

The Politics of Global Justice: Making and Erasing Violence in Myanmar

Margaux Dandrifosse

Abstract

How has the military junta in Myanmar responded to pressures from international justice proceedings? Despite seemingly little international attention on the conflicts in Myanmar, an impressive number of international accountability and justice mechanisms have been deployed since 2017 to document human rights violations and hold the military junta accountable. While these mechanisms have particularly focused on the campaigns of violence against the Rohingya minority in Rakhine state, they have acquired novel and countrywide significance since the military coup in 2021 and the ensuing escalation of violence. This article develops a new framework around the concepts of strategic shifts and counterstrategies to explore what impact these proceedings have had on the military, political, and discursive strategies of repression of the military junta in Myanmar. The analysis builds on documentary sources and interviews with civil society, community-based, and human rights actors. I find that international accountability mechanisms have produced unintended effects and triggered retaliatory practices. It has produced an increasingly sealed off space marred with ultranationalist and underground violent propaganda. Similarly, it has made invisible day-to-day violence suffered through continued and destructive airstrikes, the systematic torture of political prisoners, and a complex system of surveillance, abuses, and repression extending beyond borders. While international justice is crucial for victims/survivors and their communities, it can also obscure an increased reliance on covert and smaller-scale but pervasive and systematic forms of repression.