrators, targets or victims, types of violence, place, date, number of casualties, age, and gender. For example, if a report says that members of the Tatmadaw came to a village and killed a villager, we code the victim as a civilian. If the report says the Tatmadaw’s raid killed a member of a resistance group or that a member of a Pyu Saw Htee or other pro-military militia was killed, we do not count the victim as a civilian. When we have several reports about the same event, our coders cite several sources and make a judgment as to which source contains the most reliable information. Our hope is that reported data may soon be verified (or falsified) through proper investigation.

3.2. Data Sources, Collection Methods, and Source Analysis

This report relies mainly on data from the Township-based Conflict Monitoring System (TCMS) of the Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security (MIPS). The TCMS team collects data from 66 national and local Burmese-language news outlets, which post the information on their Facebook pages, and on a handful of well-informed Facebook pages and accounts. Facebook remains the dominant social media platform in Myanmar. In early 2022, 19.25 million people used Facebook out of a total of 20.75 million social media users. (The country’s

14. ICTY (2004) *Prosecutor v. Tihomir Blaškić*, ICTY, Judgement, Appeals Chamber, 29 July, IV, para. 114.

total population is 55.02 million.)¹⁵ Facebook serves as a platform for conflict actors, who use it to promote their causes.¹⁶ Facebook users share links from news outlets, create information-sharing groups, establish citizen-journalist pages, and make individual posts. All serious Myanmar news media have Facebook pages where they distribute reports to a broad audience that uses the social media platform.

The TCMS team registered a total of 2,878 events with civilian casualties that were exclusively sourced from news posts on these 66 social media pages. Only 46 events (1.3 percent) were collected from pages categorized as “other sources.” To ensure accuracy, the team conducted additional searches for events from “other sources” to ensure that they had been either independently reported by another source or that there was clear multimedia evidence of civilian casualties, such as pictures or videos.

The team selected both national and local-news pages because we found that national news pages alone did not provide a comprehensive number of civilian deaths. Local-news pages were more active in reporting civilian deaths. Most reports from both national and local-news pages were duplications from more independent sources. Therefore, to obtain the most accurate count, the team removed duplicates from their dataset.

MIPS staff are trained to code conflict events in accordance with the TCMS codebook and to geotag the locations. The TCMS dataset covers a wide spectrum of conflict dynamics, not just civilian deaths. This study selected only conflict events in which civilians or alleged militia members were recorded as primary or secondary targets and for which at least one civilian casualty—dead or wounded—was reported. Between February 1, 2021, and September 30, 2022, the TCMS registered 3,427 such events. The data include “grey zone” cases in which some targets may have falsely claimed to be members of a pro-military militia. As mentioned, we did not include them as targets when counting civilian casualties.

A heavy reliance on Facebook can admittedly create a selection bias. Facebook Myanmar is run from Singapore and thus is not physically present in Myanmar. Since it does not depend on any authority inside Myanmar, Facebook has been able to delete pages and accounts that violate the company’s “community standards” and remove a great number of accounts belonging to the Tatmadaw or pro-Tatmadaw groups or individuals. Facebook initiated this practice when the UN launched its report on the 2018 eviction of Rohingya from Myanmar. By the end of 2021, Facebook had banned all companies associated with the Myanmar military and deleted their

15. Simon Kemp (2022) Digital 2022: Myanmar, Datareportal, 15 February. Accessed on 2 November 2022. Available at: datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-myanmar.

16. Stein Tønnesson; Min Zaw Oo & Ne Lynn Aung (2021) Pretending to Be States: The Use of Facebook by Armed Groups in Myanmar, *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 52(2): 1–26. DOI: [10.1080/00472336.2021.1905865](https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2021.1905865).

pages.¹⁷ By mid-2022, Facebook's ban on the Tatmadaw and its supporters had removed virtually all pro-military pages and accounts.

To understand the impact of Facebook's ban on information gathered on civilian deaths by TCMS, we decided to include information from Fifty-two News, a pro-military media channel that uses Telegram to distribute its reports. Although we have not yet been able to systematically code the reports in Fifty-two News, we have reviewed them for a selected period and compared them to the ones included in the TCMS during the same period. We selected Fifty-two News because it contains more frequent posts about targeted killings of civilians than do other media on Telegram. We did not expect to uncover on Telegram the killings committed by the Tatmadaw, but we wanted to include civilian killings that were not reported on Facebook. Fifty-two News began posting news about incidents in November 2021 and its posts became frequent starting on February 5, 2022. We therefore selected the sample period of February 5, 2022, to September 30, 2022, for our comparison of Facebook and Fifty-two News. To determine the reliability of the reports of cases by Fifty-two News, we checked the reports against multimedia evidence, such as pictures or videos of killings or of dead or wounded bodies. Telegram permits posts containing gruesome visuals of a kind not tolerated by Facebook.

Raw data extracted from Fifty-two News were not coded for total fatality counts as we lacked the resources to do so. Instead, we selected the reported events involving civilian casualties. We then compared the reports with the TCMS data. This exercise allowed us to triangulate reports of civilian killings from different sources to check accuracy.

To evaluate selection bias, we compared the TCMS with a highly accurate civilian fatality dataset compiled by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners-Burma (AAPP). Additionally, we examined evidence from Fifty-two News as well as a list of killed party members and supporters prepared by the pro-military USDP.

We expected to find significant overlap between the cases reported in TCMS and AAPP, but not so much between the Facebook-based TCMS and Fifty-two News. We also compared the reports from Fifty-two News with the deaths reported by the USDP. As will be seen in the findings section below, this comparison allowed us to determine the scope of selection bias and identify data gaps in the TCMS, which then made it possible to estimate the total number of reported civilian casualties.

In summary, our goal in comparing TCMS data to AAPP and USDP data was to capture civilian deaths not included in the TCMS data and to verify the reliability of each report by triangulating

17. Meanwhile, the social media giant faces a \$150 billion lawsuit from Rohingya refugees for the role it played in the attacks against Rohingya in 2016–17. See Al Jazeera (2021) Meta to ban Myanmar military-owned firms from its platforms, *Al Jazeera*, 21 December. Accessed on 20 November 2022. Available at: www.aljazeera.com/economy/2021/12/8/meta-to-ban-myanmar-military-owned-firms-from-its-platforms.

overlapping reports from different sources. Both MIPS and AAPP tracked the number of protestors killed in the first months after the coup. We found that most of the protest-related events mentioned in the AAPP for this early period were also recorded by the TCMS. Thus, data from TCMS and AAPP overlap significantly.

During the initial protest phase after the coup, the small TCMS team struggled to keep up with rapidly evolving events. Moreover, the number of protestors killed by the military and police was significantly underreported by the media. From February 1 to July 31, 2021, the media were unable to cover all the killings, but concerned individuals checked with hospitals and mortuaries and occasionally released lists of those killed. We collected the protestor-fatality lists posted by individuals in order to compile our dataset of protestor deaths. However, neither the media nor the TCMS could verify the protestor-fatality figures. The AAPP is the only available dataset that includes verified protestor deaths. By comparing the TCMS and AAPP data, we can identify the overlaps and combine reliable data from February 1, 2021, to September 30, 2022.

Using a similar approach, we compared the USDP and TCMS data to identify gaps, overlaps, and potential selection bias for the same 20-month period, from February 1, 2021, to September 30, 2022. To uncover gaps, the USDP data were also compared with the events reported in Fifty-two News. Because both are pro-military sources, we expected to find considerable overlap.

The TCMS is an event-based dataset coded into variables that are disaggregated by types of violence, dates, locations, actors, targets, fatalities, wounded, sex, and age. The data extracted from Fifty-two News are uncoded raw events divided into types of violence, dates of report, locations, and the full text of the post. As mentioned, we have not yet included in our counts the civilian deaths reported in Fifty-two News; rather, we undertook the comparison to understand potential gaps in the data.

The AAPP's and USDP's lists of fatalities are similarly structured. Both provide the name, occupation, location, and cause of death for each death reported; the USDP also lists an identification number or party ID. It is therefore possible to compare the number of fatalities and related events across the TCMS, AAPP, and USDP data.

In addition, we studied 549 events in which the casualties were classified as militia, Pyu Saw Htee, or unknown. These are not counted as civilian casualties in the TCMS but are included as such to some extent on the AAPP and USDP lists.¹⁸ Among the 2,878 civilian-casualty events recorded in the TCMS, 83.4% were derived from national and local news outlets on Facebook

18. We discovered at least 3 events in the AAPP list and 54 in the USDP's where the victims of the same events were not classified as civilians in the TCMS.

and 16% from websites.¹⁹ The rest—less than 1%—came from print, radio, Twitter, or other social media. The TCMS includes reports of 3,427 events from a total of 66 news outlets. Of these, 91.13% were reported by 60 well-known anti-junta media outlets and 2.15%, by PDF or EAO news sources. “Other Sources” of Facebook pages, mostly anti-junta, represent 1.34%. Only 2.21% of the reported events were extracted from pro-military news outlets. For all events recorded by the TCMS, where there were only civilian (and no military or combatant) fatalities, the percentage of anti-junta sources increased slightly to 94.21%. The distribution is thus heavily skewed towards anti-junta sources.

The USDP, a pro-military party led by a retired military general, has established an extensive administrative structure nationwide and compiled a list of its members and associates allegedly killed by opposition forces since the military coup. We exercised caution in considering the USDP data because of the USDP’s proximity to the regime. No organization, including the United Nations (UN), has sought to prove or disprove the authenticity of the USDP data.

To cross-check the USDP data, we conducted three tests. First, we compared the data to the pro-military Telegram channel, Fifty-two News, which frequently posts news with pictures of civilians killed by opposition forces. We found that only 178 (21%) of 832 USDP deaths in the sample period (February 5 to September 30, 2022) were covered by Fifty-two News and most of the reported casualties were not affiliated with the USDP. Second, we compared the USDP’s data to that of the TCMS, with its heavy reliance on anti-junta media. Of the 2,026 reported deaths within the USDP data for the entire 20-month period, we found just 364 (18%) which also appeared in the TCMS data. These findings show that at least some of the USDP data were also reported by third-party sources. Finally, we plotted the USDP’s data geographically and compared the results to the geographical trend of politically motivated murders recorded in the TCMS. The geographical distribution of USDP’s deaths and of the politically motivated murders reported by independent sources in the TCMS were very similar.

In addition, the USDP’s data includes detailed information about the victims, such as name, occupation, party ID number, township, date of incident, and a short description of perpetrator and act. The information is sufficient for human rights organizations to attempt further verification. We hold that the USDP’s data should be considered as a list of reported but unverified deaths.

19. Almost all media outlets set up news pages on Facebook and regularly post updates. The content is equivalent to that posted on their web pages. We find it easier to extract news from their Facebook pages via Application Programming Interface (API) than from their web pages.

Table I: The Distribution of Sources on Civilian-Casualty Events in the TCMS

Sources of Information	Number of Events	Percent
Kantarawaddy Times	328	11.4
DVB	318	11.05
Mizzima	239	8.3
Khit Thit	164	5.7
C8	117	4.07
Radio Free Asia RFA	104	3.61
Voice of Myanmar	94	3.27
Delta News Agency	90	3.13
Myaelatt Athan	79	2.74
News Ambassador	77	2.68
Popular News	74	2.57
Than Lwin Time	67	2.33
Ayeyarwaddy Times	64	2.22
74 Media	60	2.08
PDF or EAO Facebook pages	60	2.08
Shwe Phee Myay	57	1.98
Burma VJ	53	1.84
Tanintharyi Times	53	1.84
Shan News	52	1.81
Irrawaddy	51	1.77
Kachin New	50	1.74
Myanmar Now	48	1.67
Karen Information Center	43	1.49
Zalen	38	1.32

BBC	37	1.29
People Media	36	1.25
Eleven Media	30	1.04
Thachileik News Agency	30	1.04
Than Lwin Khet News	28	0.97
*Other sources	27	0.94
Dawei Watch	25	0.87
Waves	25	0.87
MeKong	23	0.8
Kanbawza	22	0.76
CINCDS(Tatmadaw)	20	0.69
Salween Press	17	0.59
Western News	17	0.59
Development Media	15	0.52
Marnagar News	12	0.42
Narinjara News	12	0.42
Bago watch	10	0.35
Burma Associated Press	10	0.35
Voice of Shan-ni	8	0.28
Myama Alin	7	0.24
Yan Gyi Aung	7	0.24
Dakkhina	6	0.21
Myanmar Pressphoto Agency	6	0.21
Karen Human Rights	6	0.21
VOA	6	0.21
Public Voice Television	5	0.17

Tai Freedom	5	0.17
Thit Htoo Lwin	5	0.17
Now-a-day	5	0.17
Mawkun	4	0.14
Myitkyina News Journal	4	0.14
Network Media Group	4	0.14
Bago Weekly	3	0.1
KHRG	3	0.1
Mon News	3	0.1
Khonumthung Burmese	3	0.1
Myanmar Current Affairs	3	0.1
Mandalay Free Press	3	0.1
Free Burma Ranger	2	0.07
KO News_Kawkareik	2	0.07
Kachin Net (Kachin Language News)	1	0.03
Kayan Times	1	0.03
Total	2,878	100

For the full period from February 1, 2021, to September 30, 2022, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) drew from 31 unique sources—from traditional news media to activist information outlets—to collect data on 2,422 reported events in which armed actors killed civilians.

Over 90% of ACLED's sources were also used by the TCMS. Although both ACLED and TCMS draw on multiple sources in gathering event data, it is difficult to compare events recorded in the two datasets because the public version of ACLED provides no descriptions of the circumstances or of the original sources. As a result, the individual events recorded by ACLED and by TCMS cannot be directly compared. Comparisons can only be made on the aggregate level. One thing ACLED and TCMS have in common is that their sources are skewed towards reported killings by the military, police, or military-affiliated militias, and are less concerned with violent acts against civilians by EAOs or PDFs.

Table 2: Sources Used in ACLED's Dataset

ACLED Sources	Number of Events	Percentage
Democratic Voice of Burma	920	37.99%
Myanmar Now	249	10.28%
Radio Free Asia	205	8.46%
Eleven Media Group	186	7.68%
Ministry of Defense - NUG	154	6.36%
Network Media Group	123	5.08%
Irrawaddy	90	3.72%
Shwe Phee Myay News Agency	68	2.81%
Assistance Association for Political Prisoners	66	2.73%
Kachin News Group	64	2.64%
Shan Herald Agency for News	63	2.60%
Myanmar Pressphoto Agency	55	2.27%
VOA	46	1.90%
Myanmar Labour News	38	1.57%
Khit Thit Media	35	1.45%
Karen Information Center News	14	0.58%
Development Media Group	13	0.54%
Narinjara News	10	0.41%
Free Burma Rangers	5	0.21%
Kachinland News	4	0.17%
Twitter	3	0.12%
AFP	2	0.08%
BBC News	2	0.08%

Ayeyarwaddy Times	I	0.04%
Burma News International	I	0.04%
Kantarawaddy Times	I	0.04%
Karen News	I	0.04%
Mizzima	I	0.04%
Myitkyina Journal	I	0.04%
Undisclosed Source	I	0.04%
Total	2422	100%

The TCMS recorded 2,878 events involving civilian casualties, over 50% of which were reported by the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), Kantarawaddy Times, Mizzima, Khit Thit, C8, Radio Free Asia (RFA), Voice of Myanmar, and Delta News Agency. These media reports frequently include the names and categories of victims, such as common villagers, party members, ward administrators, or monks, and a categorization of the perpetrator groups (see Table 8).

In analyzing media reports and data from Facebook’s news pages, the TCMS faced two main challenges. First, due to the large number of killings, many politically motivated murders are no longer considered newsworthy by national media. To address this, the TCMS increased its monitoring of small local media pages on Facebook, which are more likely to report such murders. However, this only somewhat closed the reporting gap.

Second, reliance solely on Facebook data produces a bias toward the anti-junta side. As mentioned in the methodology section, Facebook has banned institutions and supporters of the Tatmadaw from its platform and removed content deemed to violate its community standards. As a result, most pro-military media are not represented on Facebook. Although reports posted on Facebook provide abundant information on human rights violations by the Myanmar military, they do not provide similar details about killings of civilians by resistance forces, and cases that are reported often lack detail and perpetrator identification.

The comparison of the TCMS, ACLED, and Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) datasets shows that data collected from English-language sources tend to include fewer reported civilian fatalities. ACLED lists different types of violence, including “violence against civilians.” We calculated the total number of fatalities from violent events in which civilians were primary targets (the variable “actor2” in ACLED was coded as “Civilians (Myanmar)”). The ACLED data yields 3,956 civilian fatalities, and the TCMS, 3,229, during the same 20-month period.

Considering that the TCMS failed to catch many protest-related fatalities in the first phase after the coup, the final estimates of ACLED and TCMS are quite similar. The UCDP data includes only 1,595 civilian fatalities even at its high estimate, probably because many civilian deaths went unreported in English-language media.

3.3. Categories of Violence

This study identifies six types of violence, which serve as categories for coding civilian deaths:

1. **Armed clash:** An event where two or more organized armed groups engage in violent confrontation with the use of lethal weapons. They may use IEDs, air strikes, artillery fire, drone attacks, or other forms of fire in an armed clash.
2. **IED incidents or remote attacks only:** Mine or IED explosions and drone attacks using explosives without an armed clash.
3. **Artillery strikes without any clash:** Artillery or rocket attacks that are not part of any armed clash.
4. **Air strikes without any clash:** Tatmadaw air strikes that are not part of any armed clash on the ground.
5. **Politically motivated murders:** Targeted killings/assassinations and summary executions.
6. **Other violence:** Civilian deaths by torture, sexual violence, and dead bodies discovered without clear evidence of the circumstances under which they were killed.

The fifth category needs further explanation here. A targeted killing/assassination is a pre-meditated act directed against specific individuals. A summary execution is killing with or without premeditation in a conflict zone. Distinguishing between the two types is often difficult. This is why we combine them in one category. Some incidents in which victims were captured, tortured, and executed, are also coded in this category.

Criminal murders are not included; the important distinction between criminal and politically motivated murder is that the latter is conflict-driven, motivated by political differences, and is carried out by perpetrators of organized groups or institutions with political objectives. The term politically motivated murder/ targeted killing in armed conflict refers to the premeditated killing of an individual, group, or community for political reasons by members of organized armed groups. Both state actors and non-state armed groups carry out such acts to achieve political objectives or to gain a tactical advantage in a conflict. Some of the key characteristics that distinguish politically motivated murders/targeted killings of civilians in armed conflict from criminal violence are:

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- a. **Intentionality:** The killings are deliberate and intentional. They are carried out with the specific aim to eliminate a perceived political threat or hindrance.²⁰
 - b. **Selectivity:** The victims are often carefully chosen based on their perceived political support of the adversary. This selectivity is often designed to maximize the impact of the killing and send a clear message to others.
 - c. **Political motivation:** The primary motivation is political, rather than economic or personal. It is often carried out as part of a broader political strategy or agenda.
 - d. **Systematic nature:** The killings may be part of a larger pattern of violence or repression, designed to suppress opposition and maintain political control. The act is carried out by organized entities rather than individuals.

20. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court's Article 8(2)(e)(i) lists "willful killing" as a war crime when committed in a non-international armed conflict. The term "willful killing" implies that the killing was premeditated and intentional, which would include politically motivated murder or targeted killing in armed conflict.

4. Existing Reports on Civilian Casualties in Myanmar

Several reports have been published with information about the killing of civilians in Myanmar after the coup. A report issued by the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar on July 12, 2022, claimed to have nearly 3 million items of information on cases related to human rights abuses in Myanmar and stated,

“...since the military takeover in February 2021, crimes have been committed in Myanmar on a scale and in a manner that constitutes a widespread and systematic attack against a civilian population. The available evidence suggests that the crimes against humanity of murder; torture; deportation and forcible transfer; rape and other forms of sexual violence; persecution; and imprisonment have been committed.”²¹

However, the report did not estimate the number of civilians killed in Myanmar after the coup and did not identify other perpetrators than the Myanmar military. Another report was presented by Tom Andrews, the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar. It cited at least 1,600 civilian deaths, based on the dataset prepared by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners-Burma (AAPP).²² Andrews provided just this number and refrained from estimating the overall number of civilian casualties. His report also briefly mentioned that “opposition groups have also carried out targeted killings of non-combatants.”²³

The NUG’s Ministry of Defense (MOD) has claimed that the SAC killed 3,010 civilians and wounded 1,933 from September 2021 to August 2022.²⁴ However, the NUG-MOD has not released a detailed list to back up these figures. When we contacted the NUG’s Ministry of Human Rights to ask for a list of civilian casualties, we were told that it did not possess any such list. We could not, therefore, compare the NUG’s MOD data to that of the TCMS and other lists.

General Zaw Min Tun, the SAC’s spokesperson, has claimed that 2,690 civilians were killed by opposition groups from February 1, 2021, to July 23, 2022.²⁵ However, the SAC did not release

21. UN Human Rights Council (HRC) (2022) Report of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar. Submitted to Human Rights Council Fifty-first Session: 5. Accessed on 9 November 2022. Available at: iimm.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/A-HRC-51-4-E.pdf.

22. Thomas Andrews (2022) Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, UN HRC, 49th Session, 28 Feb–1 Apr 2022, Item 4: 7. Accessed on 9 November 2022. Available at: reliefweb.int/attachments/a489a1e3-5263-3951-94bf-8e37b1a7f0c7/EN.pdf.

23. Ibid.: 8.

24. Ministry of Defence-NUG of Myanmar (2022) Data on the One Year Duration of People’s Resistance: September 2021 to August 2022, 12 September. Accessed on 16 November 2022. Available at: www.facebook.com/modNUG/posts/pfbid0SUzRXB3T2Gk75mpHmoCCH7c9dzm75Tnzb9mXqAJf6sD8AFeG2LtZbFKeSkxqR3rgl.

25. BBC News (2022) A year and a half after the coup, what is the state of the ward administrators? (translated from Burmese), BBC News, 21 August. Accessed on 16 November 2022. Available at: www.bbc.com/burmese/burma-62625561.

any detailed lists of the civilian casualties except one, which was published in the regime's news-

papers in November 2021. This list included some details of civilians allegedly killed by the armed opposition between February 1 and November 16, 2021.²⁶ Since we have not been able to acquire a detailed list from the SAC for the period covered by our study, we have not been able to compare the SAC-reported figures to those of the TCMS.

As mentioned, the USDP has compiled a list of party members and supporters killed since the military coup, but it has not released it to the public. We have, however, obtained the list for the period up to October 28, 2022. It includes 1,495 party members and 569 supporters, for a total of 2,064 allegedly killed since February 1, 2021. In counting the total number of civilians killed, we did not include the USDP's fatality figures if media reported the deaths as militia or Pyu Saw Htee, and we were unable to check the accuracy of the claims. The USDP list we obtained details names, dates of events, party ranks, party member IDs, locations, and remarks on how people were killed by which perpetrators. The list, however, includes only the USDP's own party members and supporters. No international or human rights organizations consider the USDP's list of killed members credible because of the USDP's proximity to the military. As mentioned, no independent organization has attempted to check or evaluate the accuracy of the USDP's data. We have compared it to the TCMS dataset with respect to trends across states and regions. We found several overlaps with the TCMS data derived from reports by independent news outlets, meaning that at least some data in the USDP's list are not fake. It will be possible also to compare the USDP data with that from other sources with regard to geographical trends.

The Institute for Strategy and Policy-Myanmar (ISP) released a short memo in May 2022 stating that 5,646 civilians were killed between February 1, 2021, and May 10, 2022.²⁷ This number is the aggregate of the data published by the SAC, USDP, AAPP, ISP, and a list of killings undertaken by the pro-military death squad Thway Thout. The SAC's number—3,100²⁸—appears to overlap substantially with the 1,530 deaths reported by the USDP up to mid-2022.²⁹ The ISP's number was calculated by subtracting the USDP's count from the SAC's total on the assumption that they overlapped, while assuming that the AAPP's list did not overlap with those of the SAC and the USDP. The ISP independently collected data on the number of civilians killed during armed conflict and by pro-military death squads, but did not release a detailed list of civilian casualties.

26. Myanmar Alin (2021) *Myanmar Alinn Daily*, 23 November: 10.

27. ISPMyanmar (2022) Over 5,600 Civilians Killed after the Coup (translated from Burmese), 12 May. Accessed on 16 November 2022 at www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=2818482065122674&set=pcb.2818485885122292 and on 26 May 2023 at www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/toll-05172022210115.html/ampRFA.

28. Naw Theresa (2022) Myanmar's Other Civilian Deaths, *The Diplomat*, 6 June. Accessed on 1 November 2022. Available at: thediplomat.com/2022/06/myanmars-other-civilian-deaths.

29. BBC News Burmese (2022) An Interview with Than Htay, *BBC News Burmese*, 11 May. Accessed on 10 November 2022. Available at: www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1002446107327247.

Since the AAPP's list also includes fatalities caused by conflict events, such as airstrikes and armed attacks, the ISP's compilation likely includes some overlaps. ISP did not produce a dataset documenting civilian deaths resulting from different types of violence. It was therefore not possible to compare the ISP figure with the TCMS data in our study.

The AAPP is the only organization that releases a list with the details of civilians killed by the regime, regularly updates its list, and makes it available to the public. Up to mid-November 2022, the AAPP's website included 2,465 civilians known to have been killed by the SAC.³⁰ The causes of death included protest-related deaths, airstrikes, artillery fire, armed attacks, bomb explosions, sexual violence, torture, landmines, gunshots, and other kinds of violence. However, as mentioned above, the AAPP's carefully documented data do not include civilians killed by the opposition forces. In some cases, the AAPP also includes the deaths of resistance fighters who were reported to have been "guarding" their villages. Although the AAPP explicitly classifies these individuals as members of resistance armed groups, it includes them in its count of civilian fatalities. In this study, per the definition of civilians provided in the section on methodology above, we exclude these fighters from our count even if they were unarmed or did not use their weapons when they were killed.

As does the TCMS, the ACLED and the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) register conflict events in Myanmar as well as in other conflict-affected countries worldwide. We have explored the ACLED and UCDP datasets to compare their estimates to those of the TCMS. Since the ACLED collects data from many of the same sources as the TCMS, a comparison of the overall numbers may be useful. The UCDP relies on English language news sources.³¹ Comparisons to UCDP data may provide insight into any potential selection bias between Myanmar and English language sources. The UCDP divides its fatality estimates into three categories (high, low, and best) whereas TCMS and ACLED each provide only one figure, which is based on reports each considers reliable.

The TCMS and ACLED rely on many of the same sources and arrive at similar figures. ACLED does not, however, provide information on the original reported event, an event description, or a source URL to explain how it coded the data. The TCMS includes summary descriptions in English, original reported text, the source URL, and screenshots of the reports stored on the MIPS server. Additionally, ACLED does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in complex events, such as armed clashes, but provides only the total number of fatalities for each. Given these differences between the two datasets, we decided, at least at this stage, to refrain from comparing the ACLED dataset to the TCMS data on a case-to-case basis.

30. Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma) (n.d.) AAPP. Accessed on 16 November 2022. Available at: aappb.org.

31. The UCDP relies mainly on Radio Free Asia, Free Burma Rangers, The Irrawaddy, Myanmar Now, Kachin News, BNI Online, Mizzima, and Frontier Myanmar. Most of them can be accessed on the Euro Burma Office (EBO) website. Information from the UCDP, 30 Jan 2023.

5. Findings

Data on civilians killed are more readily available and more reliable than data on combatants killed. The details of events in which soldiers and fighters are killed are normally not disclosed, whereas the identity of civilians killed and the circumstances under which they are killed are routinely reported. In addition, the parties in conflict tend to exaggerate the number of enemy soldiers or combatants they have killed and to minimize their own losses. This makes it far more difficult to arrive at reliable estimates for combatants killed in action than for civilians killed. Although it is often difficult to establish the identity of the perpetrators, the number of civilians killed can be estimated with reasonable accuracy.

The sources for the data we analyzed are media reports posted on national and local-news pages on Facebook, as recorded in the TCMS dataset. We coded each reported event with detailed information, including the number of civilians and combatants killed, when such information is available. To repeat, in this report, we focus on the killing of civilians.

5.1. Number of civilian casualties

As explained in the methodology section, the TCMS was unable to collect adequate information on protestor deaths, especially during the February–May 2021 protests, because media reports could not keep pace with the accelerating events on the ground and the TCMS team lacked sufficient human resources. The TCMS team compiled the number of protestor deaths from social media posts by individuals who had collected the information from hospitals, morgues, and cemeteries. Often, we did not know the source for the information and were unable to verify each case. The TCMS team registered 947 protest-related deaths from February 1 to July 31, 2021. The AAPP included on its list of civilians killed by the security forces the deaths of protestors, which they also verified. Among the 884 protest-related deaths in the AAPP’s dataset, we found that 748 were also on the list compiled by the TCMS from individual Facebook-user posts or lists of protestor deaths. The AAPP verified 90% of the 884 protest deaths. Since the AAPP list of protestors killed was carefully verified, whereas, in the early aftermath of the coup, the TCMS’s protestor-fatality was compiled in a less systematic way than is typical of the TCMS, we decided to use the AAPP’s figures for protest-related deaths rather than our own.

The TCMS dataset includes information on collateral killings, such as civilians killed in armed clashes, by artillery or air strikes, by Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), in politically motivated murders, or in other kinds of violence, such as torture or rape, as well as dead bodies discovered. The TCMS dataset includes information on 3,229 civilians (excluding combatants) who were killed. However, selection bias in the data collected by the TCMS means that a true figure would likely be substantially higher.

To address the problem of data missing from the TCMS, we made use of other valuable datasets and news reports (see Methodology). The AAPP compiles information on arrests, torture, sexual

abuse, and killings by the military and its affiliated forces. The huge advantage to its dataset is that the AAPP undertakes local investigations to try to verify individual deaths. It claims to have verified 92% of its reported killings for the period covered by this study. The AAPP dataset is thus more reliable than that of the TCMS, which is solely based on media reports. However, the AAPP includes deaths caused by only one side in the conflict.

To overcome the selection bias of the TCMS data, and the AAPP's conscious choice to register only the deaths caused by the military and allied forces, we incorporated into our study the USDP's list of killed party members and supporters. This list includes neither deaths caused by the military or its associates nor other civilian deaths not associated with the USDP. We compared data for the entire 20-month period of the study from the TCMS, AAPP, and USDP. Unsurprisingly, only one death was included in both the AAPP and USDP datasets. These two lists are almost mutually exclusive. Combining both with the TCMS data thus reduces the selection bias of the TCMS dataset, which aims to include killings committed by both sides in the conflict.

The AAPP recorded 2,218 civilian deaths (excluding resistance fighters)³² killed by the military, police, or proxy militias from the onset of the coup through September 30, 2022. Only 721 are also recorded in the TCMS dataset. For the same 20-month period, the USDP listed 2,026 party members and supporters killed by anti-junta forces. However, consulting the TCMS data, we found that 51 of the USDP's listed victims in fact belonged to a militia or Pyu Saw Htee para-military group. After excluding them, we were left with 1,975 USDP deaths, 364 of which were also recorded in the TCMS data. Table 3, below, shows the total number of civilian fatalities derived by combining three datasets and excluding the overlaps among them. The total also includes protestors killed by security forces in the first months after the coup, as recorded in the AAPP dataset.

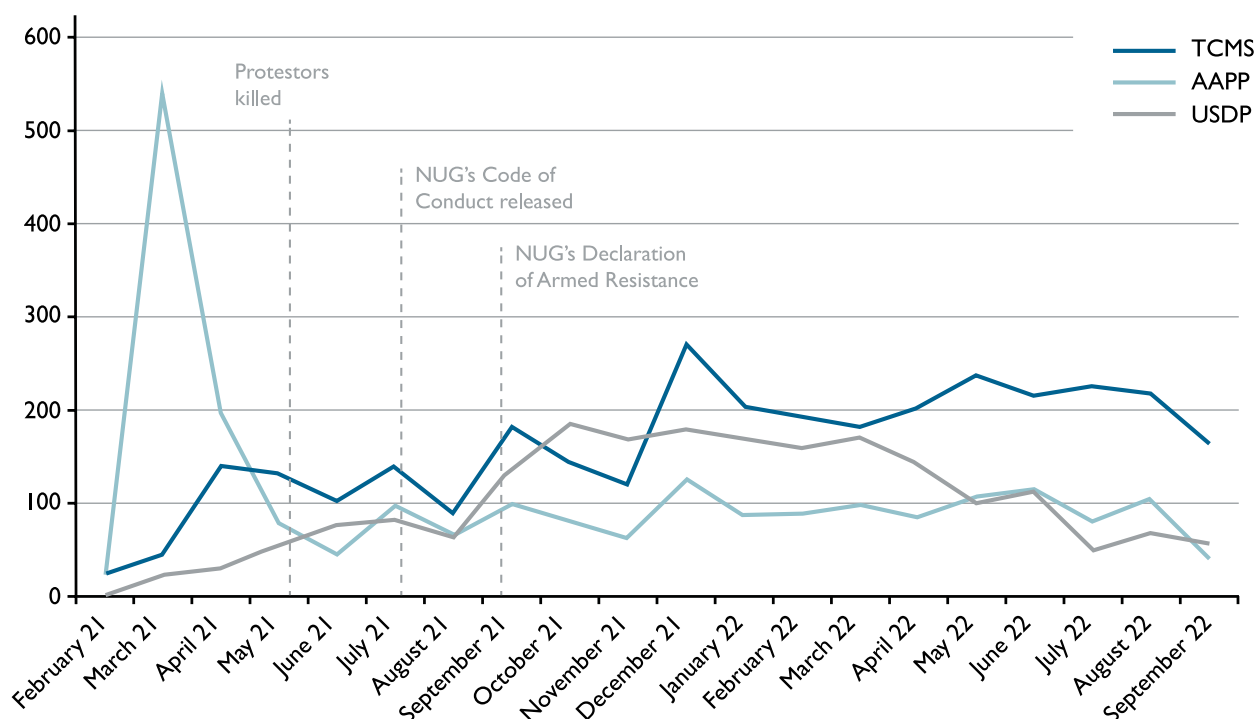
Table 3: The Total Number of Civilian Fatalities After the Military Coup, as Recorded in TCMS, AAPP, and USDP Datasets from February 1, 2021, to September 30, 2022

Number of Civilian Fatalities Recorded in TCMS	3,229
Number of Civilian Fatalities Recorded in AAPP Excluding Non-Civilians and Overlaps with TCMS	1,497
Number of Civilian Fatalities Recorded by the USDP Excluding Non-Civilians and Overlaps with TCMS	1,611
Total Reported Civilians Killed from Feb 1, 2021, to Sep 30, 2022	6,337

32. The AAPP dataset identified 97 members of resistance groups. Therefore, we subtracted this number from the civilian fatality list.

Figure 2, below, shows very different trends in the USDP and AAPP data. The AAPP data exhibit a spike in civilian deaths in the first three months after the coup, primarily due to protestor-related deaths. The USDP data show a gradual increase, beginning in March 2021, in the numbers of party members and associates killed, with a significant rise beginning in August 2021. In contrast, the TCMS data captured a fraction of the protestor deaths in the first months after the coup, but it began coding more civilian deaths after April 2021. By combining all three datasets after removing non-civilians and duplicates, we produced a new estimate of the total reported civilian deaths. However, it is likely that many civilian deaths have not been reported, in which case they are not recorded in the TCMS, AAPP or USDP datasets. Thus, our total, although more accurate than that provided by any one dataset, is still only an estimate and likely too low.

Figure 1: Comparison of TCMS, AAPP, and USDP Recorded Fatalities by Months from February 1, 2021, to September 30, 2022



To address the anti-junta selection bias in the count of civilian deaths, we turned to social media platforms other than just Facebook. Meta Platform, which owns Facebook, bans military and pro-junta accounts; pro-military Facebook users have thus migrated to other social media. Telegram has become the favored platform for pro-SAC news and propaganda. We found that the Fifty-two News channel on Telegram often reports civilian deaths allegedly caused by opposition groups. Over 90% of the civilian deaths reported by Fifty-two News included photo or video evidence of the dead, allowing us to confirm the report even if the narrative could be disputed.

We analyzed the content of Fifty-two News from February to September 2022, as the channel became active only on February 5, 2022. To our surprise, we did not find the expected significant overlap between the reports on this news channel and the USDP list. Fifty-two News covered only 178 (21%) of 832 USDP deaths in the 7-month sample period through September 2022. Only 35 deaths were reported by Fifty-two News and both in the TCMS and USDP datasets. For the sample period, the TCMS data listed only 194 (29%) of the 665 events related to civilian deaths reported by Fifty-two News.³³ In contrast, the TCMS data captured 721 (33%) of 2,218 civilian deaths that were reported by the AAPP from February 2021 to September 2022. The overlap in the AAPP and TCMS data increased to 43% of the data recorded from August 2021 to September 2022. This indicates that the TCMS and the AAPP data overlap more than do the TCMS data and the Fifty-two News reports (excluding the protestor deaths, which TCMS did not capture well). By comparing the TCMS data overlaps with the AAPP and with Fifty-two News, we can observe the selection biases (and data gaps) of the news sources. Our scrutiny of Fifty-two News is preliminary but indicates that further analysis is worthwhile. It could provide additional data regarding civilian deaths that is not available in the datasets or on Facebook and potentially raise the number of civilian deaths above 6,337.

This finding has four important implications for further research on civilian deaths in Myanmar since the coup. First, the finding confirms that selection bias affects the data presented by the different sources. No single source or available dataset is sufficiently comprehensive to provide a basis for estimating the total number of civilian deaths. Second, the data compiled by TCMS, AAPP, and USDP have each missed civilian killings that were reported in the media. Systematic collection of data from Telegram channels could be significant in reducing the amount of missing data in each database, especially in the TCMS. Third, the estimate made by combining TCMS, AAPP, and USDP data errs on the low side. The actual number of reported civilian deaths is likely much higher.

Fourth and finally, in addition to local investigation (as done by the AAPP), comparing different datasets can help researchers verify the accuracy of their findings. By triangulating various datasets and including multimedia evidence, researchers can prepare the ground for further investigation. With sufficient resources, researchers will be able to provide a better estimate of the total number of civilian fatalities since the coup.

33. We sorted out the reported civilian-casualty events into categories, such as armed clash, artillery, murder, airstrike, etc., using a Python script. This sorting enabled us to compare the events reported in the TCMS and USDP data. However, we were not able to code the number of fatalities in each event reported in Fifty-two News. Therefore, we could only compare the events, not the number of fatalities, reported on Fifty-two News and in the TCMS data.

5.2. Trends in the Killing of Civilians

The Tatmadaw's violent repression of non-violent protests after the coup triggered the escalation of violence. The protests had been largely peaceful before the regime commenced its nationwide crack-down on February 28, 2021. The largest number of protestors were killed in a two-month period, March through April 2021. Politically motivated targeted killings commenced as early as March 19, 2021. The TCMS recorded 7 such killings in March, 13 in April, and 47 in May 2021.

In February 2021, when the CRPH established the NUG, its initial strategy was to promote non-violence and advocate for a civil disobedience movement. On February 20th, the CRPH invalidated the SAC and established an "Interim Peoples' Administration Program" to underline the SAC's illegitimacy. The SAC responded by arresting members of the local administrative teams in major cities and intensifying its crackdown, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of protesters. As a result, popular dissent escalated. On March 1, the CRPH declared the SAC to be a "terrorist group" and announced on March 13 that "individuals, township and village organizations, regions and wards, everyone has the right to retaliate in self-defense in accordance with the law."³⁴ This marked the first departure from a policy of non-violent resistance by Myanmar's mainstream democratic opposition since 1988.

The use of targeted killings by the anti-junta opposition raised concern in the international community. On May 26, 2021, the NUG announced a two-page "Code of Conduct" that stated that anti-junta resistance fighters should protect civilians.³⁵ However, although the Code of Conduct said that "Mechanisms of the dictatorship shall only be defeated . . . civilians shall not be threatened, targeted and attacked," it did not stop or limit the killings.³⁶ The Code of Conduct did not provide a precise definition of "civilians" and did not clarify the ambiguous notion of "mechanisms of the dictatorship." As seen in Figure 2, the killing of USDP members continued to increase after the announcement of the Code of Conduct. Various anti-junta groups, both those affiliated with and those not affiliated with the NUG, continued targeted killings in many parts of the country, notably in Sagaing and Magway regions.

The opposition's politically motivated killings started even before the NUG was established. The collective trauma turned into collective violence against perceived perpetrators and their associates. "We targeted the military's collaborators who assisted the arrest of protestors, . . . We did not target every administrator. Some of them even helped us. We only targeted those who collaborated with

34 CRPH (2021) Statement 13/2021. Available at: crphmyanmar.org/publications/1175-2.

35. Emily Fishbein; Vahpual & Nu Nu Lusan (2021) 'Our only option': Myanmar civilians take up arms for democracy, *Al Jazeera*, 15 June. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/15/our-only-option-myanmar-civilians-take-up-arms-for-democracy>.

36. NUG. Ministry of Defense (2021) Military Code of Conduct for People's Defense Force. English Version: 1–2.

the military,” said a team leader of an urban resistance group.³⁷ The initial wave of targeted killings was motivated partly by a need to avoid arrest and partly by a quest for revenge. Targeted murders became widespread as a collective form of violence; they were not initially part of any specific strategic aim.

Gradually, many resistance fighters moved to EAO-controlled areas and linked up with each other and, to some extent, with the NUG. The groups were then better organized, with a line of control and logistical assistance. “The NUG did not do it (targeted killing) by itself; instead, it provided ‘stuff’ (ပစ္စည်း) to UG (underground members),” one source explained in 2021.³⁸

The civilian killings escalated as the violence committed by both sides increased during the second half of 2021. A combination of TCMS, AAPP, and USDP data shows a peak in December 2021, with 492 civilians reported as killed.³⁹ If we use the combined number from the TCMS, AAPP, and USDP for the 20-month period of February 2021 to September 2022, and include protestor deaths, we find that an average of 316 civilians were killed each month. In 2022, the average number killed per month increased to 352.

Civilian killings decreased in September 2022, the last month covered in this study. We do not yet know why or if this marked the beginning of a downward trend in civilian deaths. A possible explanation is that many USDP members had moved out of high-risk areas or taken other precautionary measures. Many USDP members and supporters in Sagaing and Magway joined the newly formed Tatmadaw-affiliated militias. Our impression from media reports is that the number of civilians killed by the Tatmadaw or affiliated militias increased after January 2023, when the military launched offensives across the country. However, we have not yet examined the 2023 data.

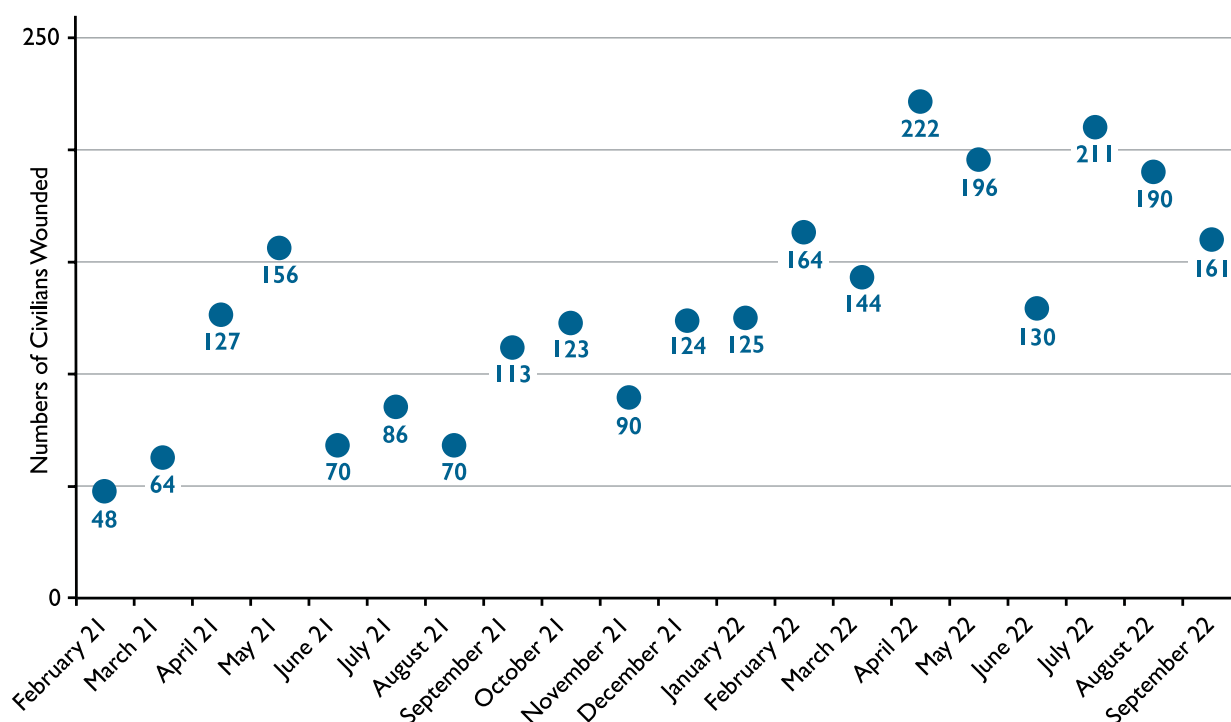
The TCMS also registers reports of wounded civilians. The data show a trend upward from 70 wounded in June 2021 to 222 in April 2022. The numbers began to trend downward in August and continued to do so in September. The TCMS is the only available dataset that records wounded civilians. From February 2021 to September 2022, at least 2,614 civilians were wounded.

37. Min Zaw Oo’s virtual interview with a non-NUG team leader of an urban resistance group responsible for multiple targeted killings, 24 March 2023. The interview was conducted via Signal.

38. Ibid. However, the overall chain of command and targeting mechanism changed after 2021.

39. The TCMS’s data has 270 fatalities for December 2021, AAPP 126, and USDP 178. After deducting 82 overlaps, we get a total of 492.

Figure 2: Number of Civilians Wounded by Month from February 1, 2021, to September 30, 2022 (TCMS)



Contrary to what we expected, the number of injured civilians in the TCMS dataset is lower than the number killed. As may be seen in Table 5, in the first twenty months after the coup, no fewer than 3,220 civilians were registered as killed by the TCMS, but only 2,614 were recorded as wounded. This discrepancy may reflect underreporting of wounded victims. However, the high killed-to-wounded ratio could also indicate that politically motivated murder victims have been precisely targeted. Targeted killings and summary executions in conflict zones often result in death rather than injury. Our analysis shows that out of the 3,229 killed civilians, 2,447 were the primary target in the incident that led to their deaths, whereas 782 were killed as secondary targets or collateral during an armed clash, IED explosion, artillery strike or air strike the primary target of which was combatants. The number of civilian deaths per incident ranges from one to 35 people. A total of 480 incidents, (23% of the overall number) had two or more victims, whereas 1,570 incidents, or 77% of the total, resulted in the death of a single victim. The most heinous of the recorded incidents was the one in which Tatmadaw soldiers killed and burned 35 civilians in vehicles near Mo So village in Hpruso township, Kayah State, on December 24, 2021.⁴⁰ The second-highest death toll occurred when 25 construction workers were executed by the Karen National Defence Organization (KNDO), a militia arm of the Karen National Union (KNU), near the Oohu bridge construction site, Wawlay township, Myawaddy district, Karen State, on May 31, 2021.

40. For airstrikes with a high number of casualties in the period after 30 September 2022, see below.

Table 4: Civilians Killed and Wounded, by Month, According to the TCMS

Months	Killed (TCMS)	Wounded (TCMS)	Killed to Wounded Ratio
February 21	25	48	0.5
March 21	45	64	0.7
April 21	140	127	1.1
May 21	131	156	0.8
June 21	103	70	1.5
July 21	139	86	1.6
August 21	89	70	1.3
September 21	182	113	1.6
October 21	143	123	1.2
November 21	120	90	1.3
December 21	270	124	2.2
January 22	203	125	1.6
February 22	195	164	1.2
March 22	183	144	1.3
April 22	202	222	0.9
May 22	237	196	1.2
June 22	215	130	1.7
July 22	225	211	1.1
August 22	218	190	1.1
September 22	164	161	1.0
Total	3229	2614	1.2

5.3. Civilians Killed, by Age and Gender

Table 5 shows that a total of 877 females, 4,553 males, and 907 individuals of unknown gender were killed in the incidents recorded in the TCMS, AAPP, and USDP datasets.⁴¹ The TCMS and AAPP data also indicate that at least 267 children were killed in incidents of violence against civilians. Of these, at least 57 were killed in incidents categorized by the TCMS as politically motivated murder. Among those whose gender is known, males outnumbered females, among both children and adults, indicating that males are significantly overrepresented among the adult primary targets.

Table 5: Civilians Killed, by Age and Gender, as Recorded in the TCMS, AAPP, and USDP datasets from February 1, 2021, to September 30, 2022

Gender	AAPP	USDP	TCMS	Total
Male	1,314	1,315	1924	4,553
Female	138	296	443	877
Unknown	45		862	907
Total	1,497	1,611	3,229	6,337

Age	AAPP	USDP	TCMS	Total
Unknown	341	1,611		1,952
Adult	1,053	N/A	3065	4,118
Child	103	N/A	164	267

5.4. Categories of Violence

The data collected by the TCMS categorized civilian fatalities into seven types. We have not been able to code the types of violence for the AAPP and USDP data, except for protest-related deaths. Therefore, the numbers associated with different types of violence that we offer in this study represent only some, not all, of the reported deaths. We find that no fewer than 2,164 civilians were killed in politically motivated murders. This is perhaps the most unexpected and important finding of the present study: Politically motivated murder—such as when members of the Yangon

41. The USDP data did not include age and gender categories. We identified gender based on the prefix of the names listed.

Federal Army (YFA) shot the Mytel company's CFO, Thein Aung, and his wife near their residences in Mayankone township, Yangon, on November 4, 2021⁴²—became the most common type of violence against civilians in the period following the military's initial crackdown on peaceful protests. If we include data from the AAPP and the USDP that were not recorded in the TCMS, the ratio of politically motivated murders to all other types is even higher. We include in this category “summary executions” of civilians in conflict zones, as when Tatmadaw troops arrested and killed nine civilians near Oke Hpo village, Budalin township, Sagaing region, on May 2, 2022.

The second most common of the seven types of violence leading to civilian deaths is protest-related killings, with 884 deaths falling in this category (according to the AAPP).

The third most common cause of civilian fatalities is an armed clash. We offer two examples of this type of killing. First, on February 7, 2022, Arakan Army (AA) fighters attacked Tatmadaw troops riding in a civilian vehicle near Ngan Chaung village, Maungdaw township, Rakhine. According to Radio Free Asia, the clash resulted in the deaths of thirteen soldiers and two civilians. Second, on September 29, 2022, a clash between Tatmadaw and local PDF fighters near Pauk Kone village, Tigyaing township, Sagaing, killed one civilian, according to the Mandalay Free Press. These are just two examples of armed clashes in which not just combatants, but also civilians, were killed. At least 339 civilians (11%) were killed during armed clashes from February 2021 through September 2022, according to the TCMS data.

The fourth most widespread cause is the rest category “other violence” which includes discovery of dead bodies, sexual violence, or cases not clearly fit in other categories of violence.

The fifth most common type of civilian fatality results from an explosive device or IED. Again, two examples: On June 1, 2021, a homemade bomb killed two attendants at a gas station in Maharaungmyay Township, Mandalay, as reported by Burma Associated Press. And on June 28, 2021, a bomb exploded in front of a local USDP office in Shwebo town, Sagaing, killing one civilian and wounding another, according to the Z-Fighter page on Facebook. Some of the killings registered as resulting from mine and IED incidents could, in fact, have been politically motivated murders, since IEDs are sometimes ignited from a mobile phone nearby. Only a few incidents involving the targeting of civilians with IEDs have been reported.

Yet other categories of violence leading to civilian fatalities are artillery and air strikes. We list them as such when they occur independently of any armed clash on the ground. To our surprise, we

42. YFA members were arrested in connection with former MP Pyo Zayar Thaw, who was later hanged by the junta. YFA carried out the killing as a part of the “Pyan Hlwar Aung” operation. *Myanmar Alinn Daily*, 23 November 2021: 12. See also RFA (2021) Myanmar military telecom CFO shot dead in Yangon, *Radio Free Asia* (RFA), 11 April. Accessed on 12 Jan 2023. Available at: www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/shot-11042021144512.html.

found that only 34 people were reported as killed in air strikes in the 20-month period of this study. The actual number of civilians killed by air strikes only could, however, be higher because civilians killed by airstrikes have in some cases been coded as armed clashes.⁴³ It is moreover clear that the number of civilians killed in air strikes has increased significantly since September 30, 2022. On October 25, 2022, the world was shocked to learn that the Tatmadaw had bombed a concert organized to celebrate the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO)'s 62nd anniversary in the village of A Nang Po near Hpakant in Kachin State. According to the *New York Times*, at least 80 people were killed.⁴⁴ KIA spokesperson Colonel Naw Bu corrected the number to 63, including 46 KIO/KIA officers (one of whom was a brigadier general). Sixty-two were wounded. Among them were 33 KIO officers and 28 civilians.⁴⁵ The world was equally shocked when, on April 11, 2023, an airstrike targeting an opening ceremony of the NUG's local administration office in Pa Zi Gyi Village in Kanbalu Township of Sagaing Region, reportedly killed at least 165 people, including children and women.⁴⁶

Table 6: Civilians Killed by Type of Violence during February 1, 2021–September 30, 2022

Types of Violence	Number of Civilians Killed
Politically Motivated Murder (TCMS)	2164
Protestors Killed (AAPP)	844
Armed Clash (TCMS)*	371
Other Violence (TCMS)	258
IED Incidents (TCMS)	256
Artillery Strike Only (TCMS)	146
Air Strike Only (TCMS)	34

*Combatant fatalities are not included. When air strikes, artillery strikes, or naval strikes are carried out unilaterally, they are coded as strikes without clash. When they occur as part of an armed clash, the strikes are considered part of the clash.

43. This coding guideline resembles the ACLED's, which shows 67 fatalities by "air and drone strikes" with civilians as the primary targets. Grouping air strikes and drone-delivered explosive attacks into a single category makes it difficult though to distinguish between fatalities caused by air strikes and by drone attacks.

44. Richard C. Paddock (2022) Airstrike Kills at Least 80 During Outdoor Concert in Myanmar, *New York Times*, 25 October. Available at: www.nytimes.com/2022/10/25/world/asia/myanmar-coup-concert-killed.html.

45. RFA (2022) Dozens of ethnic rebels killed alongside civilians in Myanmar airstrike, *Radio Free Asia*, 26 October. Accessed on 9 Jan 2023. Available at: www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/toll-10262022184020.html.

46. Helen Regan; Sandi Sidhu, Salai TZ & Anna Coren (2023) Screaming people and bodies everywhere: The horrific aftermath of Myanmar junta airstrike that killed 165, *CNN*, 13 April. Available at: edition.cnn.com/2023/04/12/asia/myanmar-junta-deadly-airstrike-aftermath-intl-hnk/index.html.

5.5. Sexual Violence

What we know about the Tatmadaw's past behavior and from single case evidence leads us to suspect that many sexual violence cases have not been reported. In Table 6, "other violence" includes sexual violence, torture, and bodies discovered. In every case except one, the perpetrators were reported to belong to the Tatmadaw. In the one remaining case the perpetrators were a Tatmadaw-affiliated militia force.

Over the 20-month study period, no case of sexual violence was recorded that involved an EAO or PDF as perpetrator. Among videos of torture and killings posted on social media, we have seen no evidence of sexual violence committed by anti-junta forces. One video circulated widely on social media in December 2022 of PDFs beating and then shooting a young woman to death revealed no sign of sexual violence. Her killers were both male and female and they appeared angry and thirsty for revenge.⁴⁷ When the video caused a stir on social media, a local fighter appeared in another video to explain that the woman had been an informer and deserved to die. We found at least three videos in which women were brutally killed and mutilated by anti-junta groups, who accused them of collaboration with the military.

A few local media have begun reporting rapes committed by some members of resistance groups in 2023. For example, members of LDF allegedly raped and killed two female children and four adult females and murdered an adult male on August 30, 2022, in Chaung Oo township in Sagaing.⁴⁸ Because the report came out on April 22, 2023, the event was not coded in the version of the TCMS used for this study.

Table 7: Sexual Violence Incidents Recorded by the TCMS from February 1, 2021, to September 30, 2022.

Reported Perpetrators	Number of Cases	Killed	Wounded
Pyu Saw Htee/Militia	1		1
Tatmadaw	41	37	21
Total	42	37	22

5.6. The Geography of Civilian Fatalities

47. The perpetrators filmed the murder while it happened.

48. Aung Soe (2023) ကလေး ၄ ဦးအပါ ၇ ဦးကိုချုပ်ကျူး ပကတိတို့က အဓမ္မမပြုကျင့်သတ်ဖတ်ခဲ့တဲ့ ၈ လကပြီအထိ အရေးမယူနိုင်သေး၊ *Myaelatt Athan*, 22 April. Accessed on 24 April 2023. Available at: tinyurl.com/47y99nb9.

Figure 4 illustrates the geographic distribution of reported civilian killings following the military coup. The data suggest a shift in the pattern of armed conflict, with areas dominated by the ethnic Burman majority experiencing increased violence. As mentioned above, those regions in the central plain, where the NLD had performed well in elections, saw the emergence of local armed groups in response to the Tatmadaw's killing of unarmed protesters. Young activists formed local PDFs, acquired rudimentary weapons, and were trained by established EAOs. They fared badly when engaging in armed clashes with well-armed Tatmadaw units so they resorted primarily to political assassinations of alleged civilian collaborators with the military regime. The Tatmadaw responded with raids against villages suspected of harboring PDFs or other local resistance groups. In such raids, the Tatmadaw killed both random villagers and those they suspected of being PDF fighters. To avoid being caught, the PDFs in return killed alleged informers, USDP members, local administrators, and other alleged collaborators.

Anti-coup groups have adopted tactics aimed at undermining the regime's control in both rural and urban areas. A key strategy has been to target village and local ward administrators who have been appointed by the regime. Opposition groups, including some EAOs, have publicly called on these administrators and civil servants to resign or to join the Civil Disobedience Movement, sometimes delivering letters with these demands that include bullets as warnings. Those who refused to comply became targets of assassination. As the conflict continues, the division between those supporting the revolution and those siding with the military has become increasingly distinct in rural areas, with most villages supporting the revolution and a minority supporting the military.

The main locus of the PDFs' struggle was in Sagaing and Magway regions, where the political contest between the NLD and USDP morphed into a civil war. In addition to carrying out raids against resisting villages, the Myanmar military, as mentioned, armed local militias. This permitted the Tatmadaw to deploy limited troops to wider areas rather than establish a permanent presence in areas where the PDFs enjoy massive support.

Figure 3 demonstrates the impact of violence through the astounding number of civilian killings in Sagaing, Magway, Mandalay, Yangon, and Bago regions, as well as in ethnic states where established EAOs have become actively involved in the revolution, through clashes with the Tatmadaw or by providing arms and training to PDFs. This has been the case in five of Myanmar's seven ethnic states: Kayin, Mon, Kachin, Kayah, and Chin. Even if the protest deaths are removed from the total, the geographical pattern of civilian deaths remains the same.

Two ethnic states show a different pattern. One is Rakhine, where the (Buddhist Rakhine) Arakan Army (AA) was fighting Myanmar's most intense armed struggle against the Tatmadaw during 2017–2020. Shortly before the 2020 national elections, the AA and Tatmadaw arranged an informal ceasefire, which has been interrupted only by a few clashes. The ceasefire has allowed the AA to build a parallel state in north and central Rakhine, with taxation and administrative services. At

the same time, the ceasefire has allowed the Tatmadaw to focus on repressing the revolution elsewhere. However, until late 2022, Tatmadaw commanders kept at least seven divisions deployed against the AA in Rakhine.

Figure 3: Civilians Killed in States and Regions, Including Protest-Related Fatalities, from February 1, 2021, to September 30, 2022, Recorded by the TCMS, AAPP, and USDP

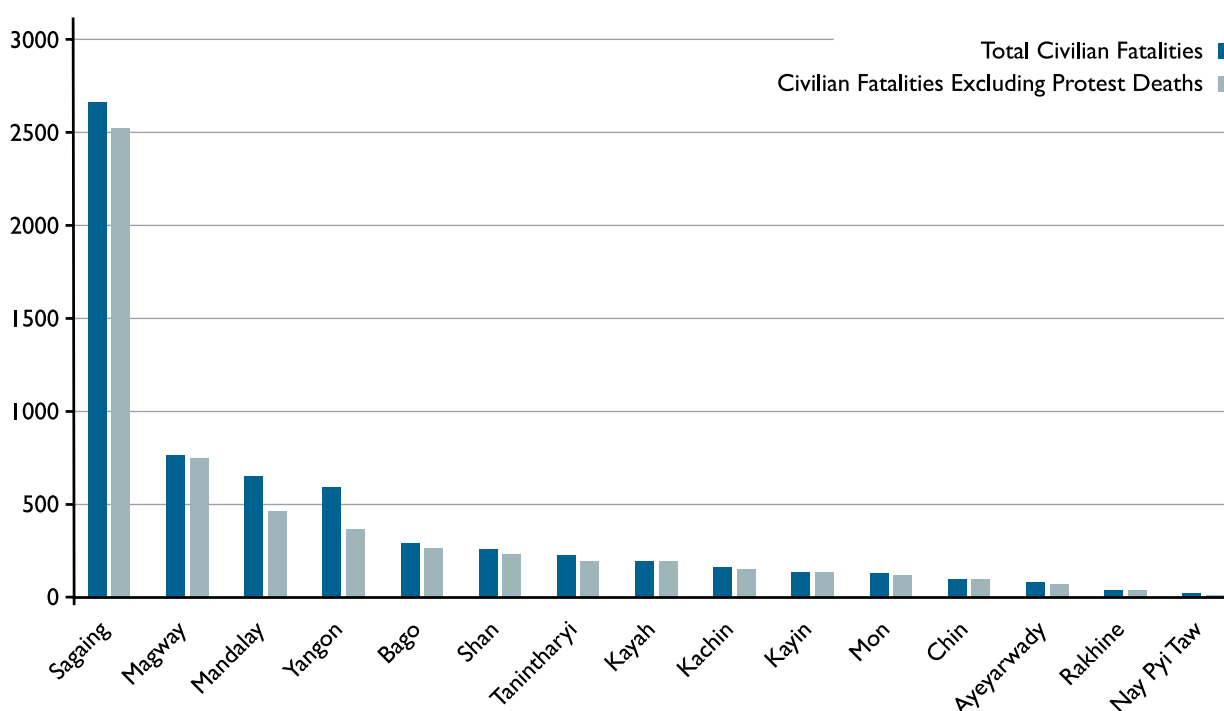


Figure 3 also shows that the number of civilians killed in Shan State, the largest of Myanmar's ethnic states, remained relatively low in 2021–2022. Few civilians in Shan State were killed in protests in February through May 2021, and the total number killed in the 20-month period covered by this study was 262. This is fewer than in Yangon, which had 588 civilian fatalities, and in Mandalay, which had 653, regions that have seen few armed clashes but that have experienced harsh and violent repression.

Figure 4 provides further insight into the post-coup pattern of violence by using the TCMS dataset to identify different types of violence geographically. (We have not yet recoded the type of violence in the AAPP and USDP datasets. However, were we to do so, we believe that the ratio of politically motivated killings to other types of violence would increase.) Politically motivated murder is the most common form of violence across all states and regions, except Rakhine, regardless of the frequency or intensity of armed clashes. Sagaing region has become a significant center of political violence, with 168 civilians killed in armed clashes and 649, in politically motivated murders. As has already been underlined above, this represents a new pattern of violence in

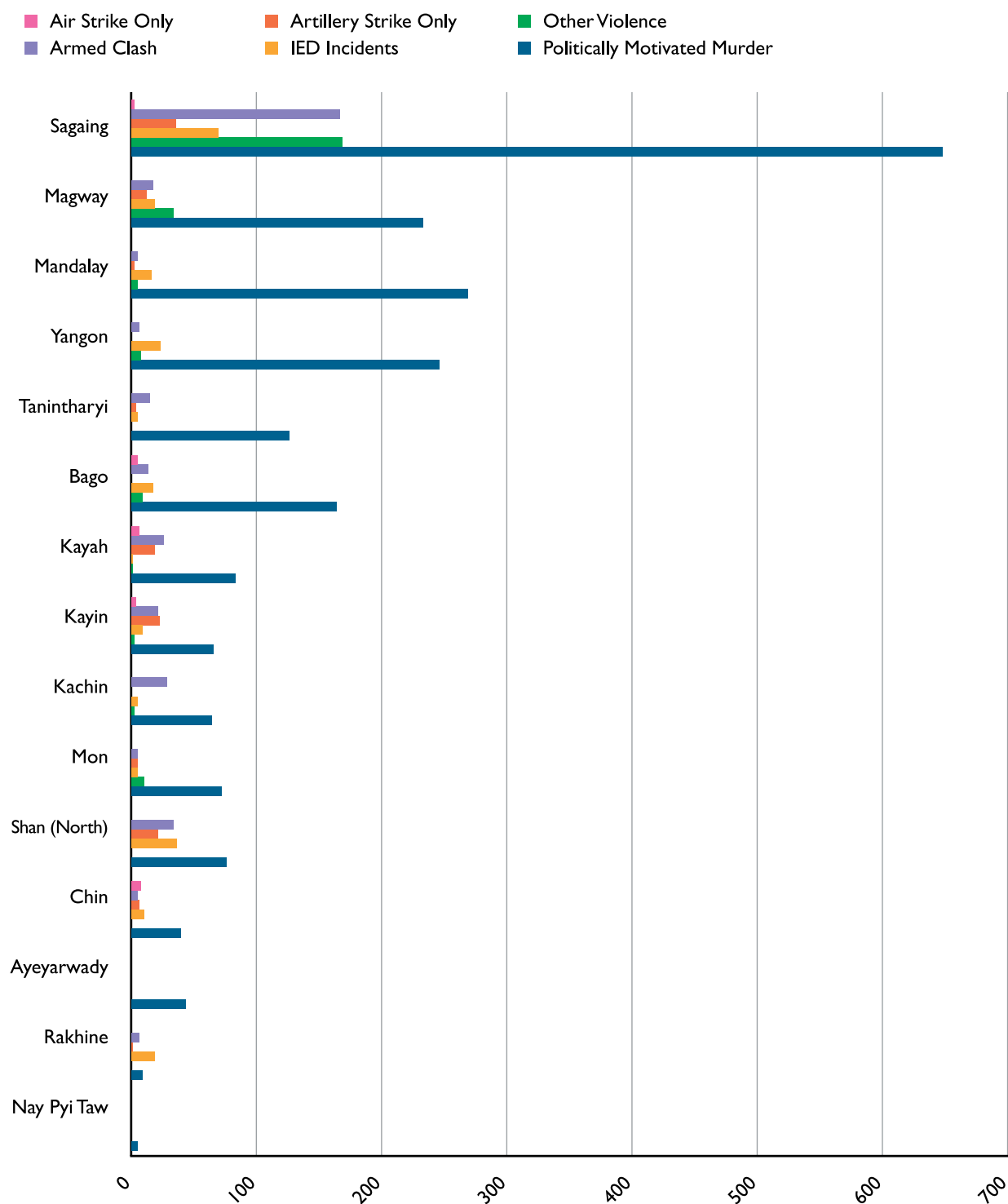
Myanmar, with 3.8 times as many people being killed in politically motivated murders than in armed clashes in Sagaing. Additionally, 71 civilians have been killed by mines/IEDs in Sagaing, and 170 died as a result of torture, sexual assault, or other forms of violence.

Of the various regions of Myanmar, Sagaing, Magway, Mandalay, and Yangon suffered the largest number of fatalities from politically motivated murders. However, the pattern of the fatalities differed from region to region. In Sagaing and Magway, both sides in the conflict but particularly the Tatmadaw, committed murders during raids and armed encounters in villages. The Tatmadaw rounded up villagers during raids and killed suspected resistance members and their supporters. The anti-junta groups resorted to killing alleged collaborators and civil servants who did not join the Civil Disobedience Movement. In contrast, in Yangon and Mandalay, most of the politically motivated murders were targeted killings committed by anti-junta groups against administrators, civil servants, and USDP members. Security forces killed a score of detainees during interrogation. The raids conducted by the military on PDF hideouts occasionally resulted in the death of PDF fighters as well. Nationwide, the military had killed at least 771 people in custody as of November 30, 2022, according to the AAPP. Dozens died within 24 hours of arrest and deaths were common during interrogation and torture.⁴⁹

The number of politically motivated murders has also increased in ethnic minority states. Mon and Kayah are cases in point. Youth from these two states reacted to the repression after the coup by participating alongside Burmans in the national revolution. In Mon State, 75 civilians were killed in politically motivated murders; the figure for Kayah State is 83. The two ethnic minority states that have been the least affected by armed conflict since the coup are Shan and Rakhine. Considering the size of Shan State and its history of armed conflict, it is noteworthy that only 77 politically motivated murders were reported there during the period of this study. In Rakhine, the informal ceasefire between the AA and Tatmadaw has played a critical role in keeping civilian deaths low, and there have been only 10 politically motivated murders there.

49. Myanmar Now (2021) Junta has killed at least 110 people in custody since coup, says rights group, *Myanmar Now*, 30 August. Accessed on 20 Jan 2023. Available at: myanmar-now.org/en/news/junta-has-killed-at-least-110-people-in-custody-since-coup-says-rights-group. Data on those killed in custody can also be found at: aappb.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/15.png.

Figure 4: Types of Violence After the Coup in States and Regions, Excluding Protest Fatalities, Recorded by the TCMS from February 1, 2021, to September 30, 2022



5.7. Identifying Perpetrators and Victims

Who are the main killers of civilians? Table 8 shows that, of the killings recorded by the TCMS from February 1, 2021, to September 30, 2022, the regime's security forces (military and police) and their affiliated militias caused the deaths of 1,506 civilians. This number does not include the USDP and AAPP data. EAOs were responsible for 92 civilian deaths, and PDF/LDFs or other resistance groups reportedly killed 449 civilians. The killings reported to have been committed by EAOs and PDF/LDF resistance groups occurred in 500 events that were reported by 52 sources, 97.2 % of which are anti-coup media outlets. These media sources were often able to report who the perpetrators were because the resistance groups claimed credit for the killings.

Table 8: Perpetrators who Killed Civilians, Recorded in the TCMS, from February 1, 2021, to September 30, 2022

Reported Perpetrators	Number of Civilians Killed
Tatmadaw	1458
Police	13
Militia affiliated with Tatmadaw	35
EAOs	92
PDF/LDF and anti-coup resistance groups	449
Civilians (not affiliated with opposition or regime)	12
Unspecified actors	1170
Total Civilians Killed in the TCMS	3229

The TCMS seeks to establish the likely perpetrator for each civilian killing. In contrast, the AAPP and USDP focus on particular perpetrators. The AAPP records the killing of civilians by the military, police, and affiliated militia. The USDP reports killings by EAOs, LDFs, and PDFs, but not by the military and its associates. Therefore, the perpetrators recorded by the AAPP and USDP do not overlap at all. This helps us estimate the number of killings by different perpetrators, as shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Civilian Killings, Listed by Perpetrators, as Recorded by the TCMS, AAPP, and USDP from February 1, 2021, to September 30, 2022, (After Subtracting All Overlaps)

	TCMS	AAPP	USDP	Sub-Total
Tatmadaw and Affiliates	1506	1497		3003
PDF/LDF Anti-Coup Resistance and EAOs	541		1611	2152
Civilians (not affiliated with opposition or regime)	12			12
Unspecified actors	1170			1170
Total				6,337

Table 9 shows that the Tatmadaw and its affiliated forces are responsible for the killing of 3,003 civilians, and that PDF/LDF anti-coup resistance groups and EAOs, for 2,152. In addition, 1,170 civilians were killed by unspecified actors.

The media tend to refrain from identifying the perpetrators unless the act was committed by the military or the perpetrators claim responsibility for their actions. Due to a considerable degree of uncertainty, and perhaps also to fear of angering the anti-junta forces, most news media and Facebook news pages do not make much effort to identify the actors who kill alleged supporters of the military regime. Who are the “unspecified perpetrators” who killed 1,170 civilians? The identity of their victims may be of some help in answering this question. Victims are more often identified in news reports than are perpetrators. In the TCMS, “unspecified perpetrators” was coded for most of the events where civilians were killed by mines or IED explosions. In the case of IEDs or mines, victims might not have been the intended targets. Therefore, it makes little sense to assume the identity of the perpetrators of IED or mine attacks based on the type of victims. Doing so would make more sense for politically motivated murders, where the perpetrators intentionally target specific victims. Yet, even in these cases, we cannot be certain that the perpetrators belong to an assumed category. Some murders may be purely criminal acts.

To finetune our analysis, Table 10 lists only those politically motivated murders for which the perpetrators were not specified. Our count includes 884 victims of politically motivated murders committed by unspecified actors.

Table 10: Victims of Unspecified Perpetrators who Committed Politically Motivated Murders, as Recorded in the TCMS from February 1, 2021, to September 30, 2022

Types of Victims Killed by Unspecified Perpetrators of Politically Motivated Murders	Number of Civilian Deaths
Civilian (Those not affiliated with the government, opposition, or political parties)	477
Administrators (Local/ward administrators, village heads, or those performing local administrative duties)	230
USDP Members	88
Civil Servants (all civil servants, such as teachers, EPC personnel, doctors, nurse, etc.)	55
Monks or Religious Personnel	21
NLD (member of the NLD)	7
Other Political Parties (neither USDP nor NLD)	6
Total	884

Table 10 separated into seven categories the 884 civilians who were killed by unspecified perpetrators. The Tatmadaw, police, and its affiliated militias are unlikely to murder local administrators, civil servants or USDP members. Similarly, the resistance forces are unlikely to target members of the NLD. Since we strictly follow the reported cases, without editorial intervention, when counting reported civilian fatalities, we shall refrain from making assumptions about the nature of perpetrators in the unspecified category. However, identifying the types of victims may be helpful in determining the perpetrators once the next step of research shows a means for verification.

To further reduce the number of unspecified actors, we need to go through the Fifty-Two News reports and the USDP's list of killed party members and identify those killings that are sufficiently documented and do not overlap with cases derived from other sources. As explained in the methodology section, this process is arduous, and we have not yet accomplished it. Again, adding data missing from the USDP and AAPP datasets and from Fifty-Two News would increase the total number of civilian killings and probably further increase the share of politically motivated murders. Any datasets or lists that record violent events drawn from different kinds of sources are useful for triangulating information and estimating the total number of civilians killed.

Including among civilians killed those individuals labelled as Pyu Saw Htee, or militia affiliated with the Tatmadaw, is problematic. For one thing, the label is not always justified. This study has studiously avoided counting such killings since members of Pyu Saw Htee or militia are not defined as civilians. A total of 446 people who were reported to have been killed were identified as Pyu Saw Htee or militia; of these, 239 were victims of politically motivated murders. Some of these individuals may not have, in fact, belonged to militia groups. For example, Delta News Agency reported that an unidentified group robbed and killed six civilians, members of a family in Zayar Ward in Saw township, Magway region, on August 21, 2022.⁵⁰ Yaw Defense Force (SAW) claimed it was conducting an operation against Pyu Saw Htee, but other resistance groups contested the claim.

5.8. Multimedia and Social Media Evidence

Ample evidence of post-coup violence against civilians can be found on various social media platforms, particularly Facebook, Telegram, and TikTok. Both sides in the conflict have recorded and shared videos and photographs that display acts of murder, torture, and physical assault on perceived collaborators or combatants. This study does not specifically focus on the nature of the available evidence, but we have found hundreds of pictures and videos of violent acts circulating on social media. For example, a lost cell phone belonging to a Tatmadaw soldier contained a series of pictures and videos depicting the torture and murder of civilians during a raid on Mon Taing Pin village in Ye-U township, Sagaing region, on May 10, 2022.⁵¹ Videos of the murder and mutilation of alleged spies or collaborators by anti-coup resistance groups have also circulated online. In cases where the actual acts of violence were not recorded, pictures of murdered bodies have been shared on Telegram. For example, Fifty-two News posted five pictures of three villagers from De-doke-kwin village, one woman and two men, who were reportedly killed by PDF fighters in Pauk township, Magway region, on September 11, 2022. This type of evidence verifies the death of civilians, even if the cause of death reported by a source is questionable. However, it should be noted that the TCMS did not capture the incidents just mentioned because they were not reported by news pages or media outlets on Facebook. Thus, it is crucial that researchers monitor various social media platforms to collect evidence of civilian casualties.

Troublingly, those engaging in post-coup violence in Myanmar have made little effort to conceal their identities. Many anti-coup resistance groups have taken credit publicly for killing alleged collaborators. For example, in a report by Than Lwin Times on Facebook, Mawlamyine PDF announced that, on June 8, 2022, it had killed a World Health Organization staff member who

50. Delta News Agency (2022) ဆာမိပြုနယ်မှာ နအေမီထဲ ဝင်ရောက်ပစ်ခတ်ခံရလို့ခတ်ပြီးသေဆုံး၊ နှစ်ဦးဒဏ်ရာရ၊ *Delta News Agency*, 22 August. Accessed on 20 Jan 2023. Available at: deltanewsagency.com/21161.

51. Khin Maung Soe (2022) 'They are going to kill us', *Radio Free Asia*, 30 June. Accessed on 14 Jan 2023. Available at: www.rfa.org/english/news/special/survivor-reconstructs-myanmar-atrocities/index.html.

was a relative of high-ranking military official Lt. Gen. Aung Lin Dwe.⁵² Many resistance groups have claimed credit for killing civilians allegedly related to someone in the military. They do so for several reasons. First, they see the deaths as legitimate punishment for the junta's actions. Second, the killings have been met with widespread public support as acts of revolution. Third, some resistance groups have used these killings to showcase their ongoing efforts and so gain donations from supporters. Pro-Tatmadaw Telegram channels that show the bodies of dead resistance fighters receive dozens of comments supporting the killings. Pro-military supporters proudly post pictures of swollen and sometimes bloody faces of activists who were arrested and beaten during security forces raids. The members of the public opposed to the coup express widespread support for violence against those perceived as supporting the military.

Social media has played a significant role in generating enthusiasm for violence, enabling pro-violence narratives and hate speech to be widely shared. For example, the report on the killing of Aung Lin Dwe's relative received over 8,600 likes on Facebook, 594 love reactions, and 351 comments. Most of the comments were laudatory. Many commenters indicated that the news of the killing made them happy. Pro-military Telegram channels have also proudly displayed photos and videos of PDF supporters being tortured, murdered, and mutilated, with hundreds of supporters hailing such acts in comments and reactions. In sum, supporters on either side of the armed conflict have been legitimizing the killing of civilians.

52. Than Lwin Times (2022) ဒုဗိုလ်ချုပ်ကြီး အောင်လင်းဒွေးနဲ့ပျိုစစ်ကောင်စီသတင်းပေး မော်လမြိုင်မှာ ပစ်သတ်ခံရ၊ 8 June. Accessed on 13 Jan 2023. Available at: www.facebook.com/thanlwintimes9/posts/3880274415430379.

6. Conclusion

This study, using various sources, has determined that at least 6,337 civilians were killed in Myanmar between the military coup on February 1, 2021, and September 30, 2022. This figure comprises data from several sources. The TCMS of the Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security registered 3,229 civilian deaths over these 20 months. We identified another 1,497 civilian deaths in the AAPP dataset, and 1,611 in a dataset established by the USDP (after having eliminated overlapping data and excluding non-civilians). However, we believe the actual number of civilian deaths in this 20-month period was higher than 6,337, both because some reported civilian deaths were not captured by any of the three datasets and because many civilian deaths are likely to have gone unreported by the official media. A systematic monitoring of all kinds of pages on social media would likely raise the number of reported civilian deaths.

Combining the numbers from TCMS, AAPP and USDP (see Table 9), at least 3,003 civilian killings were committed by the Tatmadaw and its affiliates, and 2,152 were the responsibility of the PDFs, anti-junta resistance groups, and EAOs, primarily through targeted killings. In 884 politically motivated murders, the perpetrator could not be identified. The number of victims murdered for political reasons would likely increase if missing deaths from this study were to be accounted for.

The Code of Conduct declared by the NUG did not lead to any reduction in the number of civilian killings by anti-junta resistance groups. The NUG's Code of Conduct failed to offer a clear definition of civilian in consonance with International Humanitarian Law. The SAC's killing of civilians occurred mostly in conflict zones, after 884 non-violent protestors had been killed by the regime.⁵³ The military targets villagers suspected of being supporters of the resistance movement as a form of collective punishment.

A culture of violence has emerged in previously peaceful regions, with a widespread acceptance of torture and murder against combatants but also civilians. Out of Myanmar's 14 states and regions, Sagaing, Magway, Mandalay, and Yangon regions have had the most casualties, even after the suppression of protests. The escalation of politically motivated murders has primarily taken place in Burman ethnic majority regions, but the ethnic minority states have also been affected. Here, some of Myanmar's established EAOs have joined the fight against the military junta, and new groups have formed following the pattern of the Burman regions.

The military's response, which has been to arm local militias, increases the risk of communal conflict and the killing of civilians by both sides in the conflict. There is a great risk of further

53. It is simply a coincidence that the number of non-violent protestors killed is 884 and the number of targeted political murders by unspecified actors is also 884.

escalation of these killings in connection with the elections planned by the SAC in the Fall of 2023. Social media platforms reveal widespread support for violence against civilians on both sides in the conflict. The scope and scale of violence against civilians could reach a level of politicide.

This study calls for the United Nations to establish a mechanism for monitoring and tracking the killing of civilians in Myanmar, in alignment with Security Council Resolution 2669, which seeks “an immediate end to all forms of violence and urges restraint and de-escalation of tensions.” This mechanism should regularly update the count of civilian deaths in a manner similar to the way that civilian deaths are tracked in Ukraine by the OHCHR. Additionally, this study calls on all parties in the conflict to engage in a humanitarian dialogue to stop the ongoing killing of civilians.

Counting Myanmar's Dead: Reported Civilian Casualties since the 2021 Military Coup

In the wake of the military coup in Myanmar on 1 February 2021, a staggering 6,337 civilians were reported as killed over the following 20 months. The majority of these were victims of politically motivated murders. The primary perpetrator of this violence was the military junta, which was accountable for 3,003 civilian casualties during this period. However, armed opponents of the coup also contributed to the bloodshed, taking the lives of 2,152 alleged collaborators. Based on data from the Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security's Township-based Conflict Monitoring System (TCMS), combined with two other key datasets, this PRIO paper provides a systematic statistical analysis of reported civilian casualties in Myanmar since the 2021 coup. The authors issue a stark warning: should the violence in Myanmar continue to escalate, the nation may be on the brink of a politicide.

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