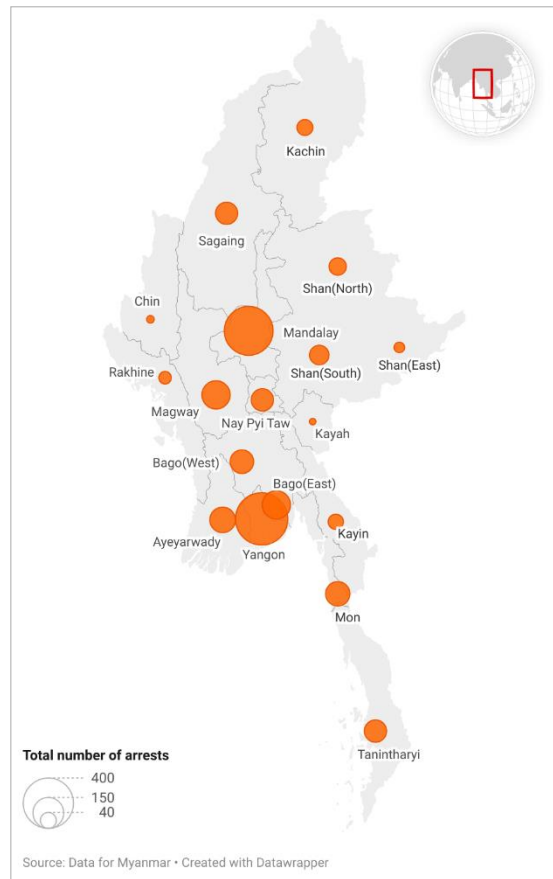# Crackdown on Digital Rights: Online Expression in the Face of Oppression in Myanmar

Data for Myanmar

This report is intended to assist policymakers and interested groups both within and outside Myanmar. The data covers the period from February 1, 2022, to July 31, 2024.

Key Messages

- Over the three years since the military coup, 1,691 people have been arrested due to their online expression on social media or online communications opposing the Myanmar military and supporting pro-democracy movements and resistance groups.

- The number of arrests significantly increased in 2022 and 2023, but the rate of arrests has decreased in 2024. In July alone, 33 online users from 24 different townships were arrested.

- From February 2022 to the end of July 2024, arrests were reported across 220 townships, with the most arrests occurring in Bago, Chanmyathazi, North Okkalapa, Pyay, and Mahaaungmyay townships.

- The majority of those arrested were detained for their online expression on Facebook, though there have also been arrests related to their online expression or online communications on online platforms such as TikTok, Telegram, and Viber.

Total number of arrests
- 400
- 150
- 40

Source: Data for Myanmar • Created with Datawrapper

Key Figures

1691	**202**	**806**	**36%**
Total Number of Arrests	Total Number of Arrests in 2024	Total Number of Arrests in Yangon and Mandalay Regions	Percentage of Women in Total Arrests

Summary

As of the end of July 2024, data collected by Data for Myanmar shows that from February 2022 to July 2024, 1,691 online users were arrested due to their online expression on social media or online communications, particularly for opposing the Myanmar military and supporting pro-democracy movements and resistance groups. On average, around 54 online users were arrested each month. In July alone, 33 users were arrested across 24 townships.

In 2022, 874 individuals were arrested, followed by 615 in 2023, and 202 in 2024 (up to the end of July). Compared to 2022, the monthly arrest rate has gradually declined in 2023 and 2024. The majority of those arrested—806 individuals—were online users from Yangon and Mandalay regions, with most arrests related to their online expression.

Background

Following the military coup, the Myanmar military has made numerous efforts to control key social networks and online platforms critical to pro-democracy movements. These efforts include internet shutdowns, blocking websites, and restricting access to popular platforms like Facebook to prevent public use.
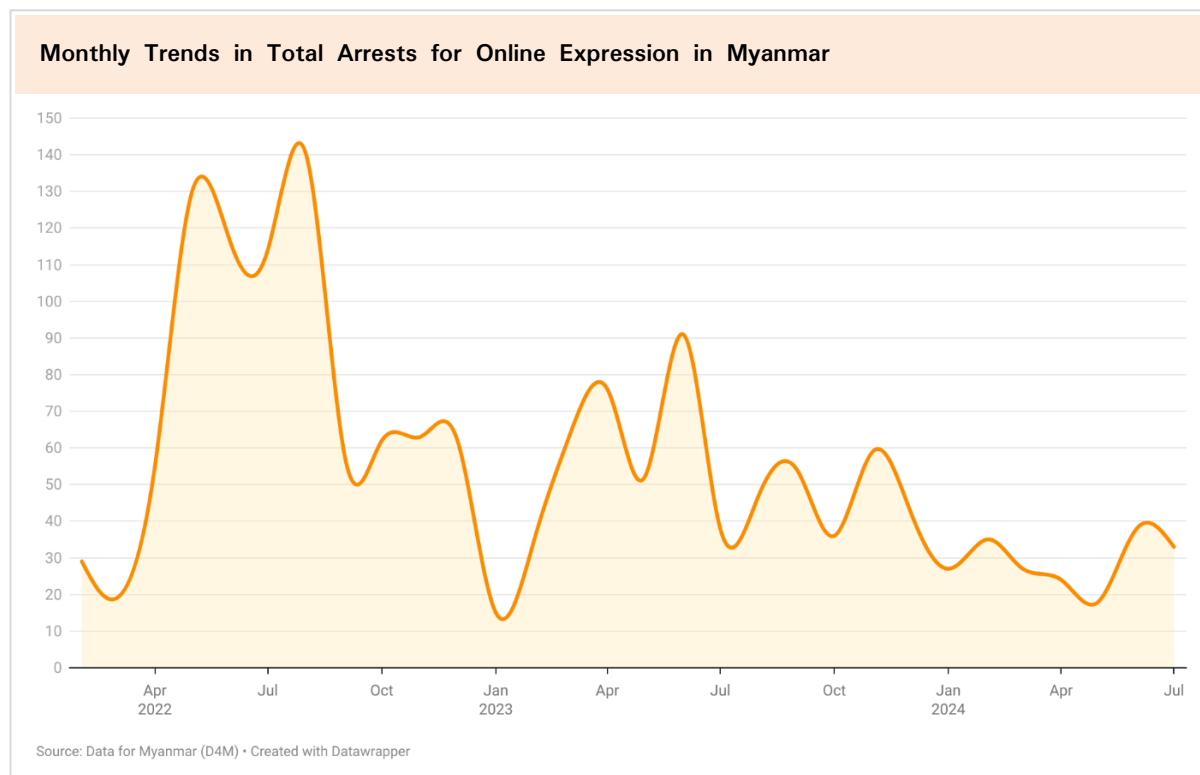
On January 25, 2022, the State Administrative Council (SAC) announced that anyone inciting, spreading propaganda, or making threats on social networks could be prosecuted under various laws, including Section 52(a) of the Anti-Terrorism Law, Section 124-A and Section 505-A of the Penal Code, and Section 33(a) of the Electronic Communications Act. The Myanmar military also used state-run media to warn the public against playing "PDF Games" (games supporting resistance groups) and engaging in hate speech. Arrests related to online activities began in February 2022.

The military not only monitors online posts but also conducts physical checks at security checkpoints, inspecting phones and arresting individuals based on their online content. Pro-military Telegram channels have also been used to gather and share personal information, pressuring and facilitating the arrests of online users for their posts.

Initially, the focus was mainly on content posted on Facebook, the most widely used social media platform. However, by 2023 and 2024, the military expanded its surveillance to include TikTok content. Among those arrested were high-profile figures such as artists, actors, and journalists. These arrests are regularly reported in daily news and pro-military media outlets.

Analysis

In 2022, there were 874 arrests, 615 in 2023, and 202 in 2024 (up to the end of July). Compared to 2022, the number of arrests per month gradually decreased in 2023 and 2024. The highest number of arrests occurred between May and August 2022, with 524 individuals arrested over those four months. On average, 56 individuals were arrested each month from February 2022 to July 2024.

Monthly Trends in Total Arrests for Online Expression in Myanmar

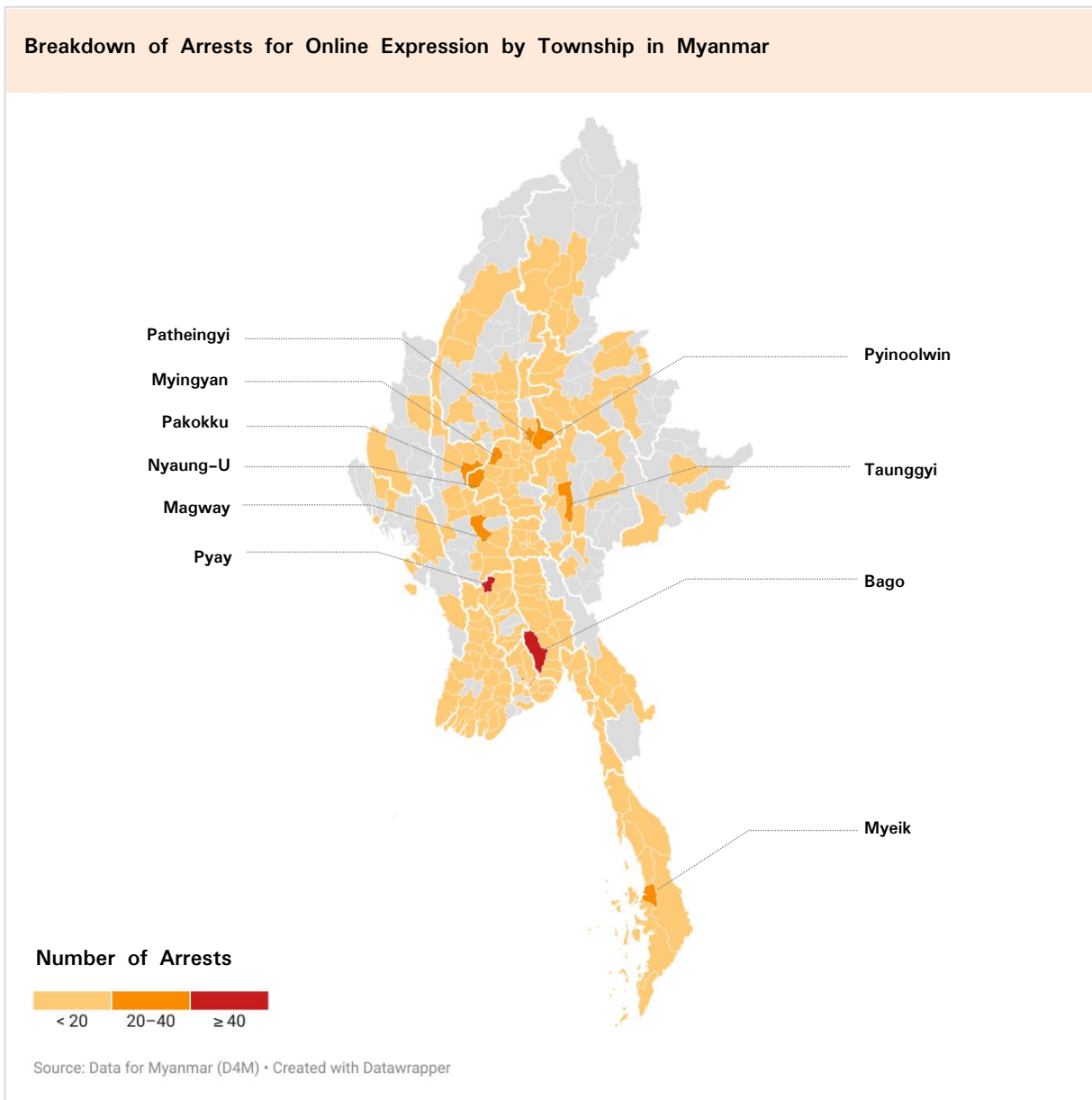Source: Data for Myanmar (D4M) • Created with Datawrapper

Over the past two years, regions like Kachin, Kayah (Karenni), Chin, Rakhine, and Eastern Shan have seen fewer than 40 arrests each. In Northern Shan, Southern Shan, Sagaing, Tanintharyi, Nay Pyi Taw, Western Bago, Mon, and Ayeyarwady regions, the number of arrests ranges from 40 to 100. Regions with over 100 arrests include Yangon, Mandalay, Eastern Bago, and Magway, with Yangon seeing the highest number at 428 arrests.

Between February 2022 and July 2024, arrests occurred in 220 townships due to their online expression on social media or online communications opposing the Myanmar military and supporting public movements and resistance groups. Among these townships, Bago had 55 arrests, Chanmyathazi had 51, North Okkalapa had 45, and Pyay had 40, making them the most heavily targeted. Townships with 20 to 40 arrests include Mahaaungmyay, Taunggyi, Pyinoolwin, Magway, Thingangyun, Pyigyitagon, South Dagon, Pakokku, Chanayethazan, Shwepyitha, Patheingyi, Nyaung-U, Myeik, and Myingyan.

In 2024, there were only 11 arrests across Kachin, Karenni, Kayin, Chin, Rakhine, Shan, and Tanintharyi regions, with no arrests reported in these regions after March, except for Northern Shan. Arrests

continued as usual in Nay Pyi Taw, Sagaing, Ayeyarwady, and Magway, while Mon and Bago saw a decline. Yangon and Mandalay remain hotspots for arrests.

Breakdown of Arrests for Online Expression by Township in Myanmar

Number of Arrests

< 20 | 20–40 | ≥ 40

Source: Data for Myanmar (D4M) • Created with Datawrapper

Regarding gender, 613 women and 1,078 men have been arrested. Most arrests were due to their posts, comments and shares on Facebook, though some individuals were also arrested for content shared on other platforms like TikTok, Telegram, and Viber.

Recommendations

- Relevant organizations should protect individuals' rights to freedom of expression and safeguard their personal data.
- Online users should avoid sharing hate speech related to ethnicity or religion, as well as content that could harm or endanger civilians.
- Online users should take precautions to ensure their personal information remains secure when using digital platforms.
- Before traveling, online users should carefully prepare security measures to protect their personal data and ensure their safety.

Methodology and Limitations

The data in this report was compiled by reviewing and verifying information published on the official website and media outlets of the Myanmar military's Ministry of Information. Duplicate cases of individuals with identical names, addresses, or dates have been counted only once. Arrested individuals whose names remain unverified (under review) have been excluded from the count.

Regarding the arrested individuals, Data for Myanmar does not have detailed information on how the military continues to prosecute them, whether they have been released, or their current status.

About us

Data for Myanmar (D4M) is an independent research organization that provides useful data for the people in Myanmar after collecting and analyzing data from various sources.

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