

# Online Terrorization

An Examination of the Myanmar Junta's Propaganda Tactics (2023) -  
Briefing Paper –

December, 2023.

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“အာဏာရှင်တွေ ရပ်တည်ရှင်သန်ဖို့ ဆိုရင်  
အင်အားသုံးနိုင်၊ ဒါမှမဟုတ် အတွေးအခေါ်သွတ်သွင်းနိုင်ရုံမကပါဘူး။  
မှားသည်ဖြစ်စေ၊ မှန်သည်ဖြစ်စေ သူတို့ စွမ်းနိုင်လုပ်နိုင်ကြောင်း  
လူထုကို ယုံအောင်သိမ်းသွင်းနိုင်မှ ဖြစ်မှာပါ”<sup>1</sup>

**Dictators survive not because of their use of force or ideology but  
because they convince the public—rightly or wrongly—that they are competent**

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<sup>1</sup> How Modern Dictators Survive: An Informational Theory of the New Authoritarianism မှ ကောက်နုတ်သည်။

## Introduction

This paper examines the State Administrative Council's (SAC) use of pro-military propaganda on social media platforms, including its tactics and the popular topics it promotes. This paper aims to assist IT companies, the international community, civil society and media organizations in understanding, taking action and documenting the junta's propaganda campaigns. It is important to note that this study focuses solely on prominent social media accounts and significant events and may not encompass every account or topic. The Red Flag, in collaboration with Beautifiers of Diversity Network, has authored this paper to monitor social media content.

## Summary

Despite relying on age-old tactics, the SAC and supporters have adapted to new platforms. They employ state-owned newspapers and TV channels as their main broadcasting system to disseminate propaganda. Additionally, they utilize digital online media and social media platforms to reach a wider audience. Exploiting expressions such as "standing on the side of justice," "preventing the state from collapsing," and "safeguarding the race and national religion," they strive to manipulate both the public and international communities. This is achieved through the use of journalist imposters and social media influencers who actively spread their pro-military propaganda.

This paper focuses on collecting data regarding pro-military propaganda, studying the movements within the online sphere, analyzing propaganda tactics, and identifying popular topics that have gained traction in 2023. The collected data spans a period of one year.

1. The analysis of the main entities involved in the movement is as follows:
  - (a) Influential groups
  - (b) Media controlled by the military
  - (c) Pages disseminating false information and journalist imposters
  - (d) Regionally-targeted disinformation
  - (e) Ultra-nationalists

These entities can be categorized into five groups as described above. They systematically spread the same propaganda to both the public and international community through their extensive networks.

2. As part of their propaganda tactics, one strategy involves carefully assessing the potential risks of being restricted on social media platforms. To mitigate these risks, they employ various tactics such as using coded language, creating new expressions, utilizing multiple platforms instead of relying solely on one main social media platform, and establishing numerous secondary accounts that are interconnected to maintain an active presence regardless of circumstances.

3. Through the examination of popular topics, it becomes evident that they not only systematically disseminate a single propaganda theme across different mediums but also craft compelling content to fuel discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, and gender. Ultimately, this approach aims to escalate tensions and foster conflicts.

4. The junta consistently tarnishes the resistance by falsely labeling it as a terrorist movement. Moreover, they systematically propagate their own agenda by framing the resistance as a violator of human rights.

5. They employ both disinformation and fact-checking as their weapons, branding independent media as generators of “fake news.” This tactic aims to divert the public's attention from receiving accurate information and manipulate them into believing that independent news organizations lack credibility.

6. It is evident that numerous individuals face arrest due to relentless online attacks from pro-military accounts. These accounts engage in commenting on news articles to suppress the public's freedom of expression and instill fear. Additionally, they engage in doxing activities, exposing the personal information of anti-military accounts and issuing threats to arrest based upon what people have written on their own accounts.

The aforementioned issues will be thoroughly examined and categorized in this paper.

## Context/Background

The political trajectory of Myanmar, following the 2021 coup, has entered uncharted territory, dangerously close to the brink of becoming a failed state. The collapse of the central administration system, with exceptions in the delta region and urban centers such as Yangon, Mandalay, and Naypyidaw, has resulted in the emergence of numerous de facto local self-administration areas across the nation.

The genesis of Myanmar's political challenges can be traced back to the post-World War II era, marked by the discrimination and inequality perpetrated by the successive Central Government against ethnic groups in peripheral hill areas. For decades, various ethnic communities have relentlessly pursued increased autonomy and self-determination. Despite successive coups leading to name changes of the Central Government, including the Caretaker Government (1958), Revolutionary Government (1962), State Law and Order Restoration Council (1988), State Peace and Development Committee (1992), and State Administrative Council (2021), ethnic groups have consistently been denied the opportunity to manage their resources for local development.

Over time, the military has justified its exclusive right to lead and govern the country through propaganda efforts, primarily centered on the perceived threats of Islamization, Indianization, and colonization. This narrative exploits the collective grievances stemming from Myanmar's experiences during the British Colonial era, wherein the country was marginalized, relegated to the lowest social class under Indian Civil Servants and British Raj. Historically, the military government has repeatedly expelled Indian settlers in Myanmar who had been in the country during the British Rule, a trend that escalated dramatically in 2016 with the mass exodus of Rohingya people, driven out in a genocidal manner. These displaced individuals continue to languish in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps along the

Bangladesh-Myanmar border.

Between 2010 and 2021, Myanmar underwent an interval of quasi-civilian government, where representatives were elected through an electoral system. However, it is crucial to note that 25% of the legislative body and three key ministries remained under the stringent control of the military, the Tatmadaw. During this phase, Myanmar's citizens enjoyed limited civil liberties, including Freedom of Expression, Freedom of Movement, Freedom of Press, and, significantly, Freedom to Access the internet and social media platforms. However, the military subsequently exploited these platforms, utilizing them for propaganda dissemination, misinformation campaigns, and incitement to create communal, racial, and religious conflicts.

Post the 2021 Coup, the military government intensified its control, outlawing nearly all independent media outlets and detaining journalists. This tactic aimed to create an information void, subsequently filled by the military through select social media platforms, pro-military media, and influencers. These tools were employed to spread misinformation, propaganda, doxing, and instigation, leading to arrests, violence, and, in some instances, the promotion of ethnic hatred.

## Entities responsible for spreading propaganda

Following the 2021 military coup, social media accounts associated with the military had to seek new platforms to disseminate propaganda due to restrictions imposed on Facebook. They opted for Telegram as their new arena, resulting in the migration of numerous propaganda accounts to that platform. These propaganda channels were previously active on Facebook, YouTube, VK, Twitter, and TikTok, propagating pro-military content, promoting genocide, and consistently attacking supporters of democracy. They also propagated ultra-nationalist ideologies by accusing independent media and civil society organizations of being puppets of Western powers and claiming that they would bring about the destruction of the country. This paper will categorize and differentiate the data collected from these accounts based on their respective types.

### (a) Influential groups

The influential groups consist of influencers frequently featured in the media, as well as popular channels or pages with a substantial number of subscribers and followers. These individuals or entities often share content that encourages unlawful arrests, threatens lives, spreads disinformation, discusses battles, attacks PDFs (People's Defense Forces) and armed resistance groups, highlights internal conflicts among resistances groups, and stirs up ethnic and religious tensions. These channels specifically target anti-junta groups, employing such content as psychological warfare to influence their own troops. These channels have gained widespread popularity and wield significant influence due to their large subscriber base.

Telegram Channel	Particular Content	Channel Size
Kyaw Swar	Encouraging the arrest of individuals opposing junta and inciting violence on the ground.	100 K +
Ko Thet	Spreading false information about battles, online campaigns, and lucky draws for phone bills.	80 K +

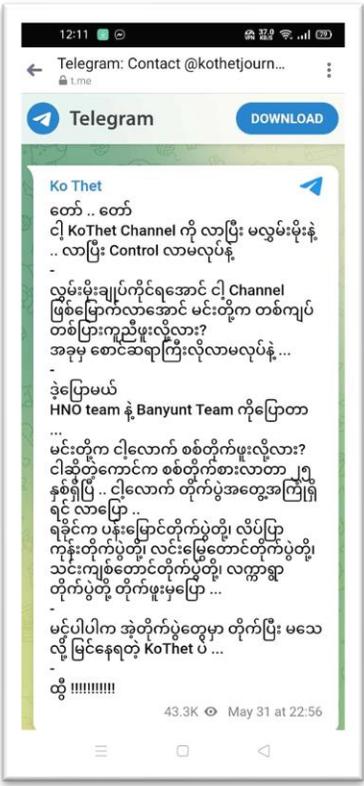
Banyunt	Encouraging arbitrary arrests, pornography, and celebrity gossip.	40 K +
Han Nyein Oo	Encouraging arbitrary arrests, pornography, and celebrity gossip.	100 K +
Thazin Oo	Government lottery, propagandistic debates from MWD TV hosted by Moe Hein, the founder of Thuriya Naywun Journal, and TikTok videos.	50 K +
Sergeant Phoe Si	Consistently labeling articles from independent media as fake news.	50 K +

In March 2023, the Kyaw Swar channel received an official commendation from the Ministry of Information under the State Administrative Council (SAC). The commendation acknowledged the channel's active efforts in combating disinformation. Similarly, the Han Nyein Oo channel sought trade permits during the military rule as they assisted in making arrests and securing state funding. Additionally, this channel requested permission to possess firearms, as it aimed to project an image aligned with the military.

The administrator of the Thazin Oo channel was involved in running the election campaigns for the USDP in 2020. Following the coup, this channel collaborated with media imposters like Myanmar Hard Talk and Thuriya Naywun Journal to carry out propaganda campaigns. They also served as hosts on the military-owned MWD TV and were granted the opportunity to ask questions during press conferences organized by the SAC.

Several other channels, such as Hmine Wai, Ah Than (ICG), Ko Khant, Ye Yint Htet, Shwe Ba, Snow Queen, Sai Aung, Nan Nge, are also part of the influential groups mentioned earlier. These channels operate under various names and maintain an active presence across multiple platforms.

The objective of pro-military channels is to unlawfully detain pro-democracy activists, weaken the impact of independent news outlets, and intensify psychological warfare through propaganda.

	
<p>The commendation from the Ministry of Information for Kyaw Swar Telegram Channel</p>	<p>An evidence showing that the propagand channels are not operating as individual but coordinating as various teams.</p>

(b) Media influenced by the military

The Telegram channels associated with state-owned media influenced by the military include MRTV and MOI. These channels showcase the activities of the SAC and various ministries, share official statements, disseminate fabricated news targeting resistance

groups, and provide live news coverage. When the TV channels broadcast their programs daily, the MRTV Telegram channel often goes live simultaneously. The military-owned MWD TV Telegram channel focuses on highlighting SAC's activities and labeling actions of resistance movements as acts of terrorism. These contents are subsequently echoed and shared by pro-military channels.

**(c) Pages disseminating false information and journalist imposters**

The channels posing as media outlets adopt a similar news presentation style commonly seen in the media industry. The articles published on their channels follow the structure of news articles, and they also produce TV news. Some of these channels have even registered with the Ministry of Information under the SAC.

However, despite following the standard practices of mainstream media, these media imposter channels primarily focus on content related to SAC activities, spreading hate speech, disseminating disinformation about resistance groups, and promoting propaganda.

The media imposters affiliated with SAC consist of former crime reporters, veterans, informers, members of the USDP, and ultra-nationalists.

<b>Pages imposed as media</b>	<b>as Founder</b>	<b>Background information of the founder</b>
Myanmar Hard Talk	Aung Min	Journalist imposter
Myanmar National Post	Naung Taw Lay	Ultra-nationalist
Myanmar Transparency News	Phyo Wai	Former Journalist
People Media	Kyaw Soe Oo	Journalist imposter
Positive Angle News	Kyaw Swar	Veteran, Founder of propaganda network

Neo Politics News	Kyaw Myo Min	Co-founder of AKonThi Media and former reporter at Pyi Myanmar Journal
Radio Free Myanmar	?	?

The media imposters share the content from their news channels on Telegram, as well as on various other platforms. Additionally, they have launched websites, some of which provide foreign language support in English and Chinese.

**(d) Regionally targeted mis/disinformation**

Since October 2021, the propaganda network has established several regional media imposter channels, and in July 2022, they simultaneously launched multiple channels.

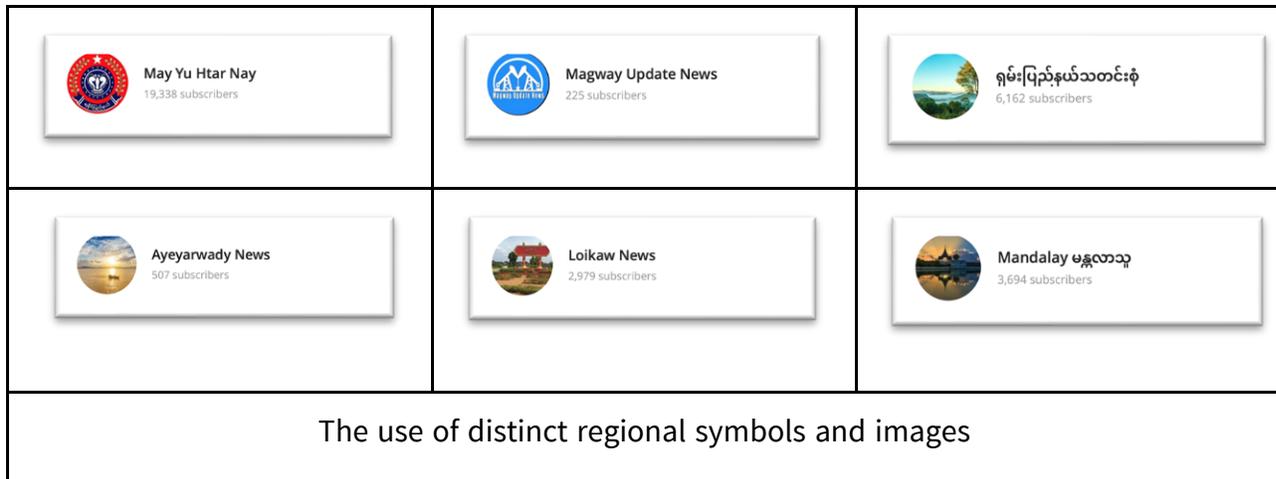
Region	Number of channels
Shan	11
Rakhine	9
Bago	7
Sagaing	9
Magway	5
Mon	4
Yangon	4
Kayah	3
Tanintharyi	3
Ayeyarwaddy	4

Karen	3
Mandalay	3
Kachin	2
Nay Pyi Taw	1

Out of the 14 states and regions legally recognized by successive governments in Myanmar, pro-military supporters focused their efforts on establishing propaganda channels in 13 of these regions. As of present, the collected data indicates a total of 68 regional pages on Facebook and Telegram. These channels adopt regional symbols as their profile pictures and disseminate propaganda and disinformation while pretending to have no connection to the military.



The pro-military channels, such as Kyaw Swar, Ko Thet, and Banyunt, introduce and promote regional media imposter channels. They capture people's attention by claiming to provide authentic news about events happening in those regions. However, these regional channels not only share content specific to their respective regions but also disseminate misleading information that distorts the image of the revolution. Additionally, they share content from well-known propaganda channels.



**(e) Ultra-nationalists**

The group responsible for spreading propaganda focuses on generating content filled with hatred towards foreign countries, religious minorities, and ethnic minorities. One of their main objectives was to encourage the opening of Buddhist nationalist private high schools, operated by the MaBaTha (Patriotic Association of Myanmar) monks, as a response to the boycott of state-run schools under the SAC. These followers actively share speeches by Wirathu, a prominent figure known for his extreme nationalist movements, through their Facebook channels. Furthermore, there are Telegram and YouTube channels named “Welove-Wirathu” that also share speeches by Wirathu.

As anti-dictatorship armed resistance forces gain strength in the central region of Myanmar, an ultra-nationalist monk named U Wathawa emerged in a video where he was seen caning youths accused of being members of the PDFs. He began advocating for the protection of villages from insurgents. Subsequently, he established connections with well-known propaganda Telegram channels to acquire donations of bulletproof vests and receive firearm support for the SAC. U Wathawa actively engaged in forming pro-military militia groups and has gained fame for organizing these militia troops in various villages in Sagaing. Nationalists have established civilian armed forces known as Pyu Saw Htee and served as informers for the SAC. In certain regions of Sagaing, MaBaTha monks played a leading role in forming Pyu Saw Htees. U Wathawa acted as a key leader in organizing Pyu Saw Htee units. He called for meetings in villages near Kant Balu to establish Pyu Saw Htee units,

imposing fines on those who refused to join. U Wathawa also formed Pyu Saw Htee Commando groups with his trusted followers. Furthermore, he arranged graduation ceremonies for Pyu Saw Htee recruits and engaged in spreading propaganda to persuade members of the PDFs to surrender.

Naung Taw Lay, the founder of Myanmar National Post, along with Aye Lay, Sithu Myint, and Bullet Hla Swe, a former USDP member of parliament, led the formation of various groups such as YMBA (Young Men's Buddhist Association), Shwe Pyi Taw Thoet Sone Hmat Volunteer Group, Myo Saunt Lu Nge Network, MNO (Myanmar Nationalist Organization), and Patriotic Myanmar Monks Union(PMMU). These groups consist of Buddhist nationalists and military supporters who come together to celebrate ceremonies related to Buddhism, Armed Forces Day, and engage in voluntary charity work.

## Propaganda Tactics

Following the 2021 military coup in Myanmar, the junta imposed an internet shutdown. Consequently, the cost of mobile and internet services skyrocketed, reaching three times higher than before. Accessing Facebook in Myanmar became risky for security reasons, necessitating the use of VPNs. As a result, people increasingly turned to Telegram as a safer alternative. Pro-military entities, responsible for spreading propaganda, migrated to Telegram for two primary reasons. Firstly, their Facebook accounts faced frequent restrictions, prompting the shift. Secondly, they aimed to mount information-based counterattacks on Telegram to prevent their opposition from gaining influence.

Pro-military entities engaged in spreading propaganda have specifically targeted the Telegram platform as their primary base for disseminating their messages. From there, they extend their reach across different platforms through their networks. They assert that Telegram is the only reliable space available to them for sharing information, and they actively encourage their ministries and other pro-military entities to make greater use of the platform. As Facebook, which was previously their main platform for propaganda, frequently imposes restrictions on their activities, they no longer post the entirety of their content there. Instead, they share links to their Telegram channels, which now serve as their new central hub. They employ captions such as "We cannot post this link on Facebook" or "Posting this on Facebook will result in account restrictions" to explain their shift in approach.

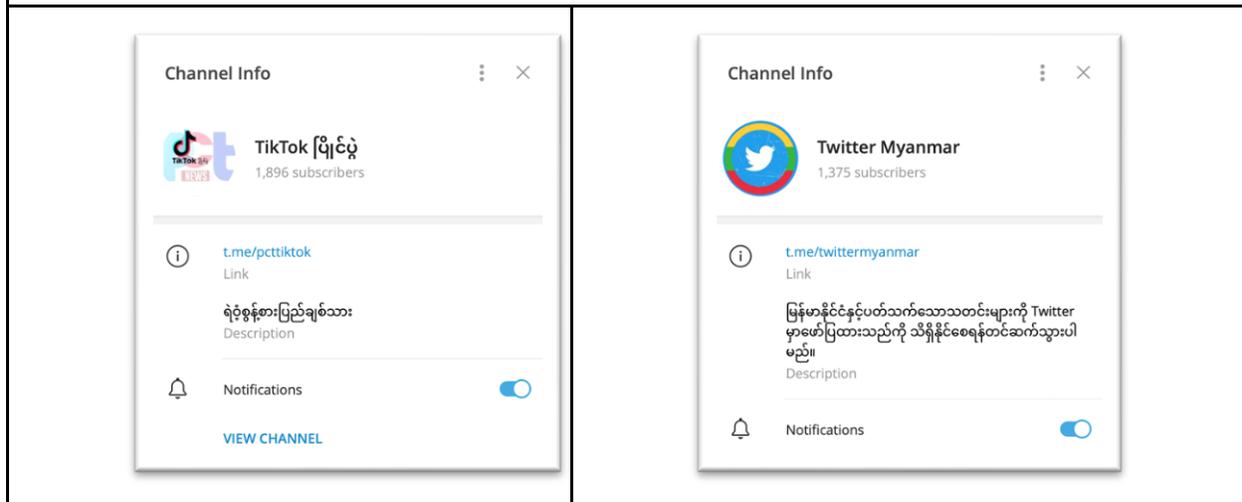
When disseminating news through Telegram channels, which serve as the primary platform for spreading military propaganda, these channels are interconnected with one another. For instance, when an article is posted on a Telegram channel, it is swiftly shared and reposted across other similar channels. The rapid spread of articles to multiple accounts occurs within a remarkably short period of time. Misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech, which they aim to propagate, quickly feature on numerous accounts within minutes. While the channel names may vary, the administrators remain the same, and the timing of forwarding posts aligns precisely. This indicates a clear systematic approach to spreading propaganda as a network.

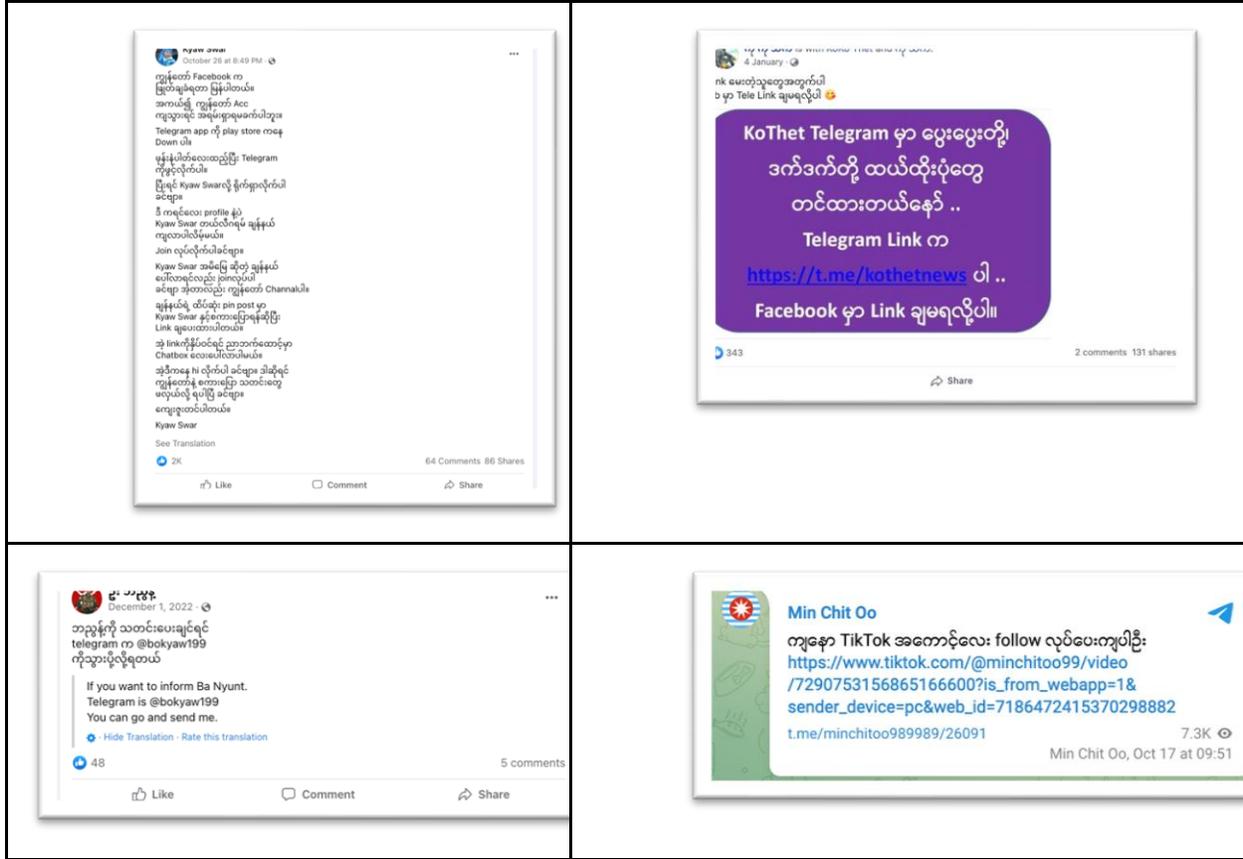
Contents from pro-military channels and their characteristics:

- The channels typically post a minimum of 50 and a maximum of 200 posts per day.

- Around 70 percent of the posts on most channels are duplicates.
- They feature information that is difficult to access for international and local news media, often containing exclusive details accessible only to the military council troops and authorities.
- Propaganda campaigns highlight the success of festivals organized by the military council, achievements in military operations, reductions in commodity prices, and the overall stability of the country.
- Constantly featured posts incite violence against pro-democracy forces and supporters of the Spring Revolution, advocating for their seizure, murder, and suppression.
- The channels actively promote the purchase of state lottery tickets by the military council and even sell the lotteries directly through the channels.
- They also encourage restrictions on visa extensions for exiles who support the Spring Revolution.

**Propaganda campaigns originating from Telegram and coordinated activities across other platforms**





## Exploiting fact-checking mechanisms

The network of pro-military propaganda accounts not only spreads disinformation and harmful content but also launches counterattacks on independent media, labeling their content as “fake news” under the guise of fact-checking. However, their fact-checking process lacks adherence to standard values as they unilaterally label the articles “fake news,” aiming to diminish the influence of those media outlets. The primary targets of this campaign include Khit Thit Media, DVB, Mizzima, RFA, Ayeyarwaddy Times, and Narinjara, while occasional attacks are directed towards other media outlets. The military council's social media platforms and state-controlled newspapers feature multiple accounts named Fact Check, which focus on so-called fact-checking. These contents are further reposted and promoted by popular channels like Ko Thet, Banyunt, and Myanmar National Post, which are groups associated with pro-military entities involved in propaganda dissemination, as mentioned above. The channels that share fact-checking content from the military council include Fact Check (<https://t.me/factcheckmm>), Ye’ Ba Nyein (<https://t.me/yebanyein007>) and Delta News (<https://t.me/deltanewsmedia>).



## **Popular topics that have gained traction in 2023**

The military council and pro-military entities engaged in spreading propaganda have actively fabricated events on online platforms for various purposes. These fabricated events serve to propagate their agenda, instill fear among the public, manipulate people into distrusting independent news media, hinder access to reliable information, and sow conflicts through the dissemination of mis/disinformation and other deceptive tactics. This paper focuses on the analysis of eleven significant events selected from these incidents. By examining the selected contents, we can identify the intentions behind spreading disinformation, detect patterns, and understand the timing. This awareness will help us exercise caution and remain vigilant.

### **(a) Fabricated event claiming opposition to the silent strike in Mandalay on February 1:**

On the second anniversary of the military coup on February 1, 2023, pro-democracy forces urged people on social media to participate in a silent strike as a way to honor those unlawfully detained and those who lost their lives during the Spring Revolution, expressing their anti-dictatorship stance. However, pro-military Telegram channels consistently circulated fabricated posts alleging that the people of Mandalay were against this silent strike.

One such Telegram channel, named Mhine Wai, boasting over 31,000 subscribers, shared this news, attempting to give the impression that the post originated from Facebook pages such as Bikers of Mandalay, Taxi drivers, Mini Oh Way drivers, vendors from Zay Cho market, and traditional bakers of Mandalay.

In reality, these Facebook pages mentioned in the article do not exist, and the pictures used are fabricated. While two of the mentioned Facebook groups are genuine, no corresponding posts were found on their platforms. The purpose behind these pro-military propaganda accounts sharing multiple disinformation and false announcements leading up to the silent strike was to undermine the collective strength of the people.



A fabricated posts linked to the silent strike in February 2023:  
(Picture - Think before you trust)

**(b) False news alleging secret negotiations between the NUG and the military regarding their participation in the military-led election:**

The military persistently propagates a narrative alleging electoral fraud as the reason behind the 2021 military coup, specifically targeting the outcome of the 2020 elections under the NLD government. Despite their attempts to hold new elections under their control, the people of Myanmar and political parties refused to cooperate. Consequently, the military announced another election scheduled for August 2023, and they began spreading misinformation, claiming that the NUG (National Unity Government) was secretly offering to compete in the election led by the military. This deceptive strategy aims to gain the trust of the people and divert their attention from the military's actions.

This message was shared on the Mhine Wai Telegram channel, stating, "We're unsure about the kind of agreements the NUG has made, but we've heard that they're currently in negotiations with the SAC to participate in the upcoming election. It's necessary for them to negotiate, otherwise, if the SAC holds an election anyway and a civilian government is elected afterward, the NUG will lose everything."

The NUG government categorically rejects and opposes the forthcoming election orchestrated by the SAC. The acting president of the NUG, Duwa Lashi La, explicitly declared a boycott of the SAC's election. Additionally, the NUCC (National Unity Consultative Council), which formed the NUG, announced discussions with opposition forces to join in the boycott of the election. Derek Chollet, Counselor for the United States Department of State, stated that the junta-led election would not be acknowledged by the United States. Those who spread disinformation often manipulate the timing and fabricate stories to serve their agenda.

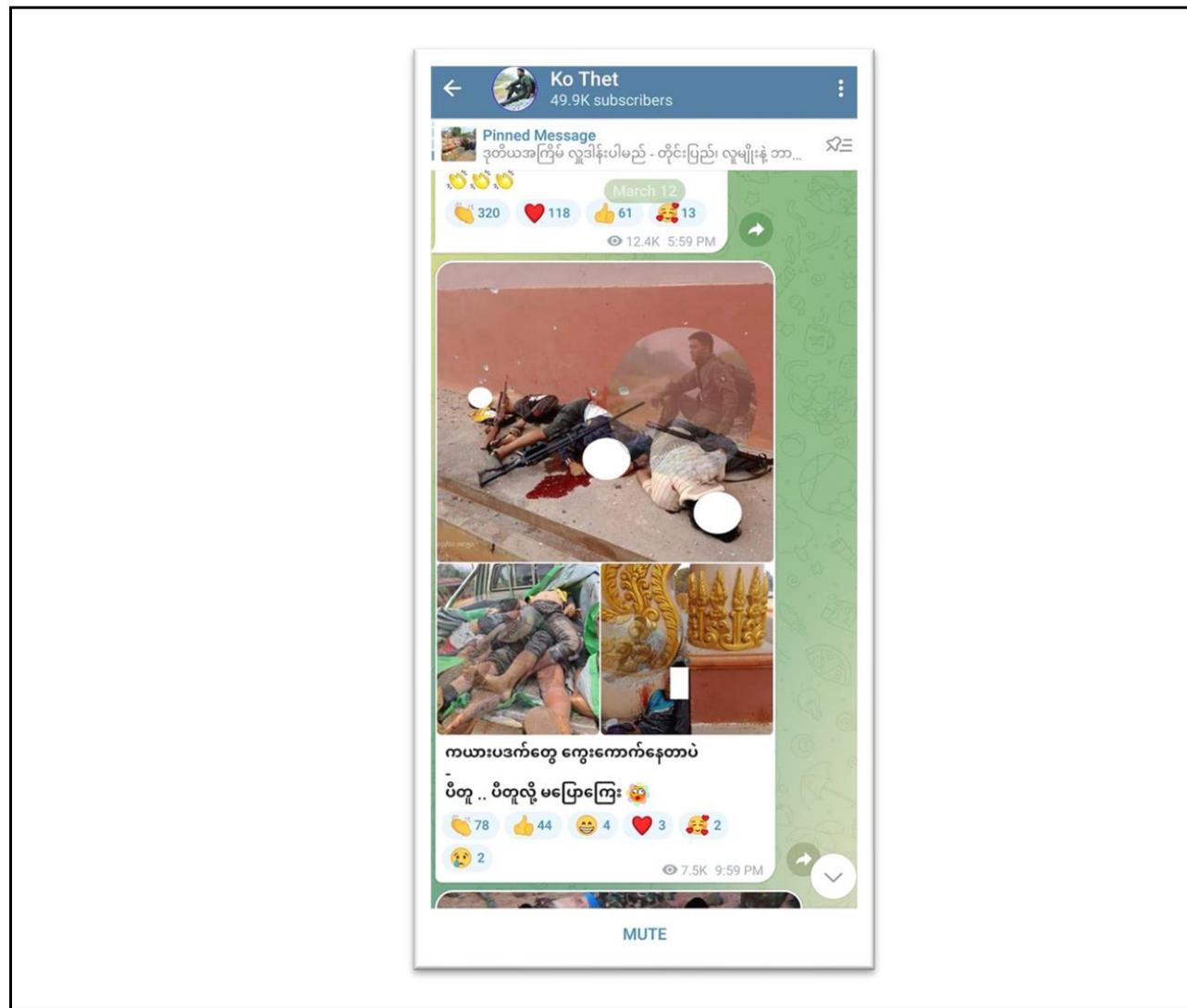


Disinformation related to the election led by SAC

**(c) Disinformation concerning the Pinlaung massacre in Namneng village, Shan State:**

More than 30 civilians, including three monks, were tragically killed in Namneng village, located in Shan State. KNDF (Karenni Nationalities Defence Force) attributed responsibility for this massacre to the troops of the military council. However, there were subsequent allegations suggesting that both the KNDF and the PDF were involved in these killings.

Upon conducting fact-checking regarding these events, it was revealed that the images depicting the murdered civilians were not initially shared by the KNDF. Instead, they were initially circulated by Telegram channels associated with pro-military propaganda.



The pro-military channels shared false information, claiming that the killings of more than 30 civilians, including three monks, in Namneng village, Shan State, were carried out by PDF members from Kayah State.

On March 12, 2023, at 10 a.m. in the morning, a Telegram channel named Ko Thet, known for spreading pro-military propaganda, initially shared the pictures. Soon after, other

Telegram channels with tens of thousands of subscribers, such as Snow Queen, Spring Revolution Cemetery, Hmine Wai, and Thit Lwin, began circulating the same images. These posts claimed that military council troops used sniper rifles to shoot at twenty-four PDF members who were in a monastery. The posts also included photos of makeshift firearms on the deceased bodies. Notably, Ko Thet channel, the first to release these photos, mentioned in a post that they would soon release photos of PDF members in Kayah State even before actually sharing them.

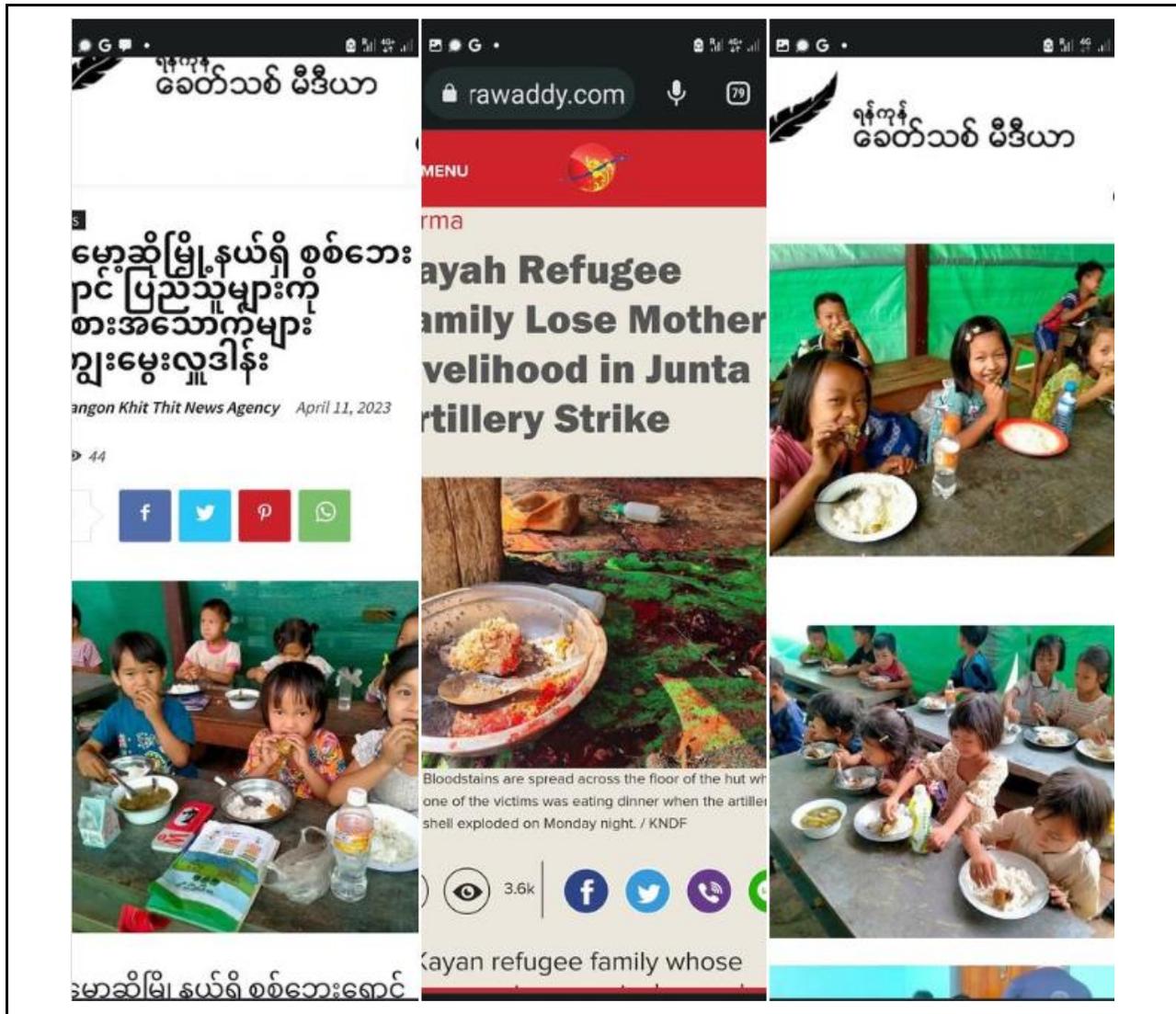
Furthermore, the photos released by KNDF and those shared by the pro-military channels display identical background buildings and clothing. Moreover, the military council troops conducted airstrikes on Namneng village in Pinlaung starting from March 11.

**(d) Disinformation alleging that PDFs are sending threatening letters to NLD (National League for Democracy) party members who have chosen to register at the UEC (Union Election Commission) following the murders of certain NLD party members in Mandalay by the Thway Thout groups.**

False information has circulated on social media, claiming that the NUG will participate in the election organized by the SAC. Additionally, there have been reports of disagreements between NLD party central committee members remaining in the country and current officials of the NUG. In the first week of April, a fabricated article titled "PDF sent a threatening letter to NLD party members from inside the country who decided to re-register NLD party with the instructions of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi" emerged. Pro-military channels have been spreading this false news, asserting that NLD party members residing in the country who decided to register their party at the Union Election Commission (UEC) established by the military council received a threatening letter from the PDFs. Not very long after the UEC disbanded the NLD, some of party members and supporters from Mandalay were murdered and their bodies disposed of by Thway Thout groups. In addition to that, party signboards were smashed and party offices were vandalized.



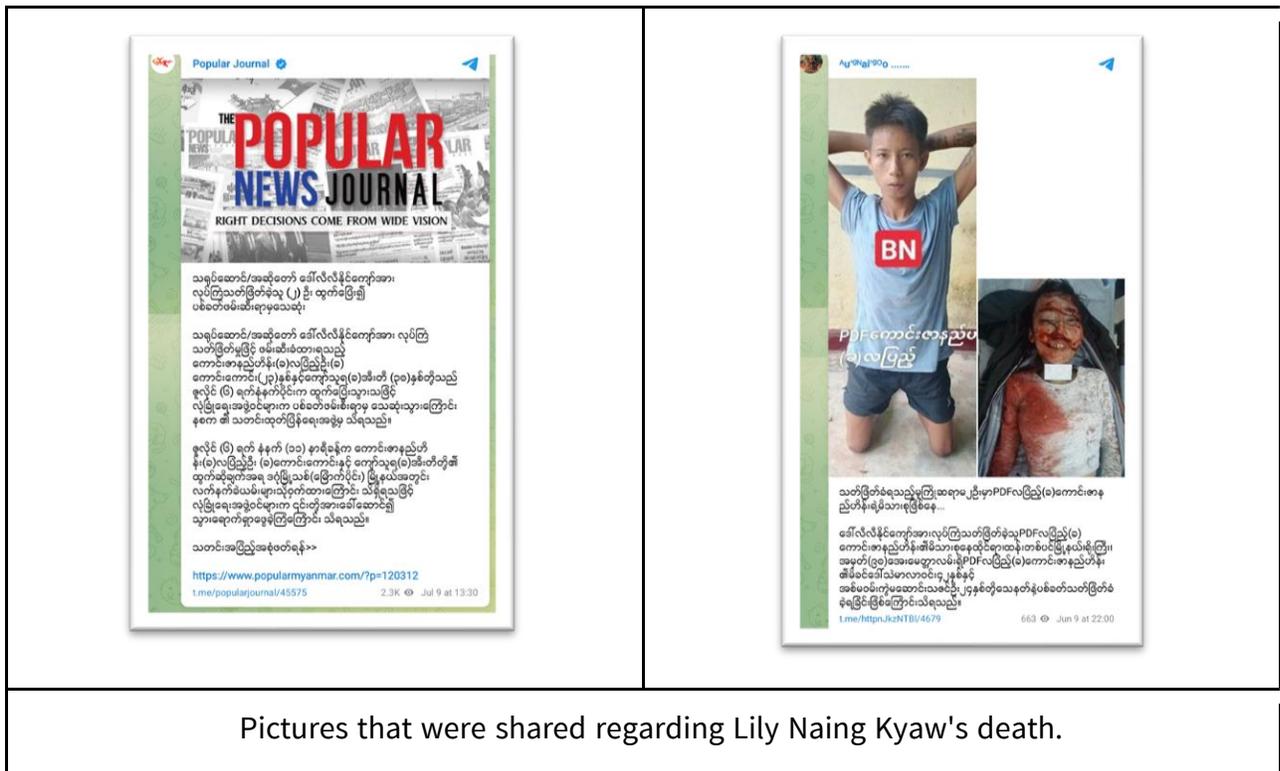
In response to this incident, U Aung Myo Min, the human rights minister from the NUG posted on social media, emphasizing the importance for media outlets to avoid combining separate events within a single article. While both events were real and significant, mixing them up undermines the gravity of each event and can lead to inaccurate data collection for researchers.



Some media outlets mistakenly inserted different photos while reporting Pazigygi massacre from Kanbalu, Sagaing.

**(f) Allegations that the perpetrators responsible for the murder of Lily Naing Kyaw were silenced by the PDF.**

On May 30, the singer Lily Naing Kyaw, who was known for her support of the military and ultra-nationalist views, was shot with a gun at No.265 (A), Room-7, Yan Shin Street, Ward 2, Yankin Township, Yangon. Following the shooting, she was transferred to a military hospital in Mingaladon for medical treatment. She passed away on June 6. After the assassination of Lily Naing Kyaw, there was an increase in the spread of hate speech by ultra-nationalists and pro-military supporters concerning this event. As a result, some civilians were arrested, others faced threats, and some lost their lives.

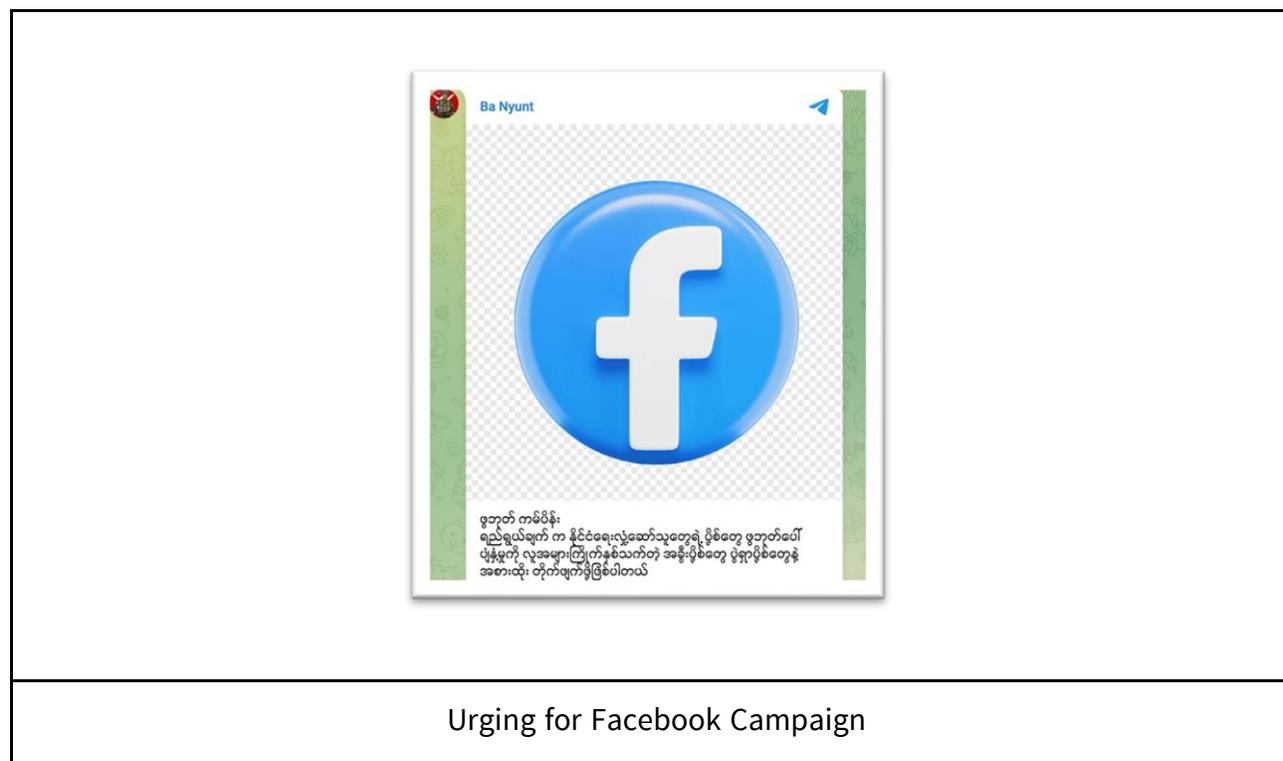


Pictures that were shared regarding Lily Naing Kyaw's death.

On June 6, the SAC announced the arrest of two young men named Kaung Zarni Hein and Kyaw Thura, stating their involvement in the killing of singer Lily Naing Kyaw. These arrests took place on June 4. After their arrest, the mother of Kaung Zarni Hein and his cousin were murdered in their home at No.90, Aye Metta Street, Yoe Gyi village, Htantabin Township,

on the evening of June 6 by an unidentified group of individuals. Pro-military propagandists quickly began claiming that the murder was orchestrated by the PDFs to silence the family members of Kaung Zarni Hein and to eliminate any potential witnesses. Additionally, they spread false news, alleging that the two detained young men were shot to death while attempting to flee.

**(g) Attempts were made to minimize the dissemination of anti-dictatorship content.**



Urging for Facebook Campaign

In late June 2023, pro-military propagandists urged their supporters to take action in countering anti-dictatorship content. The details of this campaign, titled "Facebook campaign," can be found at <https://archive.ph/4oKzi>. The objective of this campaign was to replace political activists' content with memes, humorous posts, and other light-hearted materials. Additionally, they advised their followers to hide posts from Khit Thit Media, Mizzima, Actor Min Maw Kun, and social media influencer Pencilo. They also encouraged avoiding likes and comments on posts related to the Spring Revolution, while suggesting

engaging with entertainment pages, celebrity news pages, and sharing at least ten fun or gossip-related posts per day.

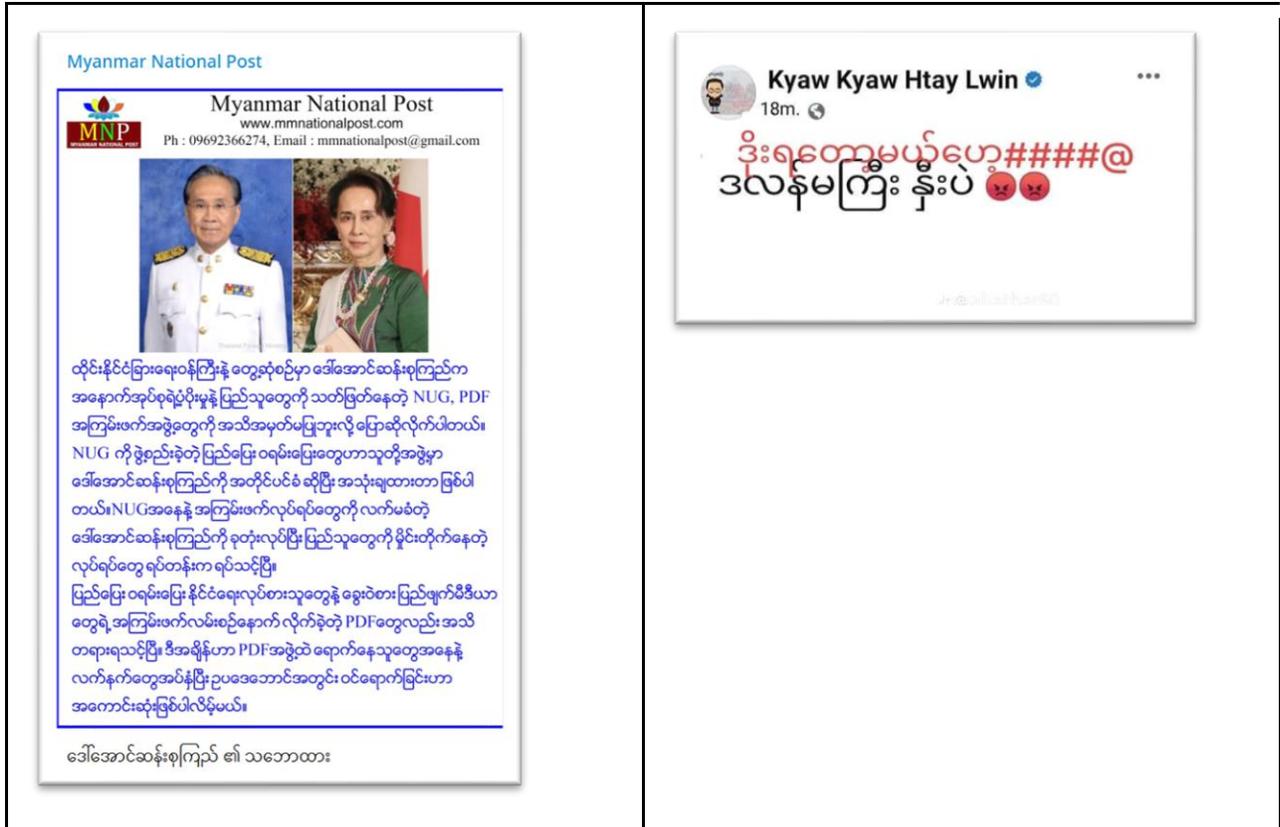
Since early 2023, Facebook has globally decreased the visibility of political content in users' newsfeeds. Exploiting this situation, propagandists have attempted to divert public engagement from politics and pro-democracy topics by promoting regular entertainment content. People's Spring Media, in an article, mentioned that 7th Sense movie production, led by Min Aung Hlaing's daughter, has launched several subsidiary TV channels that broadcast movies and celebrities' activities to distract the public. Some Facebook users and members of the revolution movement have reported seeing sponsored entertainment and celebrity gossip pages appearing in their newsfeeds under the "suggested for you" section.

**(h) Disinformation surrounding the meeting between Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and Don Pramudwinai, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand.**

Following the news of the meeting between State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who was arbitrarily detained by the military council, and Don Pramudwinai, Thailand's Minister of Foreign Affairs, there was an emergence of hate speech and disinformation surrounding the event. On July 12, Don Pramudwinai clarified that the meeting took place on July 9, 2023, with permission from the SAC.

Several false reports circulated, claiming that during the meeting, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi expressed her lack of support for the armed resistance of the People's Defense Forces (PDF) against the SAC and disapproved of the National Unity Government (NUG) and PDF's alleged involvement in civilian casualties with the backing of Western countries.

False news was disseminated through various online platforms as part of a propaganda campaign. Additionally, in certain cities, troops from the military council, general administration officers, and police officers distributed colorful flyers stating that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi did not support the NUG and the PDF.



Fabricated screenshots were circulated, falsely portraying them as transcriptions of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's speech, along with another fabricated screenshot of actor Min Maw Kun criticizing Daw Suu.

**(i) A TikTok contest was organized by supporters of the military.**

In February 2023, pro-military propagandists organized a contest that combined elements of propaganda and entertainment on the TikTok platform. Participants were required to create TikTok videos supporting the military and criticizing the resistance forces and media. The contest saw participation from military council troops, pro-military supporters, and ultra-nationalists, with the first prize being awarded to Sandy Myint Aung, an ultra-nationalist member of the USDP (Union Solidarity and Development Party). Supporters of the military announced that a second TikTok contest took place in September 2023, attracting over 1,700 contestants.

The TikTok video that won the first prize depicted a short story portraying independent media as spreading falsehoods, while emphasizing that pro-military propaganda Telegram channels were the only reliable sources of accurate news. The second TikTok contest gained attention even from resistance forces. There were submissions from various individuals, including military family members, soldiers, officers, students, and civilians, aiming to manipulate public perception by creating an illusion of widespread support for the military across different social classes.



TikTok Contest advertisement reposted on Telegram

**(j) Fake announcements caused a stir by falsely stating that the 50- and 100-kyat banknotes would no longer be considered legal tender.**

Two official-looking announcements were circulated, labeled as statement number 1/2023 and 27/2023, falsely claiming that the current 50- and 100-kyat banknotes would no longer be considered legal tender, starting from September 29 at 6 a.m., according to the Central Bank of Myanmar. However, these announcements were proven to be fake upon verification. The official website of the Central Bank of Myanmar issued a statement on September 30, confirming that the news circulating on social media about the cancellation of the 50- and 100-kyat notes was indeed false information.

Upon examination of the fake announcement with statement number (1/2023), it was discovered that there were no references to banknotes. Instead, the statement pertained to martial law and the legal translation commission. Furthermore, when statement number (27/2023) was investigated, no official statements with that number were found. This confirmed that the circulated announcements were indeed fabricated. The military-controlled TV channel, MWD, also addressed the issue during their 8 p.m. news on September 30, clarifying that the news regarding the small banknotes was false. Surprisingly, among those who initially shared the fake announcement, there was even a Meta Verified account. Consequently, many individuals began reposting the fabricated announcement from this account, assuming its credibility due to the blue verification mark.

During the early stages of the coup, disinformation regarding banknotes circulated in a different manner. False information spread claiming that the 5000 kyat and 10000 kyat banknotes would no longer be considered legal tender, and that the SAC would take action against individuals possessing more than 300,000 kyats. These were among the fabricated reports concerning banknotes that emerged following the military coup.





Fake announcements accompanied by photos circulated, falsely stating that certain banknotes would no longer be considered legal tender. (Photo - Think before you trust Boom Myanmar)

**(k) During the period of operations to “occupy the towns”, various forms of propaganda were employed.**

On October 27, 2023, Northern Shan state, Northern Alliance including the AA, TNLA, and MNDAA, launched Operation 1027 to resist the invasion by the SAC and to target individuals involved in online gambling. As a result, they successfully occupied six towns. Additionally, coordinated operations took place in the Karenni and Rakhine states in support of Operation 1027, leading to the resistance forces gaining control over SAC bases and certain regions. This is widely recognized as the most significant turning point in the military situation since the coup in 2021.

The SAC acknowledged the loss of certain regions due to the aforementioned operations, which led to dissatisfaction among military supporters. They expressed their frustration on social media, citing inadequate reinforcements from the military and instances of surrender from their own side. The network of prominent propagandists faced significant

challenges in maintaining their supporters, necessitating considerable effort. In an attempt to demonstrate support, pro-military rallies were organized 13 times in 9 townships. These rallies focused on criticizing the northern allies of the resistance forces on 10 occasions and condemning the interference of Western countries in Myanmar politics on 3 occasions.

To counter the Operation 1027, the SAC and military supporters employed five tactics:

1. They wrote articles about the battles, accompanied by fabricated news photos.
2. They established channels to share information.
3. They broadcasted videos and songs on military-owned TV channels to boost morale among their troops and supporters.
4. They spread propaganda based on ethnicity and religion.
5. They disseminated propaganda claiming that the instability in the country was not a result of internal issues but rather due to international interference.

Additionally, they made efforts to uphold their image as a beloved military force. This included launching Telegram channels to provide moral support and soliciting donations through propaganda channels to aid their troops.



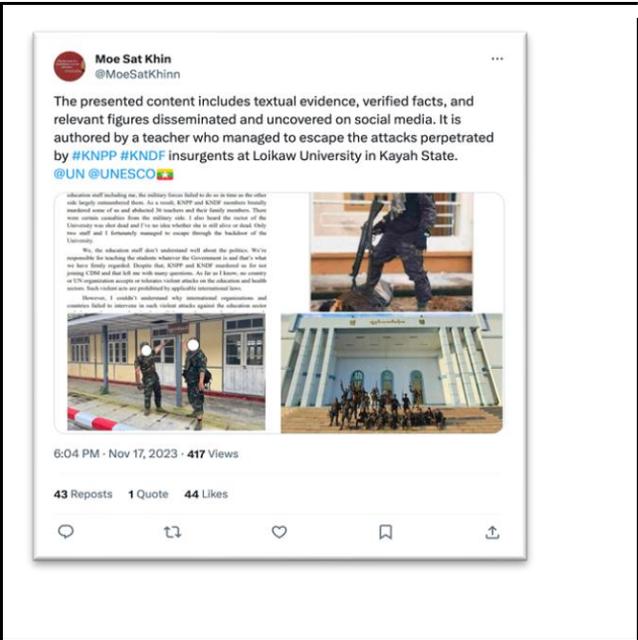
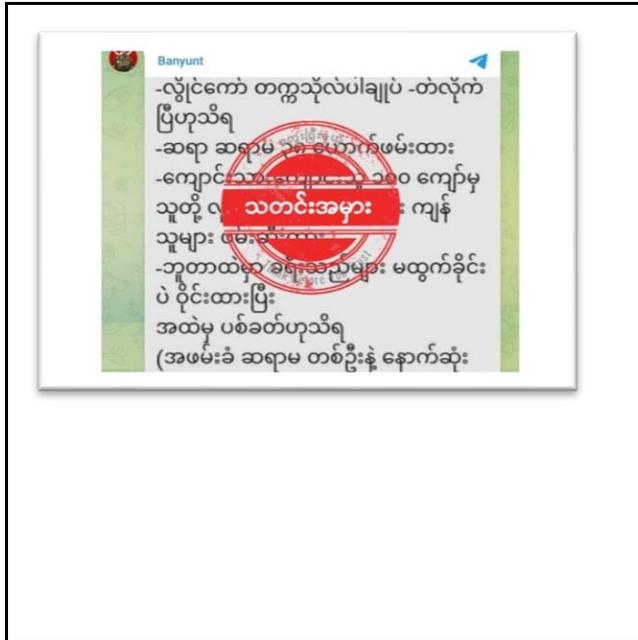
Telegram channel to send letters for SAC troops

Contents that spread among military supporters include claims such as atheists intentionally started the operations around the sacred time of Thadingyut Full Moon Day which Buddhists value, that it was not true that resistance forces were occupying cities, that

civilians were murdered during those raids and the military council troops were trying their best to save them, etc. As EAOs with the “occupy the towns” operations also created pages and channels on social media to release operational facts, imposter pages were created with similar names.

Among the content that circulated among military supporters, there were claims suggesting that atheists deliberately initiated the operations during the sacred time of Thadingyut Full Moon Day, which holds significance for Buddhists. Additionally, false information was spread, denying the occupation of towns and asserting that civilians were killed during the raids, while highlighting the efforts of the military council troops to protect them. As the EAOs involved in the “occupy the towns” operations established social media pages and channels to provide factual information about their operations, military supporters also created impostor pages with similar names to confuse the public.

Despite propaganda channels denying the confiscation of tanks during the operations, the EAOs released videos and pictures showing them riding those confiscated tanks. Additionally, in the operation carried out in Kayah State, the resistance forces gained control of Loikaw University. They ensured the safety of military council troops and non-CDM government officers residing in the university by relocating them to secure locations. However, pro-military propaganda channels made false claims that the Dean and faculty members of Loikaw University had been murdered by the resistance forces. These claims were posted on the Twitter platform with English translations, aiming to attract international attention. A few days later, the resistance forces released video footage refuting these claims, demonstrating that the faculty members were being well-treated. The Dean himself appeared in the footage, confirming his safety and well-being. Despite this clarification, the pro-military propagandists persisted and continued to share content suggesting that these faculty members would soon be eliminated by the resistance forces.



False content circulated, claiming that the Dean and faculty members of Loikaw University had been murdered.

## **Violations of freedom of expression**

Since the military coup on February 1, 2021, the people of Myanmar have endured widespread chaos and the oppressive rule of the junta. The fundamental rights of individual freedom and freedom of expression have been blatantly violated both on the ground and on social media platforms following the coup.

The SAC and their pro-military followers engaged in doxing, exposing the personal information of individuals actively involved in the Spring Revolution, democracy advocacy, and campaigns against the dictatorship. They shared this information on their propaganda Telegram channels with the intention of arresting these individuals, resulting in actual arrests taking place within a matter of hours.

As a consequence of the coup, there has been a relentless wave of detentions and killings targeting those who support and participate in revolutionary organizations. Human rights activists, journalists, members of student unions, and ordinary civilians have been consistently subjected to arrests. Furthermore, private and public properties have been forcibly confiscated by the ruling authorities.

Following the military coup, there were blatant violations of freedom of expression on social media platforms, with a focus on intensifying propaganda campaigns and garnering support from military followers. These followers unlawfully collected data and private information from individuals who criticized the military, held differing viewpoints, or supported the Spring Revolution through Telegram channels. The SAC troops then conducted illegal arrests and confiscations of property based on this information, an ongoing practice to this day.

Due to the activities of both the SAC and pro-military propaganda Telegram channels, a total of 884 men, 334 women, 1 LGBTQ individual, and 5 people of unknown gender were unlawfully detained, brought to court, and imprisoned. Additionally, 554 men, 599 women, 9 LGBTQ individuals, and 3 people of unknown gender, making a total of 1165 people, faced threats from these entities. Among these individuals, women particularly experienced the release of their private information to the public, which was done to tarnish their image and subject them to attacks.

In recent times, there has been a noticeable increase in the oppression faced by social media users. Particularly during the commemoration of the 2nd anniversary of the Spring Revolution in 2023, the military has been engaging in severe violations of human rights by arresting and oppressing individuals based on a single sentence or comment made on social media platforms.







People have been unlawfully arrested for their involvement in anti-dictatorship campaigns, while women's private information has been released without their consent.

## List of concerning terms

Following the 2021 military coup, Facebook adjusted its policies to combat the spread of disinformation and hate speech. As a result, accounts and pages that published or shared disinformation faced restrictions, and the reach of pages and accounts disseminating hate speech was limited or banned. This had an impact on the propaganda accounts and pages associated with the SAC, leading to a decrease in their presence. However, these propaganda accounts reemerged under new names on Facebook, masquerading as news media outlets to continue spreading their propaganda.

The strict policies implemented by Facebook prompted hate speech distributors to create new expressions as code words. They also utilized live streams and video files to propagate their propaganda. These accounts and pages engaged in spreading hate speech by using modified versions of expressions that conveyed discriminatory meanings based on religion, ethnicity, and gender.

There were certain expressions used to refer to the forces associated with the Spring Revolution. These included terms like "Chin Pa Dat terrorists" (ချင်းပဒတ်အကြမ်းဖက်သမားများ), "terrorists defacing Buddhism," "Kha Na Pa," "Ni Gain," "Ni Pain terrorists," "Face Mask," "Insein Household," "Pa La Ma Tha," "low lives," "Stray dogs," "mix bred Red/Black dog," "Pyin Cha," "Impure race/malicious race," "watermelon," "supplement," "divine brown dog," "Htamain Chon," "Paung Dine" (which referred to shootings and killings), and "bird pooping" (which referred to air strikes).

There were also expressions that targeted specific religions and races. These included terms like "Christian terrorists," "Christian armed forces," "Christ Riot," "Wat ma sar," "Khwar ka lay," "Myo Pwar Sate," "Charcoals," "Beards," "KL," "Kalar Wat Ma Sar," "terrorists of Buddhism," "Mut Kalar," and "Buddhist ni pate."

There were expressions used to target individuals based on their gender. These included terms such as "pro-terrorism bitch," "Pa Dat Law Ka Thu," "Make up," "Suck Kyi," "Pa dat ma," "malicious woman," "son of a skinny dog/Ah Chaut," "Pa ri pa dat ma," "bitch from other religion," "Bin ball ma," and "Daw Suu  Ma (Ka La Oat Aa)." These expressions not only lack sensitivity towards religion and gender but also display clear discrimination.

Furthermore, ethnic and resistance armed forces were unfairly labeled as terrorists through these expressions. It is crucial to take these actions seriously and explore effective countermeasures to prevent the emergence of dangerous situations.

It's crucial for social media researchers and civil society organizations to proactively monitor and keep tracking those terms. Although keyword filtered content moderation is effective in some way, the propagandists are still pushing the incitements with newly created keywords. For this reason, social media companies not only focus on the keyword filtered moderation but also focus on actor level designated removal.

## Recommendations

Facebook, which is now owned by Meta, took action against news media and business pages associated with the military following the coup. They removed these pages from their platform. Additionally, accounts and content that encouraged the brutal arrests and violations of Myanmar people by the military were also removed. Facebook also eliminated business-related pages that provided financial support to the military, based on reports from the United States, European countries, and other foreign governments. Furthermore, pages controlled by the state and military were also taken down to prevent the dissemination of harmful incitements. However, the military's propaganda machinery has not been completely halted on Facebook, and new methods need to be explored in order to effectively inhibit their activities.

Telegram, as described on their website, claims to support freedom of speech and has played a significant role in supporting democracy movements in various countries, including Myanmar, Iran, Russia, Belarus, and Hong Kong. However, they have shown reluctance in taking action to remove channels that pose a serious threat to people in Myanmar, freedom of expression and association, and the movement for democracy. While Telegram did make some attempts to ban certain channels like Han Nyein Oo, Banyunt, Kyaw Swar, Thazin Oo, stating that they violated their policies, these channels reappeared on Telegram and continued to spread harmful content that violated the platform's rules and regulations. Despite this, Telegram chose to ignore the issue and allowed these channels to persist. Additionally, channels that target women who oppose the military council, by spreading pornography, are still active on the Telegram platform.

Despite the efforts of human rights activists and civil society organizations in Myanmar, who closely monitor the content on Telegram, the company has failed to respond or take adequate action regarding the reports of 100 contents that violate their rules and regulations. If Telegram wishes to distance itself from being complicit in the war crimes, genocides, and human rights violations occurring in Myanmar, it must take responsibility by promptly and seriously addressing these contents and accounts, removing them in accordance with their own established rules and regulations.

Upon examining the narratives propagated by the military, compromised news media, and influencers engaged in pro-military propaganda, it becomes evident that their content is fueling hatred and conflicts based on religion and race. Civil society organizations promoting peace among ethnic minorities and individuals from diverse religious backgrounds should actively monitor and issue early warnings regarding such content. They should also initiate discussions to implement early response systems tailored to different regions.

To prevent such occurrences, local training sessions on media and information literacy need to be organized, with curricula adapted to the post-coup situation. These curricula should cover various aspects, including the current state of media freedom in Myanmar, the strategies and tactics employed by the military and pro-military propagandists, the weaponization of social media platforms, the dissemination methods of disinformation, the techniques of systematic propaganda through networks, and the tactics employed by media imposters. The aim is to provide people with an understanding of the prevailing circumstances and educate them accordingly.

Independent media should play a crucial role in educating the public about these matters by publishing informative articles. It is important for them to promptly fact-check the disinformation circulating on social media platforms to mitigate the harmful impacts of misinformation. Additionally, efforts should be made to enhance the localization of fact-checking initiatives, ensuring that they are accessible in various ethnic languages.

Both local and international organizations that support media and civil society should extend their assistance in localizing these initiatives. By providing increased support, these organizations can contribute to the dissemination of accurate information and the empowerment of local communities in Myanmar.

## Conclusion

The military regime in Myanmar disregarded the democracy movement and carried out a coup in 2021. Their justification for this action was based on unfounded claims of electoral fraud in the previous election. They resorted to brutal tactics against individuals supporting anti-dictatorship and pro-democracy activists. Furthermore, they engaged in spreading propaganda and disinformation to manipulate both the citizens of Myanmar and the international community.

To accomplish this, they not only utilized state-owned media outlets but also enlisted the help of social media users sympathetic to the military cause. This study examines the tactics employed by these online accounts engaged in pro-military propaganda, as well as the popular topics they promote. The objective of this paper has been to enhance understanding of the military's propaganda methods and provide assistance to tech companies, the international community, and media organizations in taking appropriate actions to address this issue.

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If you have any inquiries or suggestions concerning this paper, kindly reach out to us at [theredflagmedia@proton.me](mailto:theredflagmedia@proton.me).

# Online Terrorization

An Examination of the Myanmar Junta's  
Propaganda Tactic (2023)

- Briefing Paper -

The Red Flag, in collaboration with  
Beautifiers of Diversity Network, has  
authored this paper.