

Athan's Media Monitoring:
The Myanmar Junta's **"Sham" Election** &
The Crackdown on Dissent



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1. Executive Summary

The Myanmar junta has announced a multi-stage general election scheduled to begin on December 28, 2025. Widely condemned by the international community and independent observers as a "**sham**," this process is viewed as a mechanism to legitimize prolonged military rule rather than as a means to restore democracy.

Athan's media monitoring indicates a sharp rise in politically motivated arrests and lawsuits, specifically leveraging the newly enacted "Law on the Protection of Multiparty Democratic General Elections from Obstruction, Disruption, and Destruction" (enacted July 2025). Rather than protecting the integrity of the vote, this law is being weaponized to criminalize any speech, boycott, or non-violent protest against the regime's election.

2. Background: The 2025 Election Timeline

- **Scheduled Dates:** The junta has confirmed the first-phase election starting on December 28, 2025, with subsequent rounds planned for January 2026.
- **Context:** This will be the first election since the 2021 coup annulled the NLD's landslide victory.
- **Security Landscape:** Voting will not occur in at least 63 townships under martial law, as well as in significant territories controlled by Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) and People's Defense Forces (PDFs).
- **International Reaction:** The UN, EU, and several major democratic countries have labeled the process "neither free nor fair."

3. Legal Framework of Suppression

The primary instrument of suppression identified in this monitoring period is the Election Protection Law, which was enacted on July 29, 2025.

Key Provisions:

Section 23(a)

Criminalizes "incitement to destroy the election," "delivering speeches," or "distributing letters/online content" that disrupts the process.

Section 24 (a)

Threatening, obstructing, or using undue influence—whether directly or indirectly—to prevent a voter from casting their vote is designated as a criminal offense.

Penalties –

Punishments range from severe prison terms (minimum 3 years) up to life imprisonment or even the death penalty for acts deemed to cause death or severe disruption.

Scope –

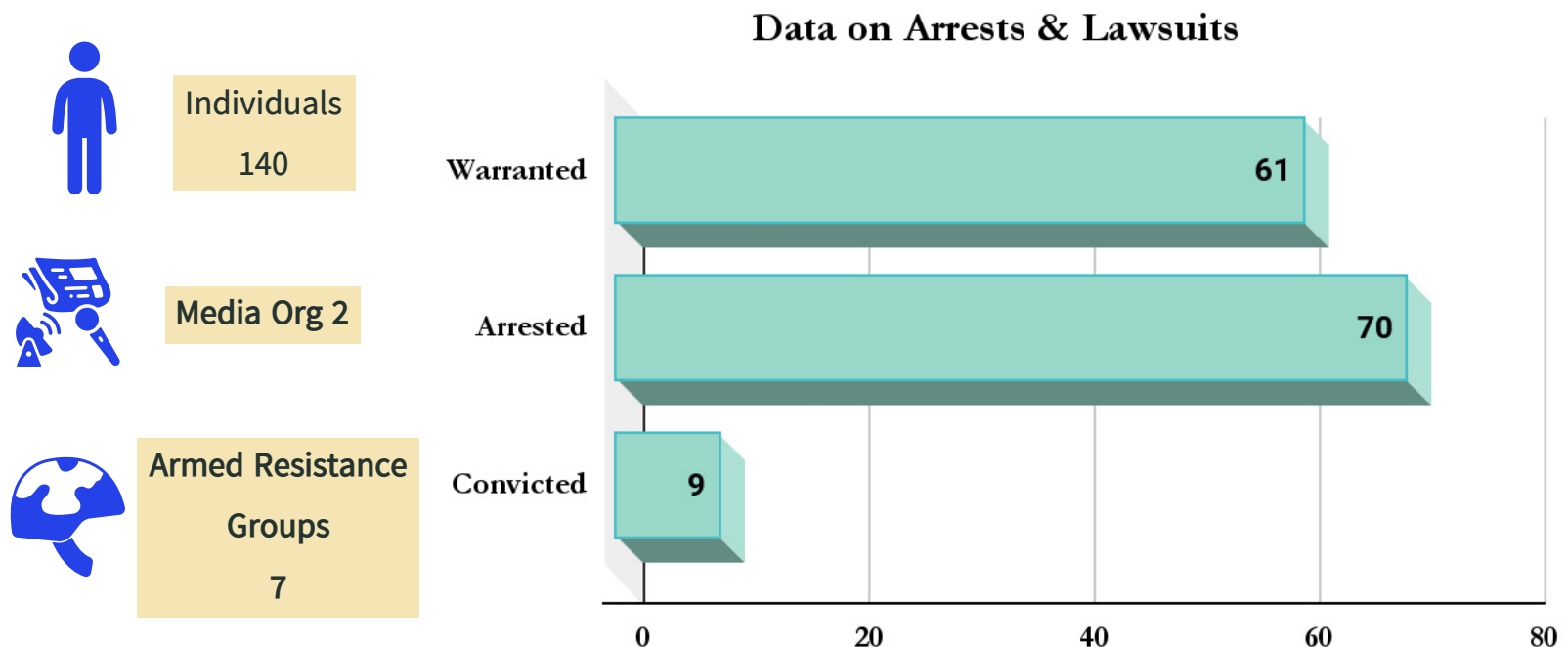
The law explicitly targets "obstruction" of the polls, which the regime interprets as any call for a boycott or criticism of the election commission (UEC).

4. Media Monitoring Findings: Data on Arrests & Lawsuits

This data is compiled from monitoring reports by 27 independent media outlets and two military-owned newspapers, The Mirror and New Light of Myanmar, and the actual number of arrests and lawsuits is likely higher.

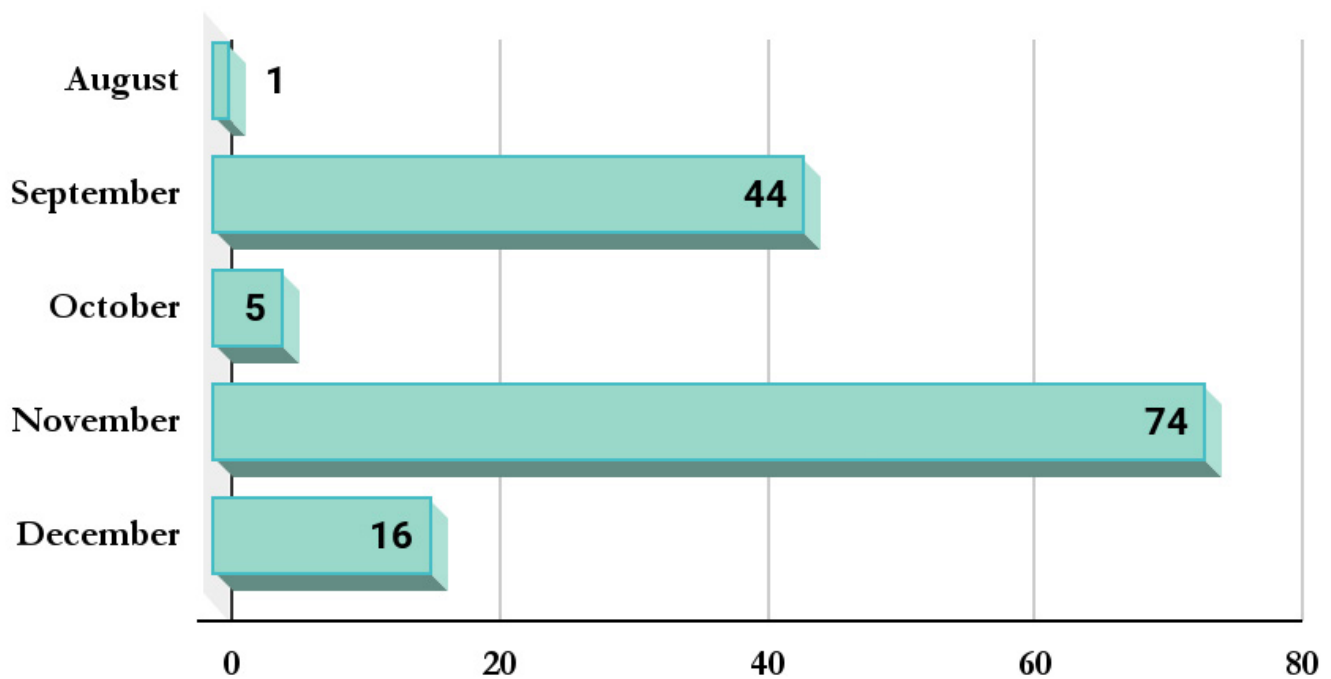
A. Statistical Overview (As of 15 December 2025)

Total Cases Filed under Election Protection Law: According to monitoring records from July 29, when the law came into effect, through November, approximately 140 individuals, 2 media organizations, and 7 armed resistance groups have faced legal action under this new law. These figures include both those who were arrested and those charged in absentia.



- ▶ Recent Surge: Arrests and legal actions peaked in November, just after the election campaign period officially started, affecting up to **74** individuals.
- ▶ In September, one month after the law came into effect, **44** people faced arrest and legal charges.

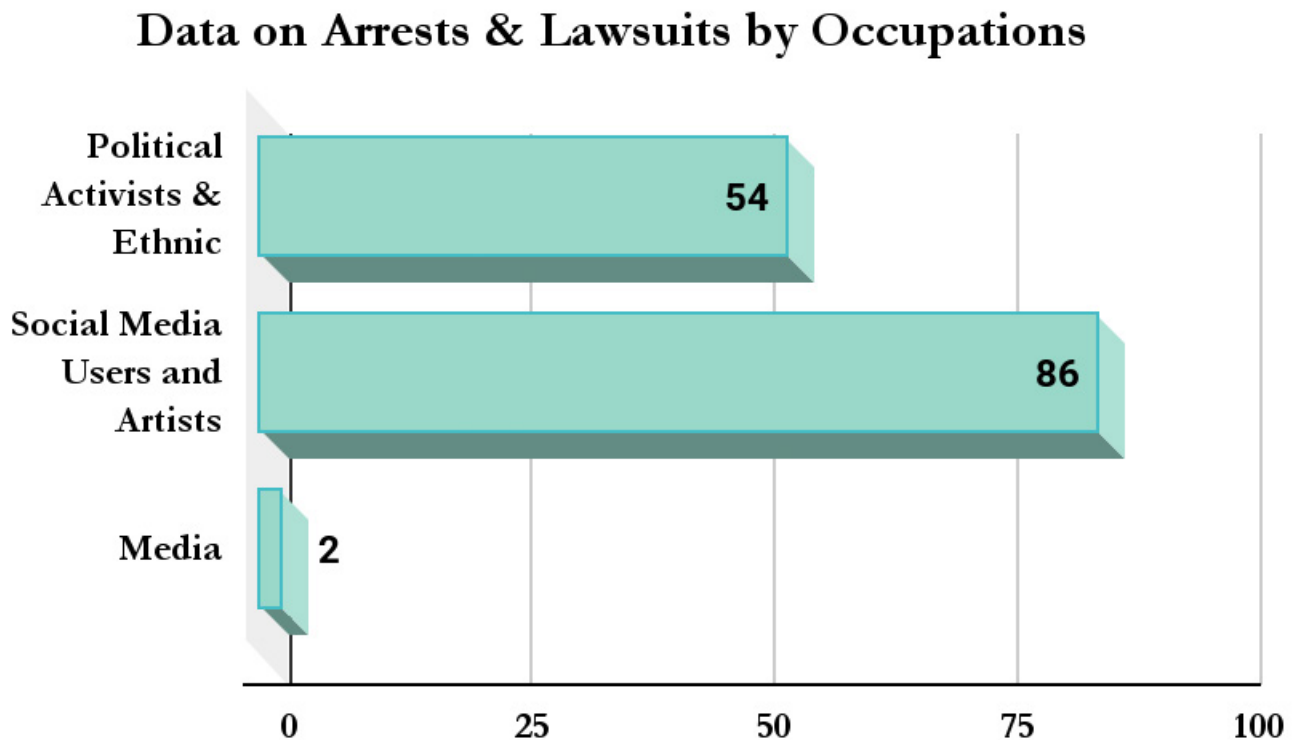
Data on Arrests & Lawsuits by Months



- ▶ Broader Crackdown: This is in addition to the ~30,000+ political prisoners arrested since the coup under other statutes like Section 505(a)

B. Categories of Targets

Monitoring reveals three distinct categories of victims being sued or arrested under election-related laws:



1. Social Media Users, the Public, and Artists

Members of the public, including artists, are being arrested for criticizing the election or for sharing posts on Facebook calling for a boycott.



- Citizens are being arrested for Facebook posts criticizing the UEC or sharing "boycott" messages.
- **Case Study:** On September 9, Ko Nay Thway from Shan State was sentenced to seven years in prison for writing critical posts online. He was the first person to be convicted under this new law.
- **Case Study:** In Hlaing Tharyar Township, three youths, including Ko Yan Naing Kyi Win (aka) Ko Yan Naing, were sentenced to up to 49 years in prison. They were charged for posting anti-election posters that depicted a bullet on a black ballot box.
- **Case Study:** On October 29, the military arrested director Maik Tee (Than Htun Zaw), actor Kyaw Win Htut (Kyaw Min Htut), and comedian Ohn Daing (Zaw Myint). They were accused of criticizing—or participating in the criticism of—the election propaganda short film “Khit Thamaing Ko Done Sai Myi Thu Myar” (Those Who Will Drive History Forward), which distorted the reality of the coup. In November, all three were sentenced to seven years in prison each under the law against disrupting the election.

2. Independent Media & Journalists:

- The regime is using the law to silence reporting on election irregularities.
- Case Study: AAMIJ News and its editors were charged under the Election Protection Law in November 2025 for reporting on a candidate's alleged criminal links.

3. Political Activists & Ethnic Opposition:

- Members of the NLD, KNU, and other opposition groups are being charged in absentia or upon capture to bar them from future participation legally.
- Case Study: 22 members of the KNU in Thaton District were charged en masse under the law in November.
- Ten political activists, including Ko Tayzar San and Ko Nan Lin, who staged protests opposing the election, have been charged under Section 23(b) of the Election Protection Law.

4. . Extra-judicial Actions: Forced Conscription

While the majority of detainees face formal charges under the Election Protection Law, monitoring indicates a disturbing emerging trend where legal procedures are entirely bypassed to facilitate forced conscription.

On December 2, three youths were arrested in Kaw Htin village, Kyaikto Township, Mon State, after informants reported them for picking up and discussing anti-election leaflets. While one individual was released after their family paid a bribe, the remaining two were not processed through the legal system. Instead of being charged or tried, a local news media, Thanlwin Times reported that they were transferred directly to the No. 6 Military Training School under the Southeast Command in Mawlamyine and forcibly conscripted into the army.

C. The "Amnesty" Distraction

In late November 2025, the SAC announced an amnesty for ~3,000 prisoners. Monitoring suggests this was a strategic PR move.

- The majority of those released were either granted release on a **pledge** or were prisoners with only months remaining on their sentences.
- **Re-arrests:** Reports indicate many were released only conditionally or were immediately re-arrested. Example: Ma Poe Piti Khine, Joint Secretary of the Hpa-an Student Union, was released on December 2 but was re-arrested on December 4.
- **Strategic Timing:** Although granting amnesty to political prisoners was intended to project an appearance of 'leniency' during the election campaign, authorities continue to arrest critics under the Election Protection Law.

5. Analysis

The data suggests the Election Protection Law is serving as a comprehensive dragnet targeting both digital and offline dissent.

Unlike traditional election violence, which happens at polling stations, this suppression is criminalizing online criticism as well as physical acts like distributing leaflets or stickers.

- **Criminalization of Boycotts:** The regime has effectively made the act of not voting or encouraging others not to vote a criminal offense equivalent to terrorism.
- **Fear Psychosis:** High-profile sentences (e.g., 49 years for posters) are designed to create a chilling effect, forcing coerced participation in the polls to generate "voter turnout" for legitimacy.

6. Conclusion

The upcoming election in Myanmar is defined not by campaigning but by criminalization. The data gathered by Athan confirms that the "Election Protection Law" is the primary mechanism for the 2025 pre-election crackdown. The regime is attempting to construct a veneer of legality by suing critics rather than simply disappearing them, hoping to frame political opposition as "electoral disruption."

Recommendations for Further Monitoring

1. **Track "Incitement" Charges:** Monitor the intersection of Section 505(a) and the new Election Law; often, police apply both to maximize sentencing.
2. **Monitor "Coerced Voting":** As the December 28 date approaches, shift monitoring to reports of administrators threatening households with the Election Law if they do not register/vote.
3. **Documentation:** Continue verifying the names and locations of the ~120 charged individuals to ensure they are recognized as political prisoners, not criminals.