

Reconstructing Power: Gender, Resistance in Post-Coup Myanmar

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Abstract

Myanmar has experienced decades of military dictatorship, and decision-making power is primarily male-dominated. The 2020 election achieved the highest number of female politicians in the country's history, but their overall representation remained limited. Accordingly, Myanmar's democratisation is expected to have greater participation by women and their active inclusion in the decision-making process. Following the 2021 coup, many citizens joined anti-military resistance, including women who engaged in frontline resistance. Still, it remains uncertain whether this resistance will lead to substantive change to patriarchal social structures. This study examines whether the resistance after the 2021 coup in Myanmar challenges or reconstructs existing gendered power structures. The findings show that women are mostly described as victims of military violence, while their roles as political actors are rarely recognised. Although promoting gender equality and supporting women's empowerment are mentioned by anti-military groups, an analysis of officially released documents shows that women are primarily viewed as subjects in need of protection. Furthermore, these movements also lack clear, concrete plans to achieve gender equality. This paper argues that strengthening women's political participation is crucial for Myanmar's future and will play a vital role in confronting the military.

Keywords: Civil Disobedience Movement, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, National Unity Government, Patriarchy, Women's agency

1. Introduction

In February 2021, a military (Tatmadaw) coup took place in Myanmar. This coup was deeply disappointing for many citizens who had long fought for democracy and had enjoyed a relatively limited degree of freedom from around 2011 until the day of the coup.¹ In response, many citizens engaged

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in mass resistance, the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM)². Despite the inhumane military repression, the CDM quickly expanded, and Myanmar's opposition government, the National Unity Government (NUG), was formed. Subsequently, the NUG declared a 'people's defensive war' in September 2021, calling on civilians, civil servants, and even security forces to resist the junta and to join the NUG's armed wing, the People's Defense Force (PDF)³. Since the coup, various news reports have highlighted the significant presence of women in the CDM.⁴ As Jordt, Than, and Lin observe, women and minority groups have stood at the forefront of the CDM, and their presence has been visible in the protest⁵. It is particularly notable in a country where the military has long dominated the political landscape and reinforced male-domination. Thus, these opinions reveal the transformation of the gender power structure. However, it is not that simple.

Moe Gyo⁶ argues that the CDM provided an opportunity for women to attain leadership roles. On the other hand, Moe Gyo contrasts the CDM with armed groups such as the PDF, where women are often limited to gender roles⁷. These roles are typically assigned by male commanders and reflect patriarchal assumptions. As a result, Moe Gyo cautions that even a successful revolution could merely reproduce patriarchal structures,

¹ R.J. Reinhart, *People in Myanmar Felt Free, Connected Before Coup*, GALLUP (Feb. 3, 2021), <https://news.gallup.com/poll/329237/people-myanmar-felt-free-connected-coup.aspx> (last visited June 4, 2025).

² Paddock, Richard C, *We can Bring Down the Dictators': Myanmar's Work Force Stays on Strike*, NEW YORK TIMES (Feb. 16 2021), <https://www.proquest.com/hnpnewyorktimes/newspapers/we-can-bring-down-dictators-myanmar-s-work-force/docview/3128027982/sem-2?accountid=10105> (last visited June 4, 2025).

³ Sebastian Strangio, *Myanmar Shadow Government Declares 'National Uprising' Against Military Rule*, THE DIPLOMAT (Sept. 7, 2021), <https://thediplomat.com/2021/09/myanmar-shadow-government-declares-national-uprising-against-military-rule/> (last visited June 4, 2025).

⁴ Asia News Monitor, *Myanmar Women Take the Lead in Resisting the Military*, ASIA NEWS MONITOR (Feb. 2, 2022), <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/myanmar-women-take-lead-resisting-military/docview/2624213478/se-2> (last visited June 4, 2025). Rina Bhattacharyya, *The Women of Myanmar's Spring Revolution*, THE DIPLOMAT (Sept. 1, 2023), <https://thediplomat.com/2023/08/the-women-of-myanmars-spring-revolution/> (last visited June 4, 2025).

⁵ Ingrid Jordt, Thant Thant & Saw Yu May Lin, *How Generation Z Galvanized a Revolutionary Movement Against Myanmar's 2021 Military Coup*, ISEAS – YUSOF ISHAK INST., TRENDS SE. ASIA No. 7 (2021), https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/TRS7_21.pdf (last visited June 4, 2025).

⁶ Moe Gyo, *Examining the Role of Women in Myanmar's Spring Revolution*, DEMOCRATIC VOICE OF BURMA (Oct. 16, 2024), <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/examining-role-women-myanmars-spring-revolution/docview/3116876638/se-2> (last visited June 4, 2025).

⁷ *Id.*

making the ongoing struggle more a male-dominated power contest than a real democracy movement.⁸

It is essential to distinguish between the CDM and armed resistance. However, this is conceptually complex in practice. The CDM is a decentralised movement driven by teachers, students, and civil society actors.⁹ On the other hand, armed forces such as the PDF have a hierarchical structure.¹⁰ Although there is some overlap in participants and coordination between groups, they differ in structure and in the roles and expectations of women. As Moe Gyo notes, movements claiming to seek democracy can reconstruct new patriarchal structures within their own operations¹¹. This observation is particularly significant when considering the broader political landscape of Myanmar. Globally, Myanmar's politics is often recalls Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, undoubtedly an icon of democratic resistance and a symbol of female political leadership in the country. But, this image hides the issue of women's exclusion from the political sphere. Women have been largely absent from the military institutions that have ruled the country for many decades¹². Additionally, progress has been slow in the electoral sphere. In the 2020 general election, which the military later cancelled through the coup, more women were elected than in any election. They still made up only 16% of parliamentarians.¹³ The participation of women in the CDM is noteworthy. However, we need to ask whether it shows a real change in gender norms and patriarchal structures in society – or whether it is just political resistance. If gender equality is not included at

⁸ Gyo, *Examining the Role of Women in Myanmar's Spring Revolution*, supra note 6.

⁹ Anonymous, *The Centrality of the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) in Myanmar's Post-Coup Era*, Policy Briefing, Supporting the Rules-Based Order in Southeast Asia (SEARBO), Austl. Nat'l Univ. (2021), https://www.newmandala.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/SEARBO_CDM-Myanmar_paper.pdf (last visited June 4, 2025).

¹⁰ Ministry of Defence, National Unity Government, *People's Defence Force*, <https://mod.nugmyanmar.org/en/peoples-defence-force/> (last visited July 1, 2026).

¹¹ Moe Gyo, *Examining the Role of Women in Myanmar's Spring Revolution*, DEMOCRATIC VOICE OF BURMA (Oct. 16, 2024), <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/examining-role-women-myanmars-spring-revolution/docview/3116876638/se-2> (last visited June 4, 2025).

¹² Lt. Col. Miemie Winn Byrd, *Integration of Women and Gender Perspective into the Myanmar Armed Forces to Improve Civil-Military Relations in Myanmar*, 99 Mil. Rev. 35 (Nov.-Dec. 2019), <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/November-December-2019/Byrd-Myanmar-Gender-Armed-Forces/> (last visited June 4, 2025).

¹³ Nathalie Ebead, *Myanmar's First Post-Coup People's Assembly Decided on a 30 Percent Women's Quota*, INT'L IDEA (Mar. 3, 2022), <https://www.idea.int/news/myanmars-first-post-coup-peoples-assembly-decides-30-cent-womens-quota> (last visited June 4, 2025).

every stage of political resistance, from grassroots action to the institutional level, the resistance may end up rebuilding the same power structures and hierarchies it is trying to change.

This study looks at political resistance to military power in Myanmar after the 2021 coup from a gender perspective. It asks whether these resistance movements challenge gendered power structures or simply rebuild them. The second section explains the methodology used in this study. Section 3 looks at how earlier studies have discussed the ways military power and patriarchy support each other, and why this makes it important to study political movements linked to armed power. Section 4 discusses the current situation in Myanmar. Section 5 presents the results of the analysis, and the final section gives the conclusion.

2. Methodology

This study examines political resistance to military power in Myanmar after the 2021 coup, investigating whether these resistance movements challenge or reconstruct gendered power structures. It focuses on the statements issued by those engaged in the CDM and by organisations referred to as revolutionary groups, conducting a textual analysis from a gender perspective. Textual analysis, rather than interviews, was chosen due to concerns over interviewee safety, as well as restricted access following events such as the 2025 earthquake in Myanmar. The focus on 'statements' reflects the fact that, since the coup, various individuals and groups have issued numerous messages through official websites, social media, and other outlets. While all such messages are important, this paper focuses on statements because, unlike personal narratives, they collectively represent constructed, official positions.

The CDM is a decentralised network of participants, and a single organisation does not form the CDM. However, a prominent entity supporting this network is the NUG. This study analyses official statements issued by NUG. Details on the NUG will be discussed later, but a brief acknowledgement of its efforts is provided here.

Following the coup, a group of parliamentarians opposing the Myanmar military formed the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH), which is composed of elected members from the 2020 general election¹⁴. The CRPH subsequently established the NUG in April 2021 based on the people's mandate from the 2020 democratic election¹⁵. The NUG has its armed wing, known as the PDF. On September 7, 2021,

¹⁴ CRPH Myanmar, *CRPH Myanmar*, <https://crphmyanmar.org/> (last visited June 4, 2025).

¹⁵ National Unity Government of Myanmar, *About NUG*, <https://nugmyanmar.org/about/> (last visited June 4, 2025).

NUG declared a 'people's defensive war' to 'eradicate military rule'¹⁶. It is worth noting that not all ethnic groups or civil groups support the NUG. ACLED addresses that some ethnic armed groups cooperate with the NUG, but other groups work with the NUG only informally or do not cooperate with it at all.¹⁷

But the rationale for focusing on NUG's document is the NUG's significant role in the CDM and the broader resistance movement. In addition to official statements by the NUG, statements from individual ministries within the NUG will also be analysed. While statements issued by ethnic minority groups are important for consideration, they are often difficult to obtain. Therefore, this study will also include joint statements issued by the NUG and the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC). The NUCC is a coalition of anti-military actors, including ethnic minority organisations and civil society groups. Notably, it includes influential organisations working on gender issues, such as the Women's Peace Network and the Women's League of Burma.

The time frame for the collected statements spans from April 16, 2021, the date of the NUG's establishment, through January 31, 2025, covering approximately four years since the coup. While statements are available in both Burmese and English, this study relies on English-language statements due to limitations in analytical software compatibility with the Myanmar (Burmese) language. Text analysis software has been used to reduce researcher bias and facilitate an accurate understanding of the selected statements.

2.1. Method of Obtaining Statements

The statements issued by the NUG are publicly available on its official website, and this study collected the relevant data from there. While the NUG disseminates various types of information through its website, this paper focuses exclusively on official statements to capture the organisation's policies and positions, press releases, news articles, and other types of content were excluded from the analysis. Similarly, while the NUCC also shares a variety of information, only those documents that clearly express political positions and statements are extracted for this study.

2.2. Analytical methods

This study analyses the document using text mining and then visualises the document's characteristics. Furthermore, qualitative analysis will be

¹⁶ *Myanmar's Shadow Govt Declares War on Military Regime*, THE IRRRAWADDY (Sept. 7, 2021), <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmars-shadow-govt-declares-war-on-military-regime.html> (last visited June 4, 2025).

¹⁷ ACLED, *Between cooperation and competition: The struggle among resistance groups in Myanmar* (2024), <https://acleddata.com/report/between-cooperation-and-competition-struggle-resistance-groups-myanmar> (last visited June 4, 2025).

employed to interpret the underlying meanings of each statement.

1) Text Mining

This study employs KH Coder, a software tool for analysing and interpreting text by identifying frequently occurring terms and examining their relationships and patterns¹⁸.

The qualitative text analysis method is employed in this study to visualise key features of the statements, enabling a more objective analysis and reducing researcher subjectivity.

First, a morphological analysis is conducted to extract words from the documents and examine their features. A correspondence analysis is then used to compare statements and show the relationships between words and organisations. The results are presented in a two-dimensional scatter plot. Words near the centre represent common features, while words farther from the centre show characteristics specific to each organisation.

In addition, a co-occurrence network analysis is conducted to identify relationships between frequently co-occurring words. The thickness of connecting lines shows the strength of relationships, while the size of each node represents word frequency. Words appearing close together in the network indicate similar contexts and semantic relationships. To have a deeper understanding of the content of the texts, qualitative analysis has been used in addition to examining quantitative features. The analysis adopts a gender perspective, with particular attention to the following aspects:

How are specific ideas shown? -- How are women's contributions, leadership, and gender-related issues described?

What is rendered invisible? -- What topics are invisible in the statements?

What discursive patterns emerge? -- Are gender roles being reinforced, or are there narratives that attempt to challenge or move beyond existing frameworks?

3. Political resistance and Gender: Academic debates and Legal framework

3.1. Use of armed force and gender

Political resistance, the use of armed force, and gender equality may seem

¹⁸ Koichi Higuchi, A Two-Step Approach to Quantitative Content Analysis: KH Coder Tutorial Using Anne of Green Gables (Part I), 52 *Ritsumeikan Soc. Sci. Rev.* 77 (2016). Koichi Higuchi, A Two-Step Approach to Quantitative Content Analysis: KH Coder Tutorial Using Anne of Green Gables (Part II), 53 *Ritsumeikan Soc. Sci. Rev.* 137 (2017).

unrelated, but academic debates highlight the connection between these factors.¹⁹ To better understand the situation in Myanmar, this section examines the basic theoretical and legal framework related to these factors.

Researchers in the fields of gender and international relations have pointed out that gender-discriminatory social structures are one of the factors that sustain armed conflicts and political instability.²⁰ One such argument is that patriarchal social structures lie at the core of militarism and help perpetuate warfare.²¹ Additionally, empirical research supports the connections between gender equality and armed conflicts. Caprioli²² empirically demonstrates that the gender equality situation in the domestic sphere influences state behaviour in the international sphere. The state where gender disparity is significant tends to use armed force. These findings demonstrate that gender equality is a crucial prerequisite for preventing armed conflict and achieving sustainable peace. In another study, Caprioli²³ also demonstrates that countries that prioritise gender equality are also less likely to respond to violence during international crises. Similarly, Erik Melander²⁴ looked at domestic conflicts and argues that gender equality can help prevent them. According to the research by Niederle and Vesterlund²⁵, women are generally less supportive of war, and men and women often care about different political issues. However, this does not mean that women are naturally more peaceful. As Caprioli and others²⁶ explain, when women are recognised as equal members of society, the values of that society change. From these arguments, the military power is supported or accepted by the social and political sphere, where a lack of diversity dominates the decision-making process. Taken together, the above studies suggest that gender-unequal structures are convenient and often necessary for advancing militarisation. Conversely, gender equality is a crucial element for states to minimise a military direction. These findings indicate that it is tough to pursue militarisation

¹⁹ David Cortright, Conor Seyle & Kristen Wall, *Gender Equality*, in GOVERNANCE FOR PEACE: HOW INCLUSIVE, PARTICIPATORY AND ACCOUNTABLE INSTITUTIONS PROMOTE PEACE AND PROSPERITY 111 (David Cortright ed., Cambridge Univ. Press 2017).

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ Betty A. Reardon, *Sexism and the War System* (rev. ed. Syracuse Univ. Press 1996).

²² Mary Caprioli, *Gendered Conflict*, 37 J. PEAS RES., 51–68 (2000).

²³ Mary Caprioli, *Gender Equality and State Aggression: The Impact of Domestic Gender Equality on State Behavior*, 47 INT'L STUD. Q., 235–244 (2003).

²⁴ Erik Melander, *Gender equality and intrastate armed conflict*, 49 INT'L STUD. Q., 695–714 (2005).

²⁵ Muriel Niederle, Lise Vesterlund, *Do women shy away from competition? Do men compete too much?* 122 Q.J. ECON., 1067–1101 (2007).

²⁶ Mary Caprioli, Valerie M. Hudson, Rose Mcdermott, Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill, Chad F. Emmett, S. Matthew Stearmer, *The WomanStats Project Database: Advancing an Empirical Research Agenda*, 46 J. PEACE RES., 839–851 (2009).

or rely on military solutions while simultaneously achieving gender equality.

It may not be appropriate to apply these academic arguments directly to Myanmar, but it is also fair to say that these arguments explain many realities of the situation. For many years, the military dominated Myanmar's political and social sphere, and its top leadership was male-dominated. As will be highlighted later, even the elected government that came to power from 2016 until the coup saw limited participation of women²⁷ because a male-dominated society has been firmly entrenched. This rigid nature and lack of diversity in politics have long justified the use of force to suppress various opinions.

3.2. Political resistance and Gender transformation

Political resistance to militarised or authoritarian rule is not always positively associated with gender transformation. Political resistances as well as armed conflict could reproduce, or even strengthen, existing patriarchal power structures. Women's proactive participation does not automatically lead to gender equality or lasting inclusion. Thus, applying a critical gender perspective to political resistance and conflict is crucial to understanding whose interests and voices are being marginalised and how power is structured. Manchanda²⁸ points out that policymakers often neglect women's needs and experiences in the conflict and peacebuilding process by examining women's agency in political resistance and conflict.

The impact of women's participation in political resistance and conflict on gender relations and women's empowerment has been widely discussed. Alexander and Apell²⁹ argue that large-scale political struggles and conflicts significantly impact society, and highlight that conflict can have both disruptive and transformative effects on existing social orders. These effects may lead to the empowerment of women. Their study on Egypt highlights positive outcomes such as legal reforms for violence against women.³⁰ At the same time, they note that the underrepresentation of women in transitional political institutions has limited progress toward achieving gender equality.³¹ They conclude that the revolution did not aim to advance gender equality, and women's

²⁷ Central Statistical Organization, *Gender Statistics in Myanmar 2020* (2020), <https://www.csostatat.gov.mm/FileUpload/cso/FileDownload/Gender%20Statistics%20in%20Myanmar%202020.pdf> (last visited June 4, 2025).

²⁸ Rita Manchanda, *Women's agency in peacebuilding: Gender relations in post conflict reconstruction*, 40 ECON. & POL. WKLY., 4737-4745 (2005).

²⁹ Amy C. Alexander, Rebecca Apell, *How does civil conflict influence gender equality? A case study of the Egyptian Revolution 2011-2013*, 26 INT'L REV. SOC., 529-545 (2016).

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ Alexander & Apell, *How Does Civil Conflict Influence Gender Equality?* *supra* note 29, at 538.

position in society remained weak.³² Their findings suggest an important lesson: actions and measures to achieve gender equality must be embedded during political transitions and throughout the preceding political resistance and conflict.

There have been cases where political struggles used women's liberation propaganda to attract many women. In the case of Nepal, K.C. Luna and Gemma Van Der Haar³³ argue that women's participation in conflict stemmed from ideological motivations and a desire to escape gendered oppression. However, although the Maoist movement promoted gender equality and attracted female combatants, its post-conflict promises to women were left unfulfilled. Similarly, Sri Lanka's LTTE propagandised women's liberation in the Tamil community and recruited female fighters, but female ex-fighters were marginalised in post-war communities.³⁴ Women played many different roles in the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe. Ndhlovu and Wielenga³⁵ note that female ex-combatants continued to face unequal access to support and reparation compared to male ex-combatants. Women's proactive participation in political resistance and conflict does not always transform gender power relations or challenge patriarchal norms without intentional measures. Based on African cases, Tripp³⁶ concludes that actual transformation is unlikely to be achieved without structural change, while conflict can disrupt and potentially improve gender hierarchies. Women's participation, in itself, does not automatically address gender equality.

These studies suggest that even when women participate in conflicts or revolutions; it is sometimes in response to women's liberation. However, this does not guarantee improvement in their status. A critical gender analysis must be applied during struggles to understand how gender is constructed, represented, and negotiated by political actors. It is a critical question as to how women have participated in political resistance and conflict, and how they have been perceived and valued within that process. Thus, it is essential to examine how political resistance groups treat women within their group and how these groups or networks understand and value women's political agency.

³² *Id.*

³³ K.C., Luna & Gemma Van Der Haar, *Living Maoist Gender Ideology: Experiences of Women Ex-Combatants in Nepal*, 21 INT'L FEMINIST J. POL., 434–53 (2019).

³⁴ Kana Takamatsu, *Socio-Cultural Barriers of Female Ex-Combatants' Social Re-Integration in Sri Lanka*, in *Recent Social, Environmental, and Cultural Issues in East Asian Societies*, 213–223 (Merviö ed., 2020).

³⁵ Ndhlovu, Nontando, and Cori Wielenga, *Unequal access to redress for women ex-combatants in Zimbabwe: An intersectional analysis*, 21 AFR. IDENTITIES, 824–839 (2023).

³⁶ Aili Mari Tripp, *Women and power in post conflict Africa* (Cambridge Univ. Press 2015).

3.3. Legal Framework and Political Agency

In addition to academic arguments, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) also guides women's political agency³⁷. CEDAW is a fundamental and comprehensive international treaty aimed at eliminating discrimination against women in all areas. States that join the Convention are required to take necessary legislative and other appropriate measures to prohibit discrimination against women³⁸.

CEDAW was adopted at the 34th UN General Assembly on December 18, 1979³⁹, and came into force on September 3, 1981. Article 7 of CEDAW clearly guarantees women's political rights which include not only the right to vote and run for office, but also participation in policymaking and civil movements. Although CEDAW does not directly mention armed conflict, which this study examines, General Recommendation No. 30, issued in 2013 by the CEDAW Committee, focuses on women in situations of conflict prevention, conflict, and post-conflict. General recommendations are not legally binding, however, general recommendations are understood as important guidance to support and promote the implementation of CEDAW. Article 21 of CEDAW authorises the Committee to issue such recommendations.

General Recommendation No. 30 was adopted in 2013, following the Committee's decision during its 47th session in 2010 to draft a recommendation on women in conflict-related situations. A working group was established in January 2011 to prepare this document⁴⁰. One important feature of general recommendation No. 30⁴¹ is that it covers not only armed conflict but also political instability and other violent situations that may not be classified as armed conflict under international humanitarian law. The general recommendation emphasises that women's equality and protection from discrimination must be ensured in all forms of violence and crisis.

Another important point is that these recommendations see women not only as victims, but also as active actors. Women participate in conflict and peace processes in various capacities, including as fighters, human rights defenders, members of civil society, participants in resistance movements, and contributors to peacebuilding. Women should therefore

³⁷ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women art. 7, Dec. 18, 1979, 1249 U.N.T.S. 13.

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ G.A. Res. 34/180, U.N. Doc. A/RES/34/180 (Dec. 18, 1979)

⁴⁰ Yoko Hayashi, *Report on the 47th, 48th and 49th sessions of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women*, 25 INT'L J. WOMEN'S STUD., 20–23 (2011).

⁴¹ U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, General Recommendation No. 30 on Women in Conflict Prevention, Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations, U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/GC/30 (2013).

be recognised as active political and social actors, not just as people who need protection.

Before engaging in a discussion of Myanmar, it is necessary to address Myanmar's legal framework, such as CEDAW and the protection of women's political rights. Myanmar ratified CEDAW in 1997⁴². 2008 Constitution, which came into effect in 2011, address that the Union shall not discriminate against any citizen of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, based on race, birth, religion, official position, status, culture, sex, and wealth⁴³. However, this legal framework does not fully guarantee gender equality. Myanmar's domestic legal framework does not provide for temporary special measures to achieve gender equality, and laws and customary practices that discriminate against women still exist both across and within ethnic groups⁴⁴. Furthermore, the rule of law must also be carefully considered. The country was under military rule for many decades, and military dictatorship weakened the independence and integrity of Myanmar's legal system.⁴⁵ Even during the period when the NLD ruled from 2016 until the coup, the NLD government was unable to achieve substantial institutional reform, including the legal system, due to structural constraints.⁴⁶

In March 2021, the Federal Democracy Charter was adopted by CRPH. The Charter declares the abolition of the 2008 Constitution. Federal Democracy Charter states that "Direct, indirect or any forms of discrimination based on sex and gender shall be absolutely prohibited and there shall be promotion, protection, respect and compliance" (Art. 25).⁴⁷ However, it remains unclear to what extent the Federal Democracy Charter has been effective in protecting the rights of citizens under military forced control situation.

⁴² Office of the U.N. High Comm'r for Hum. Rts., Ratification Status for Myanmar, U.N. Treaty Body Database, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=119&Lang=EN (last visited July 1, 2026).

⁴³ Myanmar Const. art. 348 cl. 1(a).

⁴⁴ ADB, UNDP, UNFPA and UN Women, *Gender Equality and Women's Rights in Myanmar: A Situation Analysis*, 112 (2016), <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/209596/gender-equality-womens-rights-myanmar.pdf> (last visited July 1, 2026).

⁴⁵ Sam Zarifi, *Myanmar: Making Rule of Law a Reality*, Int'l Comm'n Jurists (2014), <https://www.icj.org/resource/myanmar-making-rule-of-law-a-reality/> (last visited July 1, 2026).

⁴⁶ Zayar Lay Swe, *Why the NLD Fails to Consolidate Democratic Transition in Myanmar*, 6 Asian J. Comp. Pol. 441 (2021).

⁴⁷ Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH), Federal Democracy Charter art. 25 (Mar. 31, 2021), <https://crphmyanmar.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Federal-Democracy-Charter-English.pdf> (last visited July 1, 2026)

4. National Unity Government

The National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, won the 2020 general election. Just before the newly elected parliament was due to assemble, the military staged a coup on February 1, 2021, refusing to recognise the election result and seizing power.⁴⁸ Following the coup, many elected NLD members were detained.⁴⁹ On 5 February 2021, elected members established the CRPH.⁵⁰ In April 2021, the CRPH established the NUG. The vision of the NUG is to build a peaceful federal democratic union founded on the principles of democracy, gender equality, human rights, and minority rights.⁵¹

NUG declared itself as 'the Interim National Unity Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar is the only legitimate Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar'.⁵² Indeed, the NUG received widespread support. The survey conducted by Jangai Jap and Amy H. Liu, 4,612 Burmese adults from diverse ethnic backgrounds showed that 92% of respondents, 93% of the Bamar majority and 91% of ethnic minorities, expressed 'somewhat favourable' or 'very favourable' views toward the NUG, and this level of support was similarly high among those living inside Myanmar and in the diaspora.⁵³ The survey also addressed that many ethnic minorities show concern about any government controlled by the majority, and many see the NUG as being led by the Bamar.⁵⁴ Thus, in addition to confronting the military junta, maintaining a balanced relationship between the NUG and ethnic organisations is also critical.

Full diplomatic recognition of the NUG as Myanmar's official government remains challenging. Many states and international institutions remain negative in directly engaging with the NUG. One example occurred in August 2022, when some members of a local PDF engaged in illegal activities and human rights violations. This crime shows that such abuses do not only happen on the military side in armed conflicts. In response to the incident, multiple ministries of the NUG issued a Joint

⁴⁸ Flora Drury, *Myanmar Coup: What Happened and Why?*, BBC NEWS (2021), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-55882938> (last visited June 4, 2025).

⁴⁹ *Nearly 500 NLD Party Members Arrested Since February 2021 Coup*, BURMA NEWS INT'L (Jan. 6, 2022), <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/nearly-500-nld-party-members-arrested-february-2021-coup> (last visited June 4, 2025).

⁵⁰ Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, *History and Formation of CRPH*, <https://crphmyanmar.org/history-and-formation-of-crph/> (last visited June 29, 2026).

⁵¹ National Unity Government of Myanmar, *supra* note 15.

⁵² *Id.*

⁵³ Jangai Jap and Amy H. Liu, Myanmar: New Data Show Wide Support for Unity Government, U.S. INST. OF PEACE (Feb. 29, 2024), <https://www.usip.org/publications/2024/02/myanmar-new-datashow-wide-support-unity-government> (last visited June 4, 2025).

⁵⁴ *Id.*

Statement⁵⁵ on action taken against illegal acts of some members of the Village PDF, Chaung Oo Township, Sagaing Division. NUG expressed its concern and reaffirmed its commitment to the rule of law.⁵⁶ Although the NUG condemned this illegal behaviour and pursued legal action against those involved, it continues to face serious challenges in establishing a democratic government. Such incidents also highlight the difficulties foreign governments face in formally recognising the NUG.

Nyein argues that the NUG should not only represent the people but also provide clear direction and leadership.⁵⁷ However, it points out that the NUG currently lacks strong leadership, unity and has not been able to fully bring together resistance groups and ethnic forces.⁵⁸ NUG needs more decisive leadership, greater transparency, and a more transparent command structure to move the revolution forward.⁵⁹ Despite the NUG faces various challenges, NUG remains the only realistic body to rule the country. However, limited international recognition and political constraints restrict their activities.

Although strengthening the NUG is widely seen as necessary, the NUG announced a cabinet reorganisation on December 8, 2025. It reduced the number of ministries from 17 to 12, including the closure of the Ministry of Women, Youth, and Children Affairs.⁶⁰

International IDEA evaluates the Federal Democracy Charter, issued by the CRPH from a gender perspective and analyses the institutional frameworks of the NUG, the CRPH, and the NUCC.⁶¹ The report concludes

⁵⁵ National Unity Government of Myanmar, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Home Affairs & Immigration., Ministry of Women, Youth & Child Affairs and Ministry of Justice, *Joint Statement on Action Taken Against Illegal Acts of Some Members of the People's Defense Force*, Joint Statement No. 1/2023 (May 4, 2023), https://wp.prgressivevoicemyanmar.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/NUG_MoD_MoH_AI_MoWYCA_MoJ_JS_May4_Eng.pdf (last visited June 4, 2025).

⁵⁶ *Id.*

⁵⁷ Nyein, *Myanmar's NUG Must Lead, Not Just Represent the People*, THE IRR AWADDY (July 22, 2025), <https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/myanmars-nug-must-lead-not-just-represent-the-people.html> (last visited January 21, 2026).

⁵⁸ *Id.*

⁵⁹ *Supra* note 57.

⁶⁰ *National Unity Government Criticized for Closing Ministry of Women, Youth and Children Affairs*, DEMOCRATIC VOICE OF BURMA (DVB) (Dec. 14, 2025), <https://english.dvb.no/national-unity-government-criticized-for-closing-ministry-of-women-youths-and-children-affairs/> (last visited Dec. 25, 2025).

⁶¹ Nathalie Ebead & Atsuko Hirakawa, *Inclusion and Gender Equality in Post-Coup Myanmar: Strategies for Constitutional and Democratic Reform*, Constitution Assessment for Women's Equality Brief No. 4, Int'l Inst. for Democracy & Electoral Assistance (2022), <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/public>

that the NUG is better positioned to commit to gender equality than the previous government. However, the abolition of the Ministry of Women, Youth, and Children Affairs may weaken this institutional commitment to gender equality.⁶² Both CEDAW and the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda emphasize recognizing women as political actors. Given the military junta's systematic repression of human rights, including women's rights, the NUG has become the principal actor in advancing these commitments. The abolition of the ministry, therefore, weakens the institutional capacity needed to promote gender equality and may undermine the NUG's credibility as a democratic alternative.

5. Result of Text Analysis

5.1. Simple Aggregation

The total number of statements analysed in this study is 152 cases. The distribution of the statement examined in this study over time is shown in Figure 1. This study selected the statement written in English. Therefore, the number shown here refers specifically to those statements in English and does not represent the total number of all statements issued by the NUG during the said period.

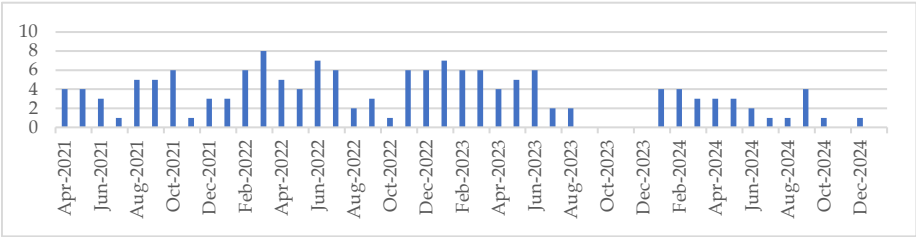


Figure 1: Number and Timing of Analysed Statements
(Created by Author)

This figure shows a trend of fewer English statements being issued since the latter half of 2023.

Figure 2 shows a breakdown of the analysed statements, distinguishing between those issued by the NUG as a representative body and those issued by individual ministries. While some joint statements between ministries exist, the NUG issued the majority as a representative entity. Notably, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has issued numerous statements, the nature of which may be influenced by the English language. Regardless of language (English or Burmese), the Ministry of Human Rights has also issued many statements. It likely reflects the frequent human rights violations that have

ations/inclusion-and-gender-equality-in-post-coup-myanmar-CAWE4_0.pdf
(last visited June 29, 2026)
⁶² *Id.*

occurred in the confrontation with the military junta, prompting the ministry to respond through public statements.

Organization	numbers
Ministry of Defence	1
Ministry of Human Rights, Ministry of Education (joint statement)	1
Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation	1
Ministry of Women, Youths and Children Affairs	2
Ministry of Health	2
Ministry of Education, Ministry of Women, Youths and Children Affairs and Ministry of Human Rights (joint statement)	3
NUG, NUCC (joint statement)	3
Ministry of Labour	4
Ministry of Planning, Finance and Investment	4
Ministry of Human Rights, Ministry of Women, Youths and Children Affairs (joint statement)	5
Ministry of International Cooperation	7
Ministry of Human Rights	27
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	32
NUG	60
Total	152

Figure 2: Issuing Ministries
(Created by Author)

Figure 3 shows the most frequently used words in the statements. When examining the most common terms across all 152 statements, as well as the 63 NUG/NUCC statements and the 89 statements issued by individual ministries, one notable feature of the NUG/NUCC statements is the presence of the term ethnic. It likely reflects that the NUCC includes many ethnic minority organisations, and such terminology is incorporated into the joint statements.

	All (152)	NUG/NUCC (63)	Ministries (89)
1	National unity	National unity	Junta
2	Human rights	ASEAN	Human rights
3	Junta	Terrorist	National unit
4	ASEAN	Military council	Military junta
5	Military junta	Action	Civilian
6	Civilian	Military	International
7	Action	Civilian	UN
8	Military junta	Child	ASEAN
9	Crime	Crime	Crime
10	International	Ethnic	action

Figure 3: Most Frequently Used Words
(Created by Author)

5.2. Quantitative Analysis

A quantitative analysis was conducted on the language used in the official statements issued by the NUG, and the words were visualised. The statements were categorised based on their issuing bodies into the NUG as a representative entity, joint statements by the NUG and NUCC, foreign affairs ministries, human rights (HR), and others. These categories were treated as external variables and analysed via correspondence analysis with frequent words. The top 60 words were plotted (Figure 4).

While statements tend to use similar vocabulary regardless of the issuing ministries, some distinct characteristics are observed. First, the statement contains the following key clusters of vocabulary:

‘State Violence,’ where vocabulary centres on the military regime's violence, illegality, and inhumanity (e.g., Myanmar military, military council, terrorist)

‘Human Rights and International Response,’ which focuses on international legal and institutional frameworks and claims of legitimacy based on them (e.g., Human rights, UN, international)

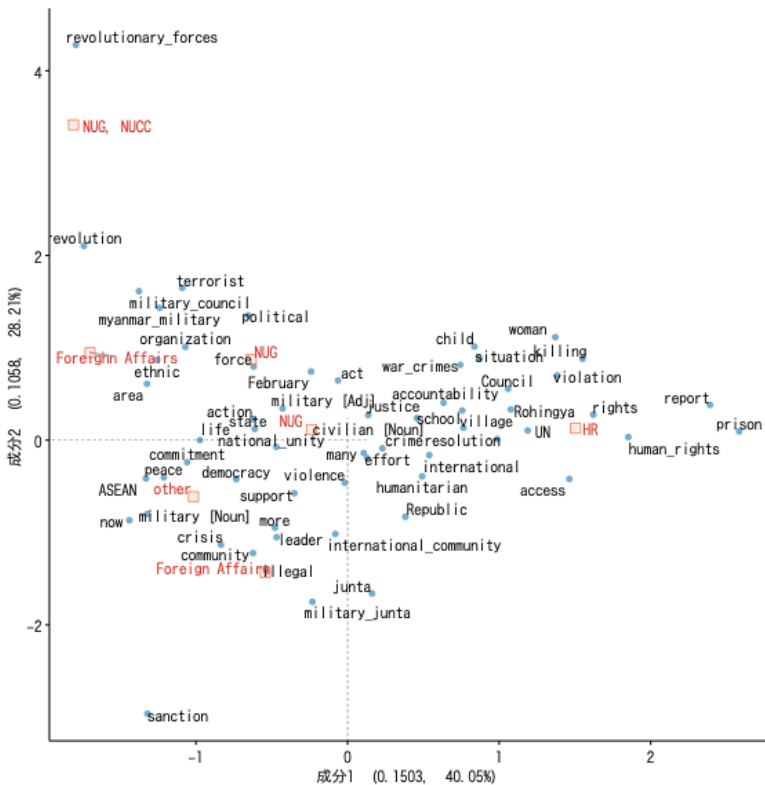


Figure 4: Correspondence Analysis
(Created by Author)

Although words such as 'revolutionary forces' and 'effort' appear, vocabulary related to civil movements, such as 'CDM' and 'civil disobedience', is not always prominent. It suggests that citizens are less often portrayed as active agents in the statement. Moreover, reflecting the ongoing conflict, the official position of the NUG lacks references to negotiation, dialogue, transition, or reform.

From the above, the primary roles of the statements are to call for national unity and to criticise the atrocities committed by the military junta, thereby aiming to generate international condemnation and pressure.

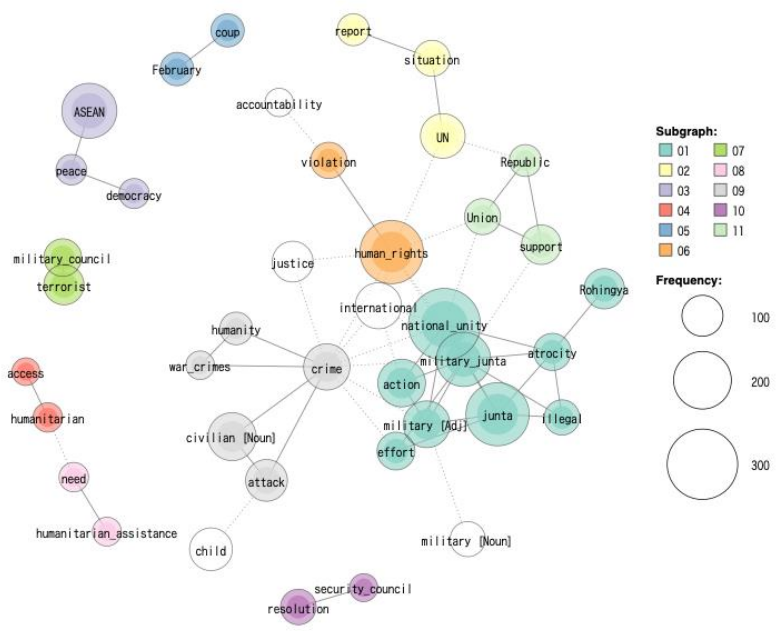


Figure 5: Co-occurrence network
(Created by Author)

Additionally, a co-occurrence network visualisation was also presented (Figure 5). The co-occurrence network reveals that critical discourse against state violence in Myanmar is a central occurrence. The core axes of the vocabulary structure reveal two main dimensions. Perpetration is represented by key terms such as military, military junta, atrocity, and illegal. Additionally, vocabulary related to justice and institutional responses, such as human rights and international human rights violations, is present. At the same time, the network suggests a limited reference to citizens' active responses to violence, indicating a relative absence of discourse on civic agency.

The analysis was also conducted by categorising the ministries. The characteristics can be classified as follows (Figure 6).

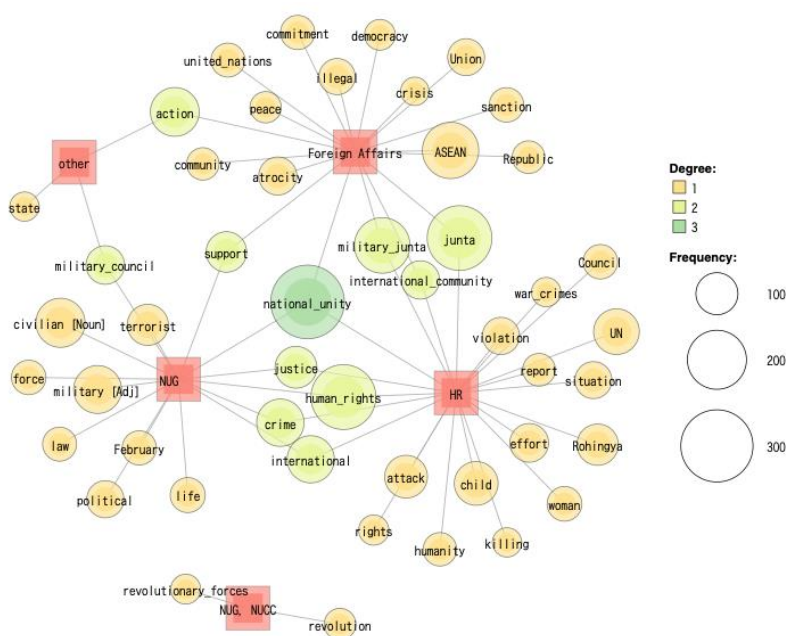


Figure 6: Co-occurrence network by category
(Created by Author)

According to Figure 6, several key characteristics can be identified. Words such as child, attack, humanity, woman, and killing reflect a humanitarian-focused discourse, portraying civilians, particularly women and children, as the primary victims of state violence.

While the above analysis highlights the characteristics observed in these statements, it should also note that the inhumane conduct of the military junta behind the statement. Critically, sustained international attention remains crucial to the NUG's survival.

5.3. Qualitative text analysis

A qualitative approach focusing on context reveals the following key characteristics of the statements issued by the NUG.

First is the narrative that the military is illegitimate and a terrorist organisation. Phrases such as ‘military junta is a terrorist organisation’⁶³

⁶³ National Unity Government of Myanmar, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Appeal for Urgent Humanitarian Assistance to the IDPs and Refugees Affected by Military Junta’s Operation* (Dec. 17, 2021), <https://wp.progressivevoicemyanmar.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/2021-12-17-appeal-for-urgent-humanitarian-assistance-to-the-idps-and-refugees-tu-en.pdf> (last visited Dec. 25, 2025).

and 'the terrorist junta's extrajudicial execution of four democracy activists'⁶⁴ illustrate how the military (SAC or Tatmadaw) is consistently described as an illegal, terrorist, criminal organisation, or criminal regime. The statements emphasise both the legal and humanitarian illegitimacy of the military and call on the international community to impose sanctions and take action. Furthermore, a statement such as 'military's atrocities are decades old'⁶⁵ shows that violence by military regimes is not framed as a recent development since the 2021 coup, but as part of a historical pattern.

Another key feature is the assertion of the NUG's legitimacy and its claim to represent the people. For example, 'The people of Myanmar recognise us as the sole legitimate government, and we hope that you will also work with us as the sole legitimate government of Myanmar,'⁶⁶ reflecting a people-centred governance narrative. The NUG positions itself as the representative of the people's will and frequently appeals to the international community, as seen in statements such as 'we call on the UN'⁶⁷ and 'we urge the international community'⁶⁸.

Frequently used words such as 'airstrikes,' 'burnings of villages,' 'torture,' and 'destruction' provide detailed accounts of specific incidents and portray the hardships faced by civilians. Notably, the statements analysed in this study are written in English, aiming to reach an international audience and expose the cruelty of the military junta. The

⁶⁴ National Unity Government of Myanmar, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Statement on the Visit of the Special Envoy of the U.N. Secretary-General on Myanmar* (Aug. 16, 2022), <https://mofa.nugmyanmar.org/statement-16-2022/> (last visited Dec. 25, 2025).

⁶⁵ National Unity Government of Myanmar, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Statement on the Outcomes of the Visit of the ASEAN Special Envoy to Myanmar* (Mar. 28, 2022), <https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2022/03/28/statement-on-the-outcomes-of-the-visit-of-asean-special-envoy-to-myanmar> (last visited Dec. 25, 2025).

⁶⁶ National Unity Government of Myanmar, Ministry of International Cooperation, *Address to the Parliamentarians of the European Union* (July 2, 2021), <https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2021/07/02/h-e-dr-sasa-union-minister-of-the-ministry-of-international-cooperation-and-spokesperson-of-the-national-unity-government-of-myanmar-former-myanmar-special-envoy-to-the-un-addressed-to-the-parliam> (last visited Dec. 25, 2025).

⁶⁷ National Unity Government of Myanmar, Ministry of Women, Youths & Child Affairs, *Ministry Investigates Sexual Violence in Detention* (Apr. 29, 2021), <https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2021/04/29/ministry-investigates-sexual-violence-in-detention> (last visited Dec. 25, 2025).

⁶⁸ National Unity Government of Myanmar, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Appeal for Urgent Humanitarian Assistance to the IDPs and Refugees Affected by Military Junta's Operation* (December 17, 2021), https://www.burmalibrary.org/en/appeal-for-urgent-humanitarian-assistance-to-the-idps-and-refugees-affected-by-military-juntas?__cf_chl_f_tk=867oc6zx0phbzpRWG5d_aoznOFH6.oRQEx6Fktfa38o-1782974352-1.0.1.1-MlcakKioG8fBPhTyA5G67N.sw86_C0v9CoPFvbWqZHK (last visited Dec. 25, 2025).

frequently used words also recall international norms, law, justice, humanitarian values, and democracy.

Myanmar is a multi-ethnic country with a long-standing history of tensions between some ethnic minority groups, the military regime, and some civilian populations. Reflecting this context, the statements analysed in this study emphasise unity among ethnic groups and citizens. However, even among the groups opposing the military, there are differences in opinions and positions. The lack of reference to such diverse perspectives raises questions and may become a significant issue.

5.4. Summary of Analysis: How Are Women Represented?

The correspondence analysis shows that women and children appear on the map, but somewhat away from the central axis. It suggests that women are not a consistent key category within the statements. Furthermore, 'women' is located near terms such as child, killing, and violation, implying that women are portrayed primarily as vulnerable individuals to be protected. In contrast, women are less often linked to groups such as the NUG, the Council, or revolutionary forces, which may suggest that they are not always viewed as political actors. Based on this text, a closer examination of the word 'women' was conducted to gain a better understanding.

In the sentences where women are specifically mentioned in the qualitative analysis, the focus is usually on violence and sexual abuse. The statements strongly condemn sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) against women and girls, primarily pointing out that it is widespread and systematic. These statements often refer to the 2018 report by the UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission (IFFMM), which found that the military committed widespread and systematic GBV against ethnic communities, including rape, gang rape, sexual slavery, and other forced sexual acts affecting women, girls, boys, men, and transgender people.⁶⁹ These acts are serious issues and violate international human rights and humanitarian law, including UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and CEDAW. This portrayal of women contrasts with reports of many women participating in the CDM. Similarly, mentions of female leaders in the NUG are few, mostly limited to Aung San Suu Kyi and a few well-known activists. It is not clear how women's voices are treated in public.

While the following statement shows a declared commitment to SGBV prevention: "We are committed to a zero-tolerance policy for crimes of sexual and gender-based violence, in line with Myanmar's obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law, including UN Security Council resolution 1325 and related resolutions, CEDAW and the

⁶⁹ U.N. Human Rights Council, *Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar*, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/39/64 (Sept. 12, 2018).

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)”⁷⁰, relatively little concrete vision appears to be offered for how gender equality and its strategy might be introduced within political structures.

6. Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, it does not include interviews with NUG members and relies only on official documents, as it aims to analyse the official position and policy orientation through these documents. This approach makes it possible to examine gender perspective at the institutional and discourse levels. However, it must be acknowledged that the analysed document does not capture women's actual life experiences and voices. In fact, there may be a gap between their experience and official statement, which is the main limitation of this study. As a result, the actual experiences and diverse voices of women may not be visible, and it discusses only institutional discourse. Future research should address this gap by incorporating interviews and fieldwork to engage more directly with individual women's experiences. Second, the study mainly focuses on the NUG, even though anti-junta groups are diverse and not all the same. Still, the NUG is the most institutionalised entity and plays a central role in this movement, so examining it remains essential for answering the research questions. Lastly, due to the limitations of the software language, this analysis could only use English statements. As a result, the discourse examined may reflect the norms and expectations of an international audience, meaning that gender-related language could be used and structured strategically for that audience.

7. Conclusion

From the above discussion, several key points emerge about how gender and women's roles are viewed in Myanmar's political resistance and conflict after the coup. First, the word ‘women’ mainly appears in the context of military violence, where women are often portrayed as victims. This framing highlights the need to protect survivors and calls for international investigation and assistance. Addressing these points is clearly important. However, focusing only on this aspect risks reinforcing stereotypical views of women and overlooking their roles as political actors. Second, unlike other conflicts where propaganda around ‘women's liberation’ or ‘gender equality’ has been used to mobilise support – as noted in existing research – such narratives are largely absent from the NUG's discourse. In other words, women participating in the CDM or armed resistance are not deliberately mobilized; rather, they act on their own agency and initiative. Third, in light of existing scholarship, this period of resistance marks a critical moment to recognize women's agency and to institutionalize gender-sensitive approaches. While observed statements still demonstrate a weak commitment to gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment, the NUG appointed women's rights activists as

⁷⁰ National Unity Government of Myanmar, Ministry of Women, Youths & Children Affairs, *supra* note 76.

advisors in 2024⁷¹. This appointment may represent a significant shift in gender mainstreaming and women's political participation. Fourth, the NUG's statements aim to expose the military junta's inhumane actions and appeal to the international community. Given that the resistance and political struggle are still ongoing, it is not surprising that the NUG's statements lack concrete policy proposals or a long-term vision. However, more than five years have now passed since the coup, and it is increasingly important for the resistance to move beyond simply overthrowing the military and to start building the foundations for a new and just political order.

In particular, we need to look more closely at how much priority is given to gender equality in policy, and whether there are ways to include women's voices in a meaningful and effective way. In other words, the NUG itself may be unconsciously reproducing the deep-rooted gender inequalities that have long shaped Myanmar's political landscape. While the resistance and conflict in post-coup Myanmar offer real potential for advancing gender equality, this potential has not yet been fully realised. Women are still mostly portrayed as victims of military violence, rather than as active political agents capable of driving real change. Furthermore, statements on gender equality and women's empowerment are largely missing from the core resistance narrative. While appointing women's rights activists as advisors within the NUG is a positive step, efforts to incorporate gender perspectives remain weak, as the analysis of statements shows. However, as noted earlier, the NUG's ministry reshuffle has left it unclear which ministry is responsible for promoting gender equality. This is a problem that needs to be addressed. If gender-sensitive policies are not adopted and women's voices are not strengthened in decision-making, there is a real risk that this resistance could end up repeating the same authoritarian, male-dominated systems it is trying to change.

Finally, this study considers what is practically feasible. The NUG is currently engaged in armed conflict with the military, so its attention naturally focuses more on military strategy and battlefield operations. However, what sets the NUG apart from the military junta is its ability to build democratic institutions and respond to people's expectations. Gender mainstreaming at both the institutional and operational levels is therefore essential, and the NUG has already made efforts to put such a framework in place. Doing so would also help it comply with international legal frameworks, including CEDAW and the WPS agenda. By institutionalising these commitments, the NUG would strengthen both its democratic legitimacy and its ability to serve as a credible alternative to military rule.

⁷¹ National Unity Government of Myanmar, Ministry of Human Rights, *Formation of the Advisory Board for the Ministry of Human Rights* (Jan. 14, 2024), <https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2024/01/14/formation-of-the-advisory-board-for-the-ministry-of-human-rights> (last visited Dec. 25, 2025).