

Contested Rohingya Citizenship between Parallel State Entities in Rakhine State, Myanmar

Kathy Win

Abstract

This article argues that the emergence of competing parallel state authorities in Rakhine State in Myanmar makes it more difficult for the Rohingya to secure full legal and political recognition of their citizenship and inclusion as one of the country's national races. The military coup in Myanmar in February 2021 changed the nature of government not only in the country as a whole but also at the local level. The article therefore considers contested political authority and post-coup governance in Rakhine State, that has emerged between two actors: Myanmar Military Force (MAF) and the United League of Arakan/Arakan Army (ULA/AA). The ULA/AA has increasingly taken control of much of Rakhine State since November 2023 and by December 2024, 14 out of 17 townships in the state had fallen into their hands. The ULA/AA sets up administration and justice systems in Rakhine State, including in Rohingya villages, and emerges as the state entity with the most territorial control in Rakhine. The Rohingya are now forced to navigate relations between two different parallel state entities in search of recognition of their citizenship and rights. Their future is caught up in a parallel contest for authority and governance. Rohingya are now expected to fulfil their role as 'citizens' under the administration of the ULA/AA and the SAC (including, for example, paying taxes to both entities, obeying rules and orders issued by both administrations including SAC's conscription), but they continue to face challenges from both entities in seeking to enjoy their rights and protections. The research draws on qualitative Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) conducted with 29 participants in 2023 and 2025, in Myanmar (Yangon and seven Townships in the central and northern regions of Rakhine State) and in Cox's Bazar refugees camps and including three participants who currently living aboard.