



## Journal of Human Rights and Peace Studies

journal homepage: <https://www.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/HRPS/index>



# Everyday Forms of Resistance and Political Killings in Post-coup Myanmar after 2021

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### ARTICLE INFO

### ABSTRACT

#### Article History:

Received: 10-Jun-2024

Revised: 12-Dec-2024

Accepted: 31-Dec-2024

#### Keywords:

Coup, Resistance,  
Killings, Junta

From 1962 until 2010, Myanmar lived under one military junta or another. This shaped how Myanmar people perceived the world and their behavior. This includes spelling the names of places in an officially prescribed way or adhering to specific clothing and hairstyles. This worldview and behavior remained unproblematic until the February 2021 coup. After the coup, some people changed their worldview and behavior; when writing, they started deviating from the official standardized spelling and calling places by their unofficial names. On one level, this can be interpreted as a variation of James Scott's "everyday forms of resistance," in which people who are not willing to join armed resistance groups revolt subtly against the state. On another level, this can be seen as an attempt on the part of anti-military individuals to single themselves out from military supporters. This division of us versus them is necessary. Since the February 2021 coup, political killings have been rampant throughout the country. This tendency to eliminate one's opponent is a dominant feature of Myanmar political culture, and the victims were picked out due to their differences in behavior vis-à-vis the perpetrators. To understand the political violence happening in Myanmar, it is necessary to grasp the role political killings play in post-coup Myanmar politics and how victims are selected and singled out based on their behavior. This paper will display the connection between "everyday forms of resistance" and "political killings" in post-coup Myanmar, mainly how "everyday forms of resistance" serve as criteria for selecting victims.

## **Introduction**

Two village officials in the Magway area were killed in March 2024. They were both around 50 years old and were said to be forcing people to join the military under the People's Military Service Law, which was widely hated when imposed by the junta (Duncan & Firn, 2024). These killings were not unexpected. Magway is one of the areas where the local People's Defense Forces are powerful, and the officials' attempt to apply the People's Military Service Law doomed them. They are also typical of the political situation in Myanmar after the coup. In 2021, about 200 village and ward officials were killed (The Irrawaddy-Burmese Edition, 2021). Others resigned on their own volition to avoid endangering their lives for the despised regime. To an outsider, these acts of violence against civilians by local rebel groups may seem criminal. However, these killings of village and ward officials have their rationale.

The killings are a different aspect of the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), which started with the vast protests and rallies that happened soon after the military took over the government on 1 February 2021. The main goal of the CDM movement was to disrupt the junta's ruling system by refusing to provide its most vital resource: people. Therefore, thousands of students, teachers, medical workers, and civil servants eagerly joined the movement, leading to the almost total stoppage of most government departments' functions. The CDM is only one of the different tactics that anti-coup activists have used to attack the military junta. Besides using the strategies from 20<sup>th</sup>-century anti-colonial and post-independence anti-dictator movements and tactics learned from other countries' social movements, the anti-coup protesters and activists applied a modified version of what James Scott called "everyday forms of resistance."

The term "everyday forms of resistance" was initially used to describe the ongoing struggle between the peasant class and the state authorities, "who seek to extract labor, food, taxes, rents, and interest from them" (Scott, 1985). The peasant class resists by using subtle and common strategies, such as delaying, pretending, complying falsely, stealing, feigning ignorance, slandering, setting fires, sabotage, and so on (Scott, 1985). Likewise, Kerkvliet (2009) defined "everyday forms of resistance" as "the actions people take that express their dislike, anger, outrage or opposition to what they see as unjust, unlawful demands on them by more powerful classes and status positions or institutions." Scott (1985) also distinguished this type of resistance from "the overt defiance" that could "trigger a faster and more brutal reaction" from state agents. The CDM movement and the protests on the streets were supplemented by various other methods, such as avoiding buses operated by UEC or not using sim cards and broadband services of MyTel, which has strong ties to the military (Burma Campaign UK, 2023).

However, the junta reacted with detentions and severe prison terms for CDM participants

(Maw, 2023), compelling others to resume their abandoned jobs or escape to free border areas. Street demonstrations were confronted with violence, including deadly forces against some protesters. The violence prompted protesters to adopt violent self-protection measures. By May 2021, protests mainly had vanished from major urban centers as protesters-turned-revolutionaries armed themselves against the junta—only a few reached border areas for firearms and military training from Ethnic Armed Groups (EAOs). Most remain in junta-controlled areas engaged in "everyday forms of resistance" to deprive the junta of resources or impede its efforts to normalize the country. In this context, everyday actions became charged with political significance, regardless of whether they directly aided the junta. While Myanmar's revolutionary methods have been examined in various literature, studying "everyday forms of resistance" has been largely neglected.

As the junta faced more violent resistance from the CDM movement, which still aimed to paralyze the junta's rule, the revolutionaries' demands also changed (Wiesmann, 2025). Along with the clashes between junta forces and armed groups, there has been an increase in the number of killings of civilians accused of supporting or collaborating with the junta. These included civil servants, administrators, militia members, and informants working for the junta. The role and process of these political killings and how the victims are portrayed on social media after their deaths are not well studied. This paper will address this gap by looking at the "everyday forms of resistance" in post-coup Myanmar and their link to political killings and assassinations. This paper focuses on how people killed for political reasons are targeted based on their perceived failure to follow the "everyday forms of resistance" against the junta.

This paper has three sections. The following section reviews the literature on everyday resistance, political killings, and post-coup Myanmar politics. The subsequent section describes the research method and the study's limitations. The last section examines and explains the "everyday forms of resistance" that people use to challenge the junta and how they relate to historical anti-colonial and anti-authoritarian struggles. The fourth section focuses on political killings in post-coup Myanmar and how they are linked to "everyday forms of resistance." The last section summarizes the paper and suggests directions for future research on post-coup Myanmar politics.

## **Research Question and Objective**

The main research question of this paper is "What is the connection between two of the most significant phenomena in post-coup Myanmar: 'everyday forms of resistance' and 'political killings'?" To answer the question, the paper will first analyze the varieties of "everyday forms of

resistance": what they are, how people practice them, and what relevance they hold for post-coup Myanmar politics. Secondly, the paper will analyze the political-based killings and explain the rationale behind some of them. The Findings and Discussion section will synthesize the two main components by systematically linking them. In particular, the section will argue that "everyday forms of resistance" and "political killings" have a strong connection in post-coup Myanmar. The connection appears because assassinations and summary executions are committed upon victims who are perceived to have not practiced "everyday forms of resistance." This word is not to suggest that "everyday forms of resistance" are similar to "political killings" but rather to showcase the connection between them by arguing that the former provides criteria for choosing whom to assassinate.

Researchers in Myanmar are primarily focused on the repressive and discriminatory measures, laws, and policies imposed upon Myanmar people, especially the Rohingya, by the military government (Cheesman 2017; Khemanihthathai 2023; Walton 2013) and its repercussions on ethnic politics. There is also extensive literature on the armed engagement between the military and the rebel groups and the dynamics behind this conflict (Brenner, 2024). Mra and Hedstrom (2024) looked into how women employed gendered norms and values to resist the military junta but stopped examining the vast repertoire of "everyday forms of resistance." This paper aims to fill this gap and examine the dynamics of the post-coup Myanmar conflict more thoroughly.

## Literature Review

Many scholars have studied how politics and everyday life are connected. In his influential book *Weapons of the Weak*, Scott claimed that scholars focused too much on peasant rebellion against landlords rather than on the "everyday forms of resistance" peasants used to avoid "those who seek to extract labor, taxes, rents and interests". Scott (1985) then explained how these two ways of resisting were similar and different:

Everyday resistance most strikingly departs from other forms of resistance in its implicit disavowal of public and symbolic goals. Where institutionalized politics is formal, overt, and concerned with systematic de jure change, everyday resistance is informal, often covert, and concerned largely with immediate de facto gains.

Kerkvliet (2009) defines "everyday forms of resistance" as low-profile and nonpolitical actions by unorganized people. Scott (1985) and Kerkvliet (2009) distinguish these actions from organized, visible, and systematic forms of resistance. Some studies agree with this distinction.

Eidse et al. (2016) show how street vendors in Hanoi avoided state agents and other vendors using "everyday forms of resistance." Geest and Nys-Ketels (2019) describe how the urban poor in Nagpur resisted or coped with government slum-upgrading projects. In both cases, people used "everyday forms of resistance" for survival and short-term improvement, not long-term change. Clothly and Koku (2019) study on the internet practices of Uyghurs in China and abroad also supports Scott and Kerkvliet's observation.

However, recent studies have demonstrated that "everyday forms of resistance," such as patronizing a particular shop whose owner shares a specific political stance, can lead to a political transformation in urban contexts. Tang and Cheng (2022) analyzed how actions in everyday life, such as consumer practices, can be used to demand lasting political changes, "such as regime change – from a semi-democratic regime to a fully democratic one – and equal political rights in electing the chief executive and the legislature." In the early 1990s, consumers in Western countries avoided beverages produced by a soft drink company. Two breweries who had previously agreed to the Myanmar junta's offer to invest in the Southeast Asian nation pulled their businesses out of Myanmar due to protest against the military government's abuse of its citizens (Charney, 2009). Although these two movements had limited effects, they still illustrate the potential of "everyday forms of resistance" to achieve more permanent political change. In this article, I will explain how the people of Myanmar employed "everyday forms of resistance" to overthrow the military junta and establish a more liberal government.

Moreover, there is an ongoing debate on whether to prioritize intent or practice in resistance studies. Vinthagen and Johansson (2013) summarize views from both sides. In particular, they explain the arguments proposed by Scott (1985), who prioritized intent over practice, and de Certeau (1984), for whom practice is more important than intention. Because of Scott's belief that "the actions of an actor who intends to resist should be defined as resistance regardless of the outcome of their actions," Vinthagen and Johansson (2013) stated, "[he] is forced to detect intention in creative and indirect ways in his...investigations of resistance". They also provide a summary of de Certeau's argument (1984), who views subaltern resistance as nearly invisible, hard to locate, and employs resources and conditions imposed upon the subaltern population by the dominant system, meaning that their capacity to resist is limited by their immediate environment (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013). Although they provide an alternative analysis in which power is taken into account, this paper would argue instead that, when analyzing everyday forms of resistance in post-coup Myanmar, it is important to take into account both the intention, as Scott has argued, and mundane, repetitive practice, as de Certeau (1984) had proposed.

Many scholars have studied political killing that happens not only in Myanmar but around the world. In Burma/Myanmar Studies, the 1947 assassination of Aung San and other cabinet members before independence has been the subject of much research (Anglene, 2001; Maung, 1962). The killing is also seen as "a tool of removing the power of resistance" outside Myanmar (Regassa, 2025). This paper adds to the literature on "everyday forms of resistance" and political killing by arguing that a person can be killed for their behavior - if they follow or break the norms set by a group or an institution. We will explain this argument more in the second section.

### **Methodology, Limitations, and Scope**

The author used Facebook as our primary source of information since it is the most popular social media platform in Myanmar, where it "has essentially become a substitute for the internet" (Huang, 2020). Many Facebook groups and pages in the Burmese language, both political and nonpolitical, increased their political and coup-related posts after 1 February 2021, and some group administrators and moderators even changed their cover photos to show their political views (Faxon et al., 2023). Moreover, new Facebook pages emerged after the coup to share political content; notably, these pages posted lists of celebrities and public figures to be socially shamed for being silent on the coup and informed people about which restaurants, brands, shopping malls, and bars to avoid. Since Facebook was the leading platform for sharing information on the coup, we gathered most of our primary data from Facebook. Besides Facebook, this paper collected data from some news agencies that focused on Myanmar and posted information on their websites.

The author used specific keywords to collect data on Facebook to find the needed information. We searched public posts from groups, pages, and celebrities to gather information on which brands and celebrities to avoid, how to evade taxes and utility bills, and what alternatives to use for products and services linked to the junta. Then, the author individually sorted them, classified them, examined the most relevant ones, and cited some examples in our paper. The author considered a post suitable if it got more than a hundred reactions from Facebook users. The categories used were (a) posts that encouraged people not to comply with the junta and to resist or hinder its unpopular policies and laws, (b) posts to boycott brands, products and services associated with the military, and (c) suggestions on how to achieve the previous two categories. Analyzing the posts gave a general idea of what "everyday forms of resistance" people employed to oppose the junta covertly.

Information on civilians killed by rebels came from Facebook and news websites. The author analyzed the posts and news articles for the reasons for their killings, looking for the

actions of the victims that, to the rebels, made them seem supportive of the junta. The paper groups the reasons into three categories: (a) enforcing an unpopular policy, (b) telling people to follow the junta's orders, and (c) using boycotted places, products, or services. These methods are the opposite of how people resist the junta in everyday life. The paper shows data on everyday resistance and killings. It concludes that victims are seen as pro-junta or not by how they go against everyday resistance, and this leads to illegal killings of people who are not pro-revolution. This paper explores and examines how "everyday forms of resistance" affect post-coup Myanmar politics and The Spring Revolution and how they relate to the assassinations of apparent junta supporters. The paper will not cover the killing and jailing of alleged revolutionaries by the junta, which is a topic for future research on the junta's logic and methods of oppression. The paper also acknowledges that due to capacity limitations, it could not perform a quantitative analysis of every assassination of junta officials and the reasons behind each of them. Future research would benefit from a quantitative analysis of how many junta supporters have been killed since the coup.

### **Definition of "Every Form of Resistance" and "Political Killing" in Post-coup Myanmar**

Although the early days of anti-coup resistance were dominated by "carnival-like rallies" (Head, 2022), they became highly deadly after the junta forces started employing violence to crack down on protestors. The latter, in turn, retaliated by initially utilizing self-protective measures and, later, by taking up arms against the junta with the assistance of long-established ethnic forces. By May 2021, virtually no protests were occurring on the streets of major urban areas and had been replaced by armed resistance (Frontier Myanmar, 2021). Moreover, it became hazardous for people to stage demonstrations in big cities like Yangon and Mandalay, as showcased by the "Pan Pin Gyi Street Incident." A military vehicle intentionally ran into a group of protestors in Yangon on 5 December 2021, followed by live firing into the crowd, leading to five deaths, three wounded and 15 arrests (Myanmar Now, 2021). A female protestor who participated in a flashmob protest recounted: "When I leave home to join a protest, I have to prepare my mind for the possibility that I might be killed" (Frontier Myanmar, 2022). In this situation, it is only natural for the disgruntled population to stage "everyday forms of resistance," as the risks are much lower in this covert variety of revolt.

Generally, everyday forms of resistance in post-coup Myanmar can be divided into two broad categories: political and nonpolitical. Political forms are when people go through their everyday activities during a particular period, knowing very well that their actions have political implications. These activities include refusing to leave one's home during silent strike days,



volunteering or working at rebel-affiliated institutions, and boycotting specific products due to their connection with the junta. Details will be provided in later sections. Analyzing everyday political forms of resistance is similar to following Scott's emphasis on "intentions and values and purposefulness that condition [the rebels'] acts" (1985). However, following Vinthagen and Johansson's (2013) advice, I supplemented my analysis of intentional everyday forms of resistance with nonpolitical ones. They include bribing officials to achieve particular goals, utilizing the junta's public services to get by with one's life, and so on.

The second concept the paper will analyze—and connect with the first concept/everyday resistance—is "political killings." By connecting them, it is not suggesting that these two are synonymous and that "political killings" ought to be treated as a variety of "everyday forms of resistance." Rather, it argues that "everyday forms of resistance" play a significant role in "political killings," providing criteria for victim selection. The paper argues that political-related assassinations are committed on people perceived as failing to practice everyday forms of resistance. Most are villagers and ward administrators responsible for implementing the military junta's unpopular policies. Moreover, as detailed below, everyday forms of resistance occasionally gave rise to violence. By linking the two concepts, the paper fills an essential gap in contemporary Burma studies literature.

## **The 2021 Coup and Everyday Forms of Resistance**

### **Political Everyday Forms of Resistance**

On 1 February 2021, the Myanmar military seized power by arresting civilian leaders, including President Win Myint, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, and other elected lawmakers gathered in the capital, Naypyitaw, on the eve of the parliament's opening. Soon after, the non-violent Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) emerged to disrupt the coup. The CDM's primary goal was to paralyze the junta's administration by refusing to work for them. Like Scott's peasants, who employed various forms of hidden resistance against exploiters (Scott, 1985), CDM participants quit their jobs and sometimes intentionally damaged property to impede the junta's operations. Even those outside government employment could join the movement. Min Ko Naing, a prominent activist in the 1988 uprising against General Ne Win's regime, explained in an RFA interview how to participate in the CDM while cautioning against the junta's persecution:

The CDM is about more than just employees who stop going to work. It also means not paying taxes, not buying lottery tickets, and boycotting products made by military-controlled firms. It means boycotting any activities that could



contribute to their revenue. The CDM participants also need to change their activities because the number of CDM participants being persecuted has grown (Radio Free Asia, 2021).

The CDM is the earliest *political* everyday form of resistance deployed against the junta. Strategies to curtail the junta's revenue sources included refusing to pay taxes and utility bills (electricity and water) for services provided by government departments. Throughout 2021, virtual and offline campaigns urged people to weaken the junta's grip on the country through these actions. In agricultural groups, farmers declared they would only repay agrarian loans given by the ousted civilian government upon the return to power of "Mother Suu and President U Win Myint" (Faxon et al., 2023).

The resignation of civil servants and refusal to pay taxes, bills, and loans were coupled with sabotage and intimidation of those who continued working under the junta. Sabotage ranged from hindering government operations to destroying materials that could be used against anti-coup protestors and CDM participants. Railway workers employed CDM tactics, lying on tracks to stop trains while raising three-fingered salutes (Figure 1). At the same time, young protesters destroyed CCTV cameras to prevent the junta from tracking their movements. Civil servants who remained loyal to the junta were subjected to intimidation through occasional bombings, shootings, and arson attacks on government offices, sending the message that "if you value your life, leave your workplace." Although these activities cannot be classified as "everyday forms of resistance" *per se*, " they complemented the latter.



Figure. 1. CDM railway workers lying in front of a locomotive, raising a three-fingered salute.

CDM goes beyond non-cooperation with the junta's administrative and fiscal systems. It

also involves rejecting the junta's aid. For example, some people turned down COVID-19 vaccines offered by the junta in late 2021 and early 2022, aiming to make "a political statement against the February 2021 coup d'etat" (Liu, 2022). In addition to avoiding taxes and the junta's aid, another aspect of the movement is to stop buying products and services from businesses and providers that have close ties with the junta. Activists and anti-military figures shared extensive lists of junta-related companies on social media and strongly warned people not to deal with junta-related businesses.

As a result, especially in early 2021, when the revolutionary momentum was strong, retail stores and eateries that sold boycotted products also faced boycotts, as they were seen as supporting the coup. A popular bar in Yangon that young people frequented announced on its Facebook page that it sold only two brands of beer, Tiger and Heineken, and it had never sold Myanmar Beer before or after the coup, which received hundreds of love reactions and comments praising the act (Figure 2). The businesses that were boycotted include not only companies and enterprises that are directly owned by the military, senior military officials, or their family members, such as MyTel and Myanmar Beverage, run by the military-owned Myanmar Economic Cooperation (MEC), but also businesses that belong to foreign corporations and firms that pay taxes to the junta for their continued operations in Myanmar. One public Facebook post with 304 reactions expressed sadness that people are still reluctant to boycott businesses that give money to the junta:

Although there are warnings against going to PTT's subsidiary Café Amazon, the company that found millions [of dollars] for the junta, and even though the name of the Café Amazon on Google Maps is edited to "Bloody Café," those with amnesia are still comfortable with going there.

Based on the classification scheme the paper presented above, these can be considered as instances of the second type of everyday resistance.



Figure. 2. A post by a popular bar in Yangon reassured its customers that it had never sold Myanmar Beer and would never do so.

On social media, people suggested using products and services from businesses that are not overtly linked to the military. They advised using Telenor and Ooredoo sim cards and internet services instead of MyTel (army-owned) and MPT (under the Ministry of Transportation and Telecommunication) sim cards and FTTH services. They campaigned to ignore calls from MyTel numbers, which typically start with "096," and offered alternatives to buses run by military-linked companies. They also recommended drinking Tiger and Tuborg beers instead of Myanmar Beer. These actions could be categorized as the third type of "everyday forms of resistance" within our established classification system.

Like the CDM movement, the boycott campaigns also involved sabotage and vandalism of businesses linked to the junta. For example, in October 2021, a Yangon bus run by Omni Focus, owned by former dictator General Ne Win's grandson Aye Ne Win, was set on fire with a firebomb by urban guerillas. They said it was revenge for junta forces burning over 160 houses in a Chin State town (The Irrawaddy, 2021). In April 2021, explosions hit military-related businesses in Bago, a city near Yangon, including a MyTel office (The Irrawaddy, 2021). This case is another instance that showcases the blurry boundary between "everyday forms of resistance" and violence.

Using words and terms plays a significant role in post-coup Myanmar's political landscape. Historically, during the late 20th century, people in Myanmar used a specific language to resist the military junta covertly. In 1989, the military changed the country's name in English from "Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma" to "Union of Myanmar" and altered place names to align with their original Burmese pronunciation (Sealth, 2019). However, some governments, activist groups, and news media outlets continue to use the old forms as a protest against the

regime's unilateral decision (Sealth, 2019). For example, in 2014, *The Irrawaddy*, a popular news outlet, rejected the Ministry of Information's demand to spell its name as "Ayeyarwaddy," citing freedom of expression (The Irrawaddy, 2014). In another instance, a Shan man actively chose to identify as Shan after growing up as a de facto Bamar, defying state coercion (Prasse-Freeman, 2023).

Names and terms are still powerful and influential after the 2021 coup. The NUG, the parallel government set up by deposed lawmakers, continues to call Win Myint and Aung San Suu Kyi President and State Counsellor, respectively. Win Myint is still the legal leader of the NUG, while its current leader, Duwa Lashi La, only acts as the vice president of the shadow cabinet. Recently, several Myanmar organizations and civil societies strongly criticized and disagreed with the Thai Prime Minister's use of "former President and State Counsellor" to refer to Win Myint and Aung San Suu Kyi.

Likewise, words and terms differ in Facebook stories from pro-junta and pro-democracy media. Pro-junta media calls the junta by its official name, the State Administration Council (SAC). Pro-democracy media uses "the military council," a more negative term. Pro-junta media uses the formal title "Senior General" for the junta's leader, Min Aung Hlaing. Anti-junta media uses his acronym, MAL, or "the military leader MAL." These examples show the significance of words and terms in Myanmar politics after the coup.

The CDM movement is the modern version of the general strikes that students and oil field workers used in the 1920, 1936, and 1938 movements against British colonial rule (Egreteau, 2023). Like its ancestors, which aimed to stop the British government's administrative system from functioning, the CDM movement hopes to block off ways for the junta to access human and financial resources. Likewise, in the 1930s, Burmese nationalists used boycotts of various imported goods as a strategy in their fight against British colonialism. Ikeya (2011) described how boycotting foreign-made shoes was central to the anti-colonial struggle;

Western shoes, after all, were at the heart of the "no footwear campaign" against the wearing of shoes by foreigners at pagodas and were the source of one of the most publicized disputes between the British and the Burmese, seen by the colonizers and the colonized alike as emblematic of the anti-colonial struggle.

In addition, since the country is under the harsh rule of the military junta, people refused to normalize the situation by shunning places of fun and entertainment such as cinemas, fairs, and festivals. People often use the phrase "the country is sick" to express what they see as an

unusual condition they and their country face. The CDM movement and the boycott campaigns do not directly challenge the junta; they do not involve groups of armed rebels attacking a base controlled by junta forces. Instead, they are the more modern and urban version of what peasants had used to resist cruel landlords and ruthless rulers. Instead of foot-dragging, slowing down the work pace, and hiding surplus grains from landlords and tax collectors, people in contemporary Myanmar have used changing consumer practices, avoiding public entertainment, and leaving their workplaces to achieve their desired political change. Since the resistance tactics that the people of Myanmar use are based on, intertwined with, and inseparable from everyday life, and since these everyday tactics make up a significant part of the people's overall revolutionary strategy against the junta, it is reasonable to conclude that these "everyday forms of resistance" play an important role in Myanmar's revolutionary landscape.

People who join the CDM movement, leave their jobs, refuse to pay taxes and, accept aid from the junta, and avoid buying or using anything linked to the junta are not only showing their opposition to the removal of civilian leaders and the military's takeover of state power. They are also using a revolutionary strategy, along with protest marches and, later, open armed resistance, to "put pressure on the government by challenging its legitimacy and control" (Chiu, 2025) and, after the fall of the junta, to create a nation based on "more inclusive democratic political visions" (Ryan et al., 2024). By using "everyday forms of resistance," the people of Myanmar are not looking for short-term relief in their living conditions or temporary compromises from the junta. Still, they want to achieve more lasting and radical change in their country's political system.

### **Nonpolitical Everyday Forms of Resistance**

Another type of "everyday form of resistance" is nonpolitical. As Vinthagen and Johansson (2013) argue, "Why should resistance have to be pure? Why is it not allowed to be 'contaminated' with other motives or effects?" Following their argument, this article will detail a particular aspect of "nonpolitical" everyday forms of resistance: bribing officials to achieve particular aims. As the military always emphasizes itself as more upright and upstanding than the preceding NLD government, this can be interpreted as undermining the official discourse.

Life after the coup is hard for the Myanmar people, mainly due to the oppressive actions of government officials and contracting opportunities for the mobility of Myanmar people. After the coup, it is reported that government officials became increasingly opportunistic and delivered services only after receiving a bribe. When the NLD government was in power, it took corruption charges seriously. For instance, the chief minister of the Tanintharyi Region was impeached and

jailed for misusing her position (Middleton & Win, 2021). Moreover, there were mechanisms to keep government officials' activities in check at that time. For example, the chief minister of Kayah State was suspended from his position following pressure from the regional parliament (Myanmar Now, 2020). After the coup, however, it became necessary for people to bribe government officials and soldiers to get through their daily lives. The following are the testimonies and experiences of Myanmar people's encounters with government officials, soldiers, and police.

An article by *Frontier Myanmar* details the experience of a person who traveled to a city in southern Myanmar to reapply for his lost ID card. The person had bribed the soldiers watching the checkpoint along the way while paying an exuberant amount of money to officials at the Immigration Office (Frontier Myanmar, 2021). Moreover, since the announcement of the National Service Law, it has been reported that young people encounter increasing obstacles when they try to leave the country or live abroad, either for a visit (The Star, 2024), work (The Nation's Editorial, 2024) or education (Naing, 2024). To overcome this, they have to bribe immigration officials at the office, and the fee ranges from MMK 100,000 to 200,000 (Democratic Voice of Burma [DVB], 2024).

Moreover, the military has drafted thousands of people into the war effort. For instance, the first round of the draft enlisted around 5,000 people, with more to come (Voice of America [VOA], 2024), while those who resisted the conscription were arrested (Myanmar Now, 2024), prompting thousands of people to flee the country (Kung, 2024). Those who have the financial resources to bribe officials to evade conscription do not flee, and the bribes range from MMK 500,000 to 50 million (Ei, 2024). Moreover, village and ward administrators also organize efforts to collect money from outsiders and hire outsiders as replacements, as in the case of Myeik Township (Burma News International, [BNI], 2024). When the military needed recruits, using bribes to flee the country and purchasing conscription replacements amounted to an everyday form of resistance; however, it impacted the peers of the people involved. Moreover, the military has been trying to wipe out corruption among officials (Ministry of Information, 2024). Bribes are a unique example of how people subvert the order the military is building.

The following section will discuss the killings of civil servants and alleged junta supporters and informants, examine how the targets were selected, and how these processes are related to the "everyday forms of resistance." In doing so, it will argue that the criteria for selecting victims are closely connected with everyday forms of resistance. As described above, this does not suggest that violence itself is a form of everyday resistance but rather showcases the way the boundary between everyday forms of resistance and violence has become blurred in post-coup Myanmar.



## **Political Killings and Selection of Victims**

Myanmar has a long history of political killing and assassination. These crimes happened often in different eras. During the Bagan Era, for example, while asleep, King Alaungsithu was killed by his son, Narathu. Later, during the colonial era, Burmese rebels who hated British rule killed and chopped up some British civil servants and military officers in remote places. They hoped that this would make Britain give up on Burma. In the 1930s, some rebels led by Hsaya San burned government papers and cut off the heads of village leaders who worked for the government. They mainly attacked people who represented the state (Saha, 2021; Aung-Thwin, 1985).

The 2021 coup led to violent crackdowns by the junta on the nonviolent protests that filled the streets of urban areas. People who opposed the coup switched to armed resistance, and one of the first armed actions against the junta forces in mid-2021 involved guerilla warfare and attacking small military outposts and stations. Following the example of early resistance against British rule, one of the first clashes between the rebel forces happened in Chin State on 24 April 2021, when the junta forces did not release arrested civilians, causing three deaths from the junta side (International Crisis Group, 2021; The Irrawaddy, 2021). Chins, members of the ethnic group who live in Chin State, are traditional mountain people known for their excellent hunting skills. They used conventional homemade rifles called *tuu mi*, "made from different parts" (Vice Staff, 2021). With these weapons, they started one of the first confrontations against the junta forces. More than a hundred years ago, frontier areas, including what is now Chin State, were the most persistent in their resistance against the British colonial rule:

By the latter half of the 1890s, however, the part of the resistance that was more strictly under Burman's leadership and represented the monarchy and the old order had been crushed. Military resistance in an organized fashion no longer threatened the British in large areas of the plains. However, it was only the beginning of pacification, for the Shans, Kachins, Karennis, and Chins had to be dealt with in the hills (Aung-Thwin, 1985).

By April 2021, the CDM movement was at its peak, local armed groups were forming nationwide, and the junta's governing mechanism had virtually collapsed. As previously described, people across the country expressed their desire for democratic rule through street demonstrations, armed resistance, sabotage, and "everyday forms of resistance" like mass resignations, altered consumer practices, and refusal to cooperate with government departments.



Initially, in February, people sympathized with police and soldiers, viewing them as fellow victims of military abuse and discrimination, a perception confirmed by testimonies of defectors (Kyed & Ah Lynn, 2024). One defector described the Myanmar military as "a system of monarchs and slaves" (Myanmar Now, 2021). Early in the coup, people offered security forces flowers and urged them to join the movement. The use of makeshift weapons was generally avoided to encourage defections and maintain the reputation of peaceful protests. A widely shared post praised nonviolent resistance, featuring photos of protesters laying flowers at the feet of police (Figure. 3).

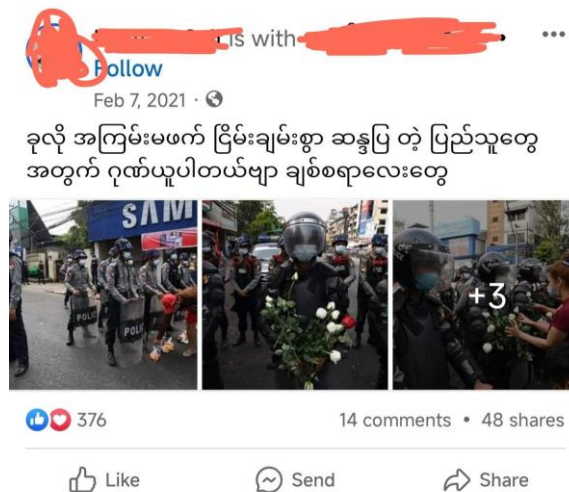


Figure. 3. The post applauding protestors for adhering to non-violent protest.

However, as the crackdown became more severe, peaceful protests turned into more violent confrontations with soldiers and police who used tear gas and bullets. The mood changed towards more brutal treatment of those who did not desert. The 24 April 2021 incident in Chin State can be seen as targeting junta forces who not only stayed loyal but also took part in the unfair arrests of civilians. These forces were attacked for not doing the expected everyday forms of resistance, namely desertion and support for the people.

Political killings in post-coup Myanmar bore down not only on those perceived as enacting the junta's contentious policies but also on those deemed responsible for the populace's anguish. Among the most reviled directives was the activation of the 2010 National Service Law on 10 February 2024. Crafted by Senior-General Than Shwe's State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in late 2010, just before the Thein Sein-led quasi-civilian government's ascent to power, its enforcement lay dormant until the junta breathed life into it earlier this year. The aftermath was swift: a mass exodus ensued, with thousands of youths clamoring to flee the nation, forming endless queues outside the Royal Thai Embassy in Yangon (The Nation's Editorial, 2024). Major-General Zaw Min Tun, the junta's spokesperson and Vice-Minister of Information, disclosed in a

BBC interview that recruitment would commence after the annual Thingyan festival in late April (BBC News, 2024). However, as whispers and unverified reports of arbitrary detentions and forced conscription surfaced as early as February, anxiety rippled through the populace. In Yangon, young men were summoned by their ward and village administrators for potential enlistment.

Though activated by Min Aung Hlaing under his State Administration Council (SAC) chairmanship, implementing the National Service Law fell predominantly upon the shoulders of village and ward administrators. These local officials swiftly became the embodiment of the loathed statute, thus exacerbating the severity of their targeted assassinations. By March, reports flooded in of scores of administrators falling victim to violence across the nation. One administrator from Meiktila Township met his demise allegedly after submitting names of conscripts to higher-ups, while another was slain while persuading villagers to acquiesce to enlistment willingly (Myint, 2024). As of June 2024, more than 80 junta-appointed officials had been assassinated due to their role in implementing the much-despised conscription law (Radio Free Asia, 2024). Those assassinated or arrested were not limited to those enforcing unpopular policies. In southern Myanmar, teachers and officials participating in the collection of censuses were arrested by resistance forces (Cho, 2024). It is reported that there were cases where resistance forces killed census-taking officials (Zin, 2024). In our classification framework, these events fall under type (1) and (2) assassinations, underscoring the lethal consequences of policy enforcement in a tumultuous political landscape.

As shown above, what people buy and use in post-coup Myanmar is connected to politics. People who sell or consume products from businesses linked to the military face fewer killings than local administrators but still risk being seen as pro-junta. They may be punished or attacked by those who oppose the coup. For example, in 2024, some rebels caned and humiliated their soldiers for drinking Myanmar Beer, and two restaurants that sold it were bombed (Nyar, 2022). To sum up, political killings in post-coup Myanmar depend on how people behave. To conclude, the pattern of victim selection in post-coup Myanmar can be discernable from the above examples: everyday forms of resistance are closely entangled with political killings and violence by providing primary criteria for victim selection.

## **Findings and Discussion**

After doing a qualitative analysis of the data collected, it has been found that there is a connection between "everyday forms of resistance" and political-related killings in post-coup Myanmar. Particularly, it is discovered that "everyday forms of resistance" provided criteria for

selecting who to kill and assassinate. During the early days of the coup, only non-violent methods of resistance were employed, and police and soldiers were offered to defect from the junta. A minority of them did so. The first clash between the junta forces and revolutionaries occurred because members of junta forces failed to practice "everyday forms of resistance." They are divided into two categories: political and nonpolitical. The political form of everyday resistance is further divided into three categories. Political everyday forms of resistance are employed consciously by the people for overt political aims. They include boycotting military-related products, resigning from jobs affiliated with or under the control of the military and so on. The study also found that, contrary to Scott's (1985) argument, people initiated this repertoire of resistance tactics to pressure the military to concede to permanent political change.

The second form of everyday resistance, nonpolitical everyday forms of resistance, is employed by the people to get through their lives. They usually do not have political motives behind them, and they sometimes hurt other people. This paper has described two recent cases in which people bribed officials to escape perilous situations. These bribes could be described as everyday forms of resistance due to their potential to subvert the military's discourse of corruption-free administration. Political killings intensified, with scores of administrators killed after the activation of the conscription law. Similarly, these administrators were perceived to be not practicing "everyday forms of resistance" while complicit in the junta's repression, leading to their demise. To conclude, it is found that "everyday forms of resistance" and political killings have a strong interconnection. Due to limitations, future research would benefit from quantitative analysis of the exact number of junta officials killed due to their failure to practice "everyday forms of resistance."

## **Conclusion**

This paper aims to illustrate the significance of ordinary "everyday forms of resistance" in Myanmar's post-coup politics. From the widespread resignations triggered by the highly publicized non-cooperative Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) to boycotting cinemas and festivals, everyday activities have become inherently political in post-coup Myanmar. The military's stake in the telecom, brewery, and transportation sectors has transformed consumer choices into acts of resistance. Moreover, the notion of undermining military rule by cutting off its revenue streams has led to boycotts of utility bills and taxes.

As protests and rallies evolved into open armed resistance, sabotage and damage have been inflicted on government offices, military-linked businesses, and properties. These actions serve a dual purpose: draining the military's resources by destroying its assets and discouraging

continued employment at military-affiliated businesses. Parallel to these “everyday forms of resistance,” Myanmar’s political landscape has been marred by targeted killings and assassinations of junta sympathizers and collaborators by rebel forces. Since the tragic death of Ma Mya Thwet Thwet Khine in the early days of the anti-coup movement, violence has become a grim reality of Myanmar’s political struggle.

For over three years, death has served as the ultimate retribution for those who openly support the junta, align themselves with its policies, or actively implement its unpopular decrees. These individuals, often officials within the junta-controlled government, have vested interests in maintaining the status quo. Their salaries and potential for illicit gains through their positions incentivize them to uphold the junta’s directives rather than resist them. This unwillingness to engage in covert resistance has made them targets for rebel forces. Their perceived complicity in the junta’s oppressive regime has led to their deaths at the hands of those fighting for a different future. The stark contrast between everyday acts of defiance and targeted killings underscores the deep divisions and high stakes within Myanmar’s ongoing conflict.

This paper seeks to contribute to the existing literature on post-coup Myanmar by examining how people resist in their daily lives and how this resistance intersects with political assassinations. It has not addressed the junta’s killing and imprisonment of alleged supporters of the revolution, which could be explored in future research.

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