



A GOVERNANCE TAPESTRY

# Layered Administrations and Revolutionary Service Delivery in Western Myanmar

| May 2022 |

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## Executive Summary

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Since establishing its Arakan People's Authority (APA) in December 2019, the United League of Arakan/Arakan Army (ULA/AA) has rapidly expanded its governance activities across western Myanmar. Its administrative strongholds lie in the central Rakhine State heartland, but administrative activities reach from the Bangladesh border to southern Chin State, and through southern Rakhine State. The expansion has in large part been made possible by the informal truce the ULA/AA struck with the Myanmar armed forces in November 2020, and the Myanmar armed forces' subsequent preoccupation with anti-coup resistance elsewhere in the country following their unlawful seizure of power. The military and its State Administration Council (SAC) is reluctant to open a new front of armed conflict with the ULA/AA—now one of Myanmar's most powerful ethnic armed organisations. Like non-state actors elsewhere in Myanmar, the ULA/AA has leveraged service delivery to cement the legitimacy and authority of its revolution. Indeed, more so than many other ethnic armed organisations in Myanmar, the ULA/AA has clearly articulated that its state-building goals are an essential step towards the complete control of the state in western Myanmar.

The ULA/AA has taken a mixed approach in establishing itself as a governance actor. In some sectors it has created independent structures to replace those run by Naypyidaw. Elsewhere, it has permitted SAC structures to continue to operate, while simultaneously redirecting resources and services; the SAC's bureaucracy in Rakhine State has a large number of Rakhine staff, and the ULA/AA has effectively co-opted or cooperated with these structures, supported by a generally sympathetic population. Government rural development funds are being channelled to ULA/AA community development priorities, SAC-salaried health and education staff serve communities under ULA/AA facilitation, while SAC judges hear trials in ULA courts. While elsewhere in Myanmar anti-coup revolutionary forces are boycotting and dismantling Naypyidaw's structures, the ULA/AA is taking them over from below—suggesting new 'bottom-up' forms of governing. In many ways, ULA/AA governance in western Myanmar now represents a patchwork tapestry: overlapping and woven throughout nearly every part of the state, if not always openly visible.

For many communities, the ULA/AA's governance offers an attractive alternative to Naypyidaw's, which is known for its corruption, inefficiency, and discrimination. However, rapid expansion has presented new challenges. Since February 2022, a wave of community criticism alleging abuses of power by APA administrators has

prompted a response from the ULA, which has taken some action against its own low-level administrators. While criticism from Rakhine communities is amplified by local media, Rohingya concerns of bias and discrimination are also widespread, if less visible. Most Rohingya appear to welcome the generally inclusive rhetoric espoused by ULA/AA senior leadership, although a refusal to use the term ‘Rohingya’ and an unclear stance on repatriation has caused concern among the community. There also appears to be a disconnect between central ULA/AA leadership and implementation on the ground; communities in some locations report ongoing discrimination from administrators, and concerns for their position in a future political community led by the ULA/AA. What must be emphasised is that the implementation of ULA/AA policy is heavily dependent on local administrators or commanders—and how the ULA/AA responds to recent criticism, and reigns in abuses, will inform how these nascent and dynamic structures develop.

Shifting governance dynamics also pose new challenges for international response agencies, many of which are designed to work with the formal state system and have not yet coordinated an engagement strategy with the ULA/AA. Challenges are heightened by the fact that openly engaging with the ULA/AA will certainly risk angering the SAC. This is also the first time that an ethnic armed organisation has established itself so comprehensively in a context already hosting a large international response; elsewhere in Myanmar ethnic armed organisation structures have generally predated the international response. However, as the ULA/AA asserts itself and increasingly reaches out to the response, its importance will continue to grow, particularly for humanitarian access and durable solutions. As such, response actor engagement with the ULA/AA is and will be a critical component of working in Rakhine State going forward.

## Considerations for International Actors

- **Given the current instability across Myanmar, there is a need for flexible and pragmatic approaches to Myanmar’s myriad conflicts.** There are opportunities to influence the ULA/AA’s movement in a positive direction, and activities undertaken by agencies today have the potential to inform the long-term development of western Myanmar. Furthermore, ULA/AA and community perceptions of international agencies in western Myanmar are currently relatively positive, presenting an opportunity for engagement and advocacy.
- **Engagement with the ULA/AA should be considered as critically important as engagement with the SAC. The ULA/AA is not going anywhere, and cannot be ignored—it is now an important facet of both the Rakhine and national landscapes, and must be engaged with as such.** Engagement with the SAC poses its own set of risks to community acceptance in western Myanmar and elsewhere, as well as to international reputations. Moreover, the ULA/AA has clearly demonstrated a high degree of influence in western Myanmar and will remain a crucial stakeholder determining the future of western Myanmar, whether or not it achieves its ultimate goals of self-determination.
- **Constructive engagement with the ULA by international agencies may present opportunities to redirect policy implementation, in addition to humanitarian access.** Humanitarian access in much of western Myanmar now relies on both the ULA/AA and SAC. The ULA/AA’s growing influence also makes it a key stakeholder for durable solutions, including for SAC-centred policies such as camp closures and repatriation from Bangladesh.
- **There is a need for international responders to retain as much operational independence as possible, while also maintaining communication with key stakeholders.** Response actors should seek to increase humanitarian space, including by opening honest discussions with the ULA/AA regarding any overly-restrictive travel authorisations of the kind currently employed by the SAC. Engagement with the ULA/AA should be considered one means to this end. Positively, there is a recognition among communities and the ULA/AA of the risks of engagement for international agencies, thereby presenting opportunities for collaborative risk mitigation.

- **Activities which strengthen the civilian structures of the ULA will support better governance, and allow the civilian side of the organisation to advocate towards its more powerful military wing.** All support will need to be provided quietly, and more sensitive activities will likely need to be conducted from outside of Myanmar or online. Activities may include capacity support and training on governance, administration, human rights standards, and international humanitarian law; sharing of information; and general capacity building for the civilian wing of the organisation.
- **Civil society groups should be supported to function as checks and balances against abuses by non-state armed groups across Myanmar, and to support responsive governance from below.** These systems remain under-developed in western Myanmar, largely because armed conflict is relatively new. The lull in armed conflict presents an opportunity to support civil society in western Myanmar—whether from Rakhine, Rohingya or other communities—to fill this gap. Other more general investment in civil society, for organisational development or capacity building, will also assist in building a strong civil society in western Myanmar which can push back against emerging governance actors like the ULA/AA when these overstep or commit abuses.
- **Support for women’s organisations may create greater opportunities for women to participate in leadership and governance.** Women are under-represented in the ULA/AA structures, despite the fact that the organisation often deals with family disputes and cases involving sexual violence. Support for women’s organisations may also promote more inclusiveness and inform greater awareness of gender dynamics among the ULA/AA and communities more broadly, and help to create a new generation of women leaders who can assume roles of greater authority and safely advocate to all influential stakeholders.
- **Identifying and supporting change-makers within and external to the ULA/AA can strengthen responsive and community-driven governance structures.** The reach of the ULA/AA is wide in western Myanmar, and administrators or party politicians who do not openly identify as ULA/AA members can still have strong influence with the group.
- **Engagement with the ULA/AA is no substitute for consultations with a wide range of stakeholders.** There is wide variation in perspectives towards the ULA/AA, even if the public space to air criticism remains limited. Public and peer sentiment can also often silence different viewpoints, and this is the case for all communities beyond the Rakhine and Rohingya. International agencies should ensure that consultations with other community leaders, civil society groups, religious leaders, and youth are designed with these dynamics in mind.

# Background

Since striking an informal and what it terms a ‘temporary’ truce with the Myanmar armed forces, the United League of Arakan/Arakan Army (ULA/AA) has dramatically expanded its administrative structures and governance activity across western Myanmar, in what it sees as an important part of its revolutionary state-building process.<sup>1</sup> ULA/AA leaders have claimed they now control some 75 per cent of the state, and it is commonly reported by communities and media that 75 to 80 per cent of judicial cases are now reported to the ULA.<sup>2</sup>

With the ULA as its governing head, the administrative body is operating under the name the Arakan People’s Authority (APA). The ULA/AA established the APA in December 2019, approximately one year after a sharp escalation in armed clashes between the AA and Myanmar armed forces. Intense armed conflict between the two raged through northern and central areas of Rakhine State, and southern Chin State, between December 2018 and November 2020, until the informal truce was struck just days after Myanmar’s 8 November election.

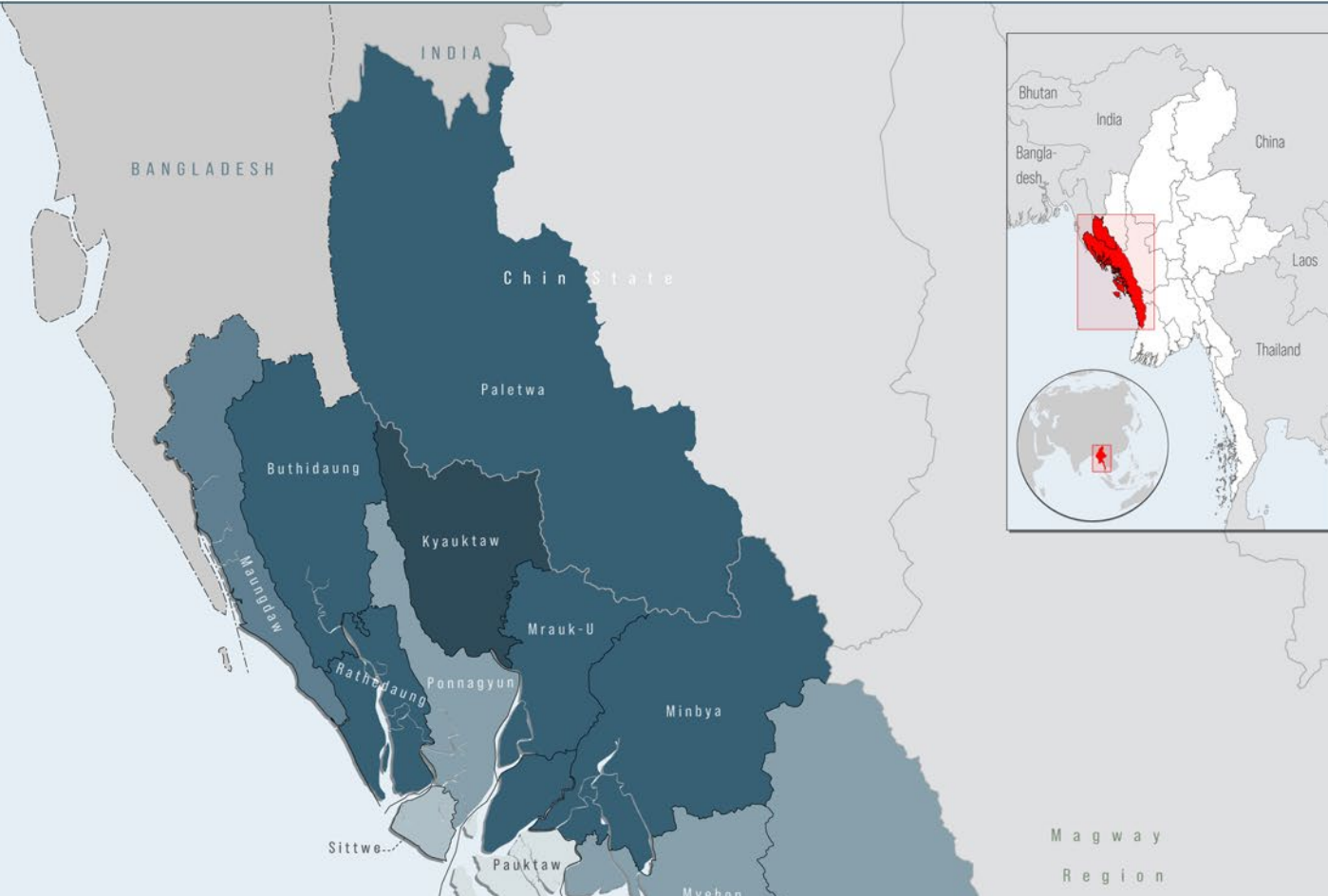
Underpinning the ULA/AA’s military and governance success has been a high degree of support from ethnic Rakhine communities. Rakhine people commonly explain the underdevelopment and poverty in the state as a result of central government neglect. Despite enthusiastic participation in party politics following Myanmar’s political opening in 2010, elected representatives from Rakhine State were allowed little real decision-making power in a centralised political system dominated by ‘national-level’ parties typically led by Burmese elites. Disillusionment with the democratic system followed, and communities and political leaders began to put their faith in armed revolution instead.<sup>3</sup>

An important dynamic during the period of intensive armed clashes between 2018 and 2020 was the disruption to the Myanmar state’s administration system, run under the General Administration Department (GAD). Under pressure from both sides, village tract and ward administrators resigned in support of the ULA/AA’s insurgency or in fear of arrest or violence on accusations of standing with the ‘wrong’ side. The ULA/AA expected loyalty and service, while the Myanmar armed forces detained administrators and charged them with associating with an ‘unlawful’ or ‘terrorist’ organisation, as the ULA/AA was designated under law.<sup>4</sup> As a result, in 2019 alone almost 200 village tract and ward administrators resigned from their posts in Rathedaung, Minbya, Kyauktaw and Mrauk-U townships, while dozens more threatened to resign in Myebon and Sittwe townships.

Before the November 2020 truce, there were high numbers of arrests of civilians on charges of associating with the ULA/AA. According to the Thazin Legal Institute, 362 people were arrested on such charges during the two years of intense armed conflict.<sup>5</sup> The Myanmar armed forces’ cessation of these arrests from late 2020 has directly facilitated the ULA’s expansion, opening the floodgates for administrators, bureaucrats, and community members to associate openly with the ULA/AA. In just one example, in April 2022, it is estimated that tens of thousands of people attended the Zee Chaung Rakhine Thongkran water festival, which was organised by the ULA/AA and likely constituted the largest celebration of the Buddhist new year in Myanmar in 2022.<sup>6</sup> People celebrated openly with uniformed ULA/AA members, while other ULA/AA members provided security and healthcare at the festival.

1 The ULA/AA Commander-in-Chief Twan Mrat Naing has repeatedly referred to the ceasefire as ‘temporary’. See, for example: Altaf Parvez, Shafiqul Alam, Ashfaque Ronnie 2022, ‘We recognise the human rights and citizen rights of the Rohingyas’: Interview: Arakan army chief Twan Mrat Naing, Prothom Alo, 2 January, available from: <https://en.prothomalo.com/opinion/interview/we-recognise-the-human-rights-and-citizen-rights-of-the-rohingyas>.  
2 “ရက္ခိုင်အမျိုးသားအဖွဲ့ချုပ် ULA ဥက္ကဋ္ဌ ၄ ရက္ခိုင်တပ်တော်တပ်မှူးချုပ် စိုလ်ချုပ်ထွန်းမြတ်နိုင်နွဲ့ အင်တာဗျူး (Interview with ULA chairman and AA Commander-In-Chief Twan Mrat Naing)”, Arrakha Media, 15 August 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9qbZaLFL61s>. See also, Kyaw Lynn 2022, *The Nature of Parallel Governance and Its Impact on Arakan Politics*, Transnational Institute, 24 February, available from: <https://www.tni.org/en/article/the-nature-of-parallel-governance-and-its-impact-on-arakan-politics>.  
3 For a more in-depth discussion of the factors driving support for the ULA/AA, see: Simbulan, Karen. *Exploring ethno-religious identities and community perceptions of social cohesion in Central Rakhine State*. November 2020. RAFT Myanmar.

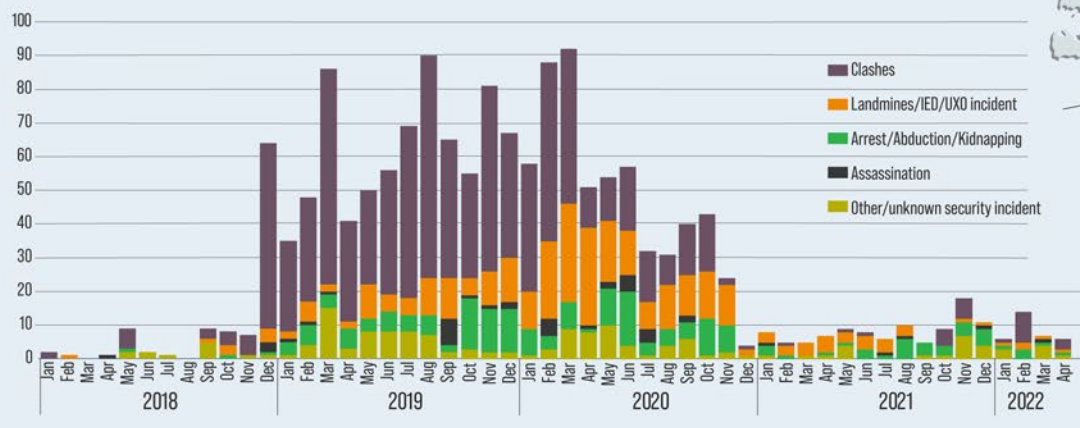
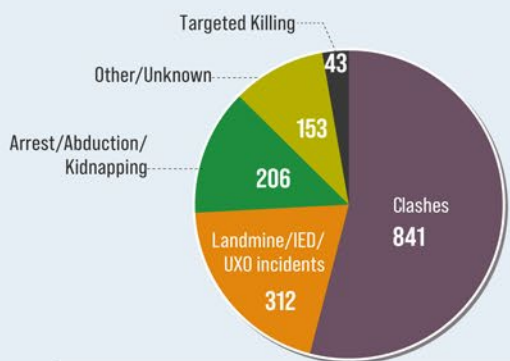
4 The Myanmar government designed the ULA/AA as a ‘terrorist’ organisation under the 2014 Counter-Terrorism law on 23 March 2020, and removed the designation on 11 March 2021, likely as a part of behind-the-scenes negotiations. The ULA/AA remains designated under the colonial-era Unlawful Association Act.  
5 Aung Htein 2021, ‘360 people arrested, accused of illegal AA ties in Arakan State,’ *Development Media Group*, 8 January, available from: <https://www.dmediag.com/news/2517-c-trr-362>.  
6 See for example, Narinjara, 18 April 2022. ပထမဆုံးအကြိမ်ကျင်းပသည့် လေးမြို့ မြစ် သကြဲနွဲ့ လူပေါင်းသောင်းချီပါဝင်ဆင်နွှဲ (Tens of thousands attend the first Lay Mro River Thingyan Festival), [https://www.facebook.com/narinjara.info/posts/5388290971182936?\\_\\_cft\\_\\_\[0\]=AZVkkGVWmAWZrV795lc6ZCoMvd3\\_RfDTJaWed1Vringy6X0yIMzXmNRg7quN583QL1BCqY0FRa13XgKJEpSf6sdQQrwh0HAbYqFRy21Zg19Tbsk4FMUcj6\\_3ynKvwFqHAZQtoRiVojzjn8EdN7n3x6\\_\\_tn\\_\\_=%2C0%2CP-R](https://www.facebook.com/narinjara.info/posts/5388290971182936?__cft__[0]=AZVkkGVWmAWZrV795lc6ZCoMvd3_RfDTJaWed1Vringy6X0yIMzXmNRg7quN583QL1BCqY0FRa13XgKJEpSf6sdQQrwh0HAbYqFRy21Zg19Tbsk4FMUcj6_3ynKvwFqHAZQtoRiVojzjn8EdN7n3x6__tn__=%2C0%2CP-R). Sources who attended the festival confirmed the estimated attendance numbers. Outside of Rakhine State, Thingyan celebrations were muted in protest of the military coup and in respect to those risking their lives to resist it. Thingyan celebrations were similarly quiet in Rakhine State during the years of active armed conflict. Thongkran is the Rakhine language name for the same festival.



# Armed Clashes and Other Key Security Incidents

## Rakhine State and Paletwa Township, Southern Chin State

1 January 2018 - 30 April 2022



The information on this map is sourced from traditional media and social media such as Facebook and should not be considered comprehensive.

Disclaimer: This product is designed for information purposes only. This map may not show all the topographical areas due to scale limitations. Base map data provided by MIMU and copyrighted to MIMU at <http://themimu.info/mimu-terms-conditions>. The accuracy of specific attributes and their geo-locations are manually added and cannot be confirmed.

For its part, the Myanmar armed forces, now operating under the guise of the State Administration Council (SAC), remains concerned with tackling widespread anti-coup resistance across Myanmar, and thereby appears reluctant to open a new front of conflict with the ULA/AA—which now represents one of the strongest ethnic armed organisations in the country. But despite the apparent calm on the surface, and mutual desire to avoid armed clashes at the current time, the potential for new outbreaks remains significant. Skirmishes continue to erupt occasionally, most recently in Myebon Township on 12 April,<sup>7</sup> and the ULA/AA is taking an increasingly visible role in the anti-coup movement across Myanmar. On 26 April, the anti-coup armed group Chinland Defence Force announced that 15 of their fighters had returned from military training with the AA in October 2021, fully equipped with arms to use against the Myanmar armed forces.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, on the ULA/AA’s 13th anniversary, celebrated on 10 April, the group shared a series of congratulatory letters it had received from anti-coup armed groups in Chin State, Kayah State, Magway Region and elsewhere, seven of which thanked the ULA/AA for their support, including military support.<sup>9</sup> This was the first time that the ULA/AA had publicly acknowledged the support it has been providing for anti-coup armed groups, and one week later the ULA/AA and its fellow Brotherhood Alliance members sent their own letter to the Bamar People’s Liberation Army, congratulating them on their first-year anniversary and pledging support for its military and political goals—which include overthrowing the SAC.<sup>10</sup> Illustrating its discontent, the SAC has continued piecemeal attempts at disrupting the ULA/AA expansion, including the deployment of troops into contested areas, the appointment of its own village administrators, and arrests of individuals accused of associating with the ULA/AA—all while skirting an escalation to

actual armed violence.<sup>11</sup> Communities are well aware of the potential for new fighting. In Ponnagyun Township, and elsewhere, young people have already moved out of villages near zones of ULA/AA and SAC competition in anticipation of arrest by the SAC on allegations of affiliation with the ULA/AA. The SAC has set up new checkpoints and outposts near populated areas,<sup>12</sup> and residents remain poised for a resumption of clashes.

*This was the first time that the ULA/AA had publicly acknowledged the support it has been providing for anti-coup armed groups.*

7 Nan Oo Nway 2022, 'Junta forces and Arakan Army clash in northern Rakhine State,' *Myanmar Now*, 14 April, available from: <https://www.myanmar-now.org/en/news/junta-forces-and-arakan-army-clash-in-northern-rakhine-state>.

8 Chin Defence Force – Mindat, Facebook post, 26 April 2022, available from: [https://www.facebook.com/chinDefenceforce/posts/320508756881700?\\_cft\\_\\_\[0\]=AZXWDfenfU5lcSRpdKsv\\_QCAOP-wQsHaGfzjmHKei26QBV6XBxcDX3PrUf1Bk15c4AKABpdwP204hHOUw0AP9nt42-xY\\_g01e0WuAVwhHLxgl2yI8ZnZ6\\_BLIEHfutrZT29V4BPc4BinmHALmNH58a8qcNFA9EIRwrCc50BxJXRQ6\\_\\_tn\\_\\_=%2C0%2CP-R](https://www.facebook.com/chinDefenceforce/posts/320508756881700?_cft__[0]=AZXWDfenfU5lcSRpdKsv_QCAOP-wQsHaGfzjmHKei26QBV6XBxcDX3PrUf1Bk15c4AKABpdwP204hHOUw0AP9nt42-xY_g01e0WuAVwhHLxgl2yI8ZnZ6_BLIEHfutrZT29V4BPc4BinmHALmNH58a8qcNFA9EIRwrCc50BxJXRQ6__tn__=%2C0%2CP-R).

9 Kyaw Hsan Hlaing, Twitter post, 10 April 2022, <https://twitter.com/kyawhsanhlaiing1/status/1513161864200568839?s=20&t=6z1mxn4dtLGPnli0rABvA>. Most of this 'military support' appears to be limited to trainings, rather than backup in active warfare.

10 Development Media Group 2022, *BPLA ကို ညီနောင်မဟာမိတ် ဝတ္ထု ဝန်းရံသွားမည်ဟုဆို (Three Brotherhood Alliance say they will support BPLA)*, 17 April, available from: [https://www.facebook.com/dmgnewsagency/posts/2271778732974525?\\_cft\\_\\_\[0\]=AZiv7rQ4pDDN5AVL118j36S0z0AqLs8V3r0cfrkQ0FR0YuQL21MXDvvhGUsGiUwvqPBrGVcnxgy6UgsYfRRnHM2Q\\_iv\\_GyLwEe5wg\\_tic\\_0hhLUuWuHvWq80-ZQ-V2Hvt8oQxWfUtvYBXMglamYRm78\\_\\_tn\\_\\_=%2C0%2CP-R](https://www.facebook.com/dmgnewsagency/posts/2271778732974525?_cft__[0]=AZiv7rQ4pDDN5AVL118j36S0z0AqLs8V3r0cfrkQ0FR0YuQL21MXDvvhGUsGiUwvqPBrGVcnxgy6UgsYfRRnHM2Q_iv_GyLwEe5wg_tic_0hhLUuWuHvWq80-ZQ-V2Hvt8oQxWfUtvYBXMglamYRm78__tn__=%2C0%2CP-R).

11 At the time of publication, tensions between the ULA/AA and military appeared to once again be on the rise. The SAC has arrested at least 15 individuals on charges of association with the ULA/AA in the first five months of 2022, while there were no recorded arrests between November 2020 and December 2021. See, for example: Narinjara 2022, 'Arrests of Rakhine on AA link spread to Ayeyarwady division,' BNI, 29 April, available from: <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/arrests-rakhine-aa-link-spread-ayeyarwady-division>; Mya Htwe Shin 2022, 'စစ်တွေတွင် မူဆလင် ၅ ဦးဖမ်းဆီးခံရ ပြီးနောက် ကျေးရွာအုပ်ချုပ်ရေးမှူး ၂ ဦး ထပ်မံဖမ်းဆီးခံရ (Two more village administrators arrested after five Muslims arrested in Sittwe),' *Narinjara*, 5 May, available from: <https://www.facebook.com/narinjara.info/posts/5434550263223673>. In contrast, the SAC also released a significant number of prisoners accused of ULA/AA affiliation in 2021 and early 2022. For example, on 12 February 2022, Myanmar’s Union Day, the military released at least 46 people detained on suspicion of affiliation with the ULA/AA. Narinjara 2022, *46 Arakan Army members released by SAC on Union Day*, 12 February, available from: <https://www.narinjara.com/news/detail/620758000aaef045bbc05f3>.

12 Interview with Rakhine Man, Ponnagyun Township, March 2022.



An AA military policeman provides security at the Zee Chaung Rakhine Thongkran Festival, Kyauktaw, April 2022. Photo: Facebook



A water-soaked AA soldier poses for a photo at the Zee Chaung Rakhine Thongkran Festival, April 2022. Photo: Facebook.



Wrestlers' embrace: For the first time in a decade, Muslim communities were invited to a traditional Rakhine wrestling event in Minbya Township in May 2022. Photo: Western News, used with permission.



## Weaving the Tapestry: Administration in Western Myanmar

The ULA/AA's administrative expansion is not unique in Myanmar and falls into a long tradition of non-state administration in Myanmar's borderlands. The ULA/AA, formed under the tutelage of the KIO/A, has learned extensive lessons from these other contexts, including from the United Wa State Army, which it continues to cite as a model for its state-building. Service delivery in particular has long been a key component of revolutionary struggles against the central Myanmar state, demonstrating legitimacy, authority and power.<sup>13</sup> The latest evolution in this tradition, the ULA/AA's structures are also unique, dynamic, and constantly adapting to their own time and place.

While the APA is often referred to as an administration 'parallel' to the SAC's, this is an oversimplification at best and misleading at worst. The dual administrations in western Myanmar are better thought of as a patchwork tapestry: interwoven and layered. Rather than existing alongside the SAC administration and never meeting it, the APA is co-opting SAC structures as much as competing with them. The two systems stand alongside each other in some places, but intersect, overlap, and weave through each other elsewhere. Just as often as it stands separate from the SAC, the APA's structures and activities are hitched onto the SAC's, or operate in collaboration with the SAC. As such, the two systems have significant overlap in structure, resources and even personnel. The intertwined nature of the two also means it can be difficult for one to differentiate which governance system one is dealing with. Agents of these governance systems, and the communities who use them, frequently navigate between the two systems to access social, material, or political resources.

The ULA's APA structure and governance activity is dynamic. As it expands, it adjusts to on-the-ground realities and evolves in its interactions with the SAC and its agents.<sup>14</sup> The top leadership of the ULA/AA have also been explicit

in their media appearances that they do not see the establishment of a governance system as the end point of the group's struggle, and that future stages of their revolution go beyond state-building, to the seizure of the whole state.<sup>15</sup>

Key to this strategy is the ULA/AA's approach to the existing state structure. Rather than seeking to tear down the system and then rebuild it anew, as many of the post-coup revolutionary movements in Myanmar are aspiring to do, the ULA/AA has taken a mixed approach, co-opting some of Naypyidaw's structures while creating others from scratch. The ULA's judiciary and administrative systems exist separate to Naypyidaw's, but continue to draw on their resources. In contrast, the ULA has allowed Naypyidaw's health and education systems to continue, while exerting greater influence over them. Naypyidaw's health services continue to visit and operate in remote areas under effective control of the ULA/AA,<sup>16</sup> and SAC-funded schools operate in ULA/AA areas, with students sitting under the Rakhine flag and singing the Rakhine national anthem, instead of the Myanmar anthem.<sup>17</sup> While taking SAC salaries, health and education staff are serving populations under the guise of the ULA/AA, and paying taxation to the ULA/AA. A farmer in Rathedaung Township noted that SAC teachers were taking on additional roles working as APA office heads or clerks,<sup>18</sup> while a Rakhine businessperson in Ann Township noted a "strong relationship" between SAC and APA staff.

Facilitating this shift in governance, the ULA/AA has capitalised on the fact that many public servants in western Myanmar are ethnically Rakhine. While popular support is difficult to quantify, the ULA/AA is clearly the preferred authority among ethnic Rakhine communities, and even those who may not be explicit supporters face pressure from their communities to cooperate with it. A distinct advantage for the ULA/AA in western Myanmar—unlike many other ethnic armed organisations operating in the borderlands of Myanmar—is the large overlap between Naypyidaw's bureaucracy and the ULA/AA's constituency or support base. Furthermore, the similarities between the Burmese and Rakhine languages mean it has been straightforward for the ULA/AA to latch on to existing structures, including health and education.

<sup>13</sup> Kim Jolliffe 2014, 'Ethnic Conflict and Social Services in Myanmar's Contested Regions', *Asia Foundation*, p. 7, available from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/ethnic-conflict-and-social-services-myanmar-s-contested-regions>.

<sup>14</sup> A definitive milestone in the ULA/AA's transition from armed group to governance actor was the third wave of COVID-19 (approximately June–October 2021), when the ULA/AA dramatically scaled up its service delivery. Its collaboration with local civil society groups and the SAC's Ministry of Health and Sports further inserted the ULA/AA into the everyday lives of communities. Interview with Chin Woman, Minbya Township, March 2022.

<sup>15</sup> "ရက်ရှင်အမျိုးသားအဖွဲ့ချုပ် ULA ဥက္ကဋ္ဌ ဌ ရက်ရှင်တပ်ဇာတိတပ်မှူးချုပ် ဗိုလ်ချုပ်ထွန်းမြတ်နိုင်နန်း အင်တာဗျူး [Interview with ULA chairman and AA commander-in-chief Twan Mrat Naing]", Arrakha Media, 15 August 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9qbZaLFL61s>.

<sup>16</sup> While communities elsewhere in Myanmar went on strike or boycotted services from the military administration under the name of the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) following the 1 February coup, the ULA/AA actively discouraged the CDM in its areas.

<sup>17</sup> Eugene Whong and Khin Maung Nyein 2022, 'Arakan Army, not military junta, run the show in Myanmar's Rakhine state', *Radio Free Asia*, 19 January, available from: <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/arakan-army-01192022193040.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Rakhine Man, Rathedaung Township, March 2022.

While other armed ethnic groups might seek to replace Burmese-language education with their own language and curriculum for cultural preservation reasons, instruction in Rakhine language has long been permitted in schools in western Myanmar, making Naypyidaw's system largely acceptable to ethnic Rakhine communities and the ULA/AA.

Illustrating the intricate tapestry-like nature of dual administration, intersections between the ULA and SAC administrations differ across locations. One Rohingya man working for an NGO in Maungdaw Township noted that people in his village have to report criminal or civil complaints to the SAC administration and the ULA, while neighbouring Rohingya villages reported solely to the ULA.<sup>19</sup> In places, the SAC-appointed and ULA-appointed administrators are the same person, and elsewhere different. Many have the resources of both administrations available to them. Where there is significant overlap of ULA/AA and SAC presence, such as in urban centres, it is not unusual for the ULA/AA and SAC police to investigate cases jointly and seek a resolution.

Indeed, in almost all areas of ULA/AA influence there is cooperation between the two systems. SAC administrators are required to report to the ULA/AA about meetings with SAC superiors, and SAC administrators coordinate with the ULA/AA when accessing rural development funding from Naypyidaw. Effectively, the ULA/AA is therefore able to access Naypyidaw's coffers to fund projects in areas under its control. The SAC administrator also continues the crucial functions of issuing identity documentation and approving agricultural loans for farmers. In this sense, the current arrangement is also accommodating to the needs of communities—although they are perhaps interacting with the ULA/AA more than the SAC, they are still able to access the services that only the SAC can provide. One Rakhine shop owner in Ponnagyun Township reiterated the crucial role that SAC administrators continue to play:

“...even though there are SAC-appointed administrators, most people prefer the APA functions. The SAC-appointed village administrators can submit households list and population data, help people to get their NRC [identify card] at the SAC's immigration office, and accept the GAD budget for village development, such as for road construction.”<sup>20</sup>

This also reflects the fact that the authority and capacity of the ULA/AA and its APA only extends so far. Communities

continue to rely on the SAC for certain services. While this is the case for all communities, it is especially true for Muslim communities including the Rohingya. Because the SAC continues to enforce discriminatory restrictions on the movement of Muslim communities, they remain reliant on SAC-issued paperwork for travel between townships, through many urban areas, or into other areas of Myanmar.

Even in low-lying areas of central Rakhine State where armed conflict was never widespread, the ULA/AA has dislodged Naypyidaw's structures. One Kaman woman in an internment camp in Pauktaw Township<sup>21</sup> noted that “since the coup we do not see much of their [SAC] activities. In the Rakhine village there is a police station and immigration office but they are not active in public areas since those areas are controlled by ULA/AA.”<sup>22</sup> The collaboration and interaction between the SAC and ULA also extends to townships of southern Rakhine State.<sup>23</sup> Although ULA/AA activity is widely acknowledged to extend as far south as Taungup Township, respondents in Thandwe Township also note a growing presence. One Kaman woman notes the scale of collaboration between the ULA/AA and the SAC police force in Thandwe:

“The SAC appointed administrators have regular communication with the ULA/AA's members personally, not officially... When SAC's police cannot enter into the villages to arrest the perpetrators in Taungup Township, ULA/AA forces arrest them and hand them over to Thandwe police station.”<sup>24</sup>

Another respondent described how the ULA and SAC systems coalesce amid a shifting terrain of control:

“In Rathedaung there are no military forces and police since 2021. In Buthidaung there are police, GAD and immigration and they are active. There are no police in Rohingya villages but in Rakhine villages there are police and immigration offices and also APA members and their offices work together... there are no problems between ULA and RSAC civil servants.”<sup>25</sup>

21 For further discussion of the Rohingya camps in Rakhine State and the possible perpetration of ongoing crimes across these sites, see: Human Rights Watch 2020, “An Open Prison without End”: Myanmar's Mass Detention of Rohingya in Rakhine State, 8 October, available from: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/10/08/open-prison-without-end/myanmars-mass-detention-rohingya-rakhine-state>.

22 Interview with Kaman Woman, Pauktaw Township, March 2022.

23 A noteworthy result of the 2020 elections in Rakhine State was the success of ethnic Rakhine political parties in Taungup Township, which was previously held by the National League for Democracy. The Arakan National Party's success in the township in 2020 was the first for any ethnic Rakhine political party since the political opening in 2010.

24 Interview with Kaman Woman, Thandwe Township, March 2022.

25 Interview with Rohingya Woman, Buthidaung Township, March 2022.

19 Interview with Rohingya Man, Maungdaw Township, March 2022.

20 Interview with Rakhine Man, Ponnagyun Township, March 2022.

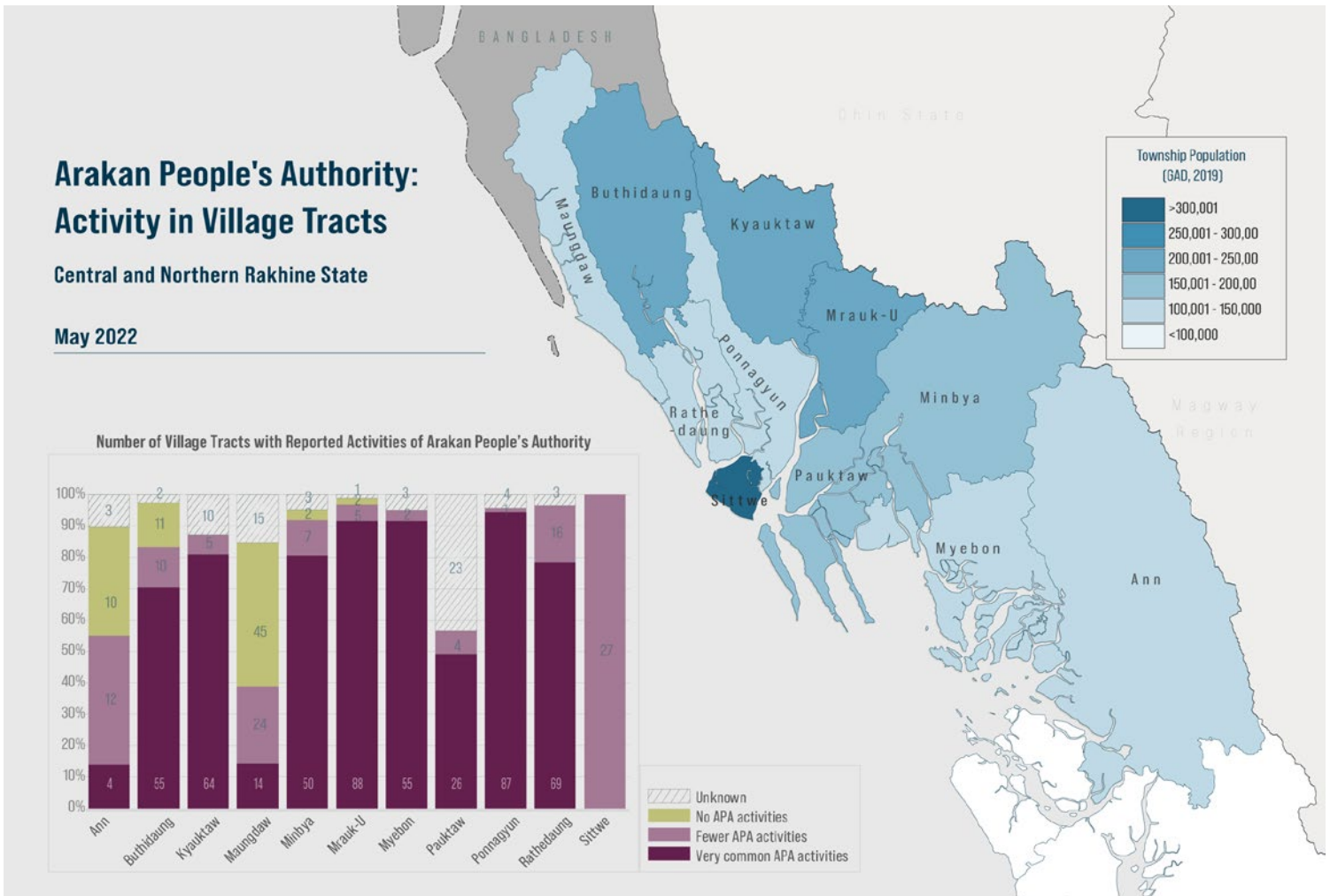
It is also important to emphasise that this arrangement is often disordered, and can deliver outcomes unfavourable to communities and to justice. Several respondents noted that their experiences dealing with the dual administration systems resulted in far-from-ideal outcomes. In several cases, SAC and ULA/AA police or administrators favoured different outcomes to investigations, with different charges from different administrations levelled against different individuals. The Kaman woman in Pauktaw explained:

“Sometimes both actors decide the case in different directions so we do not know who we should follow. For example, one party complained to [SAC] police to seek justice and the other complained to ULA/AA, so both of them have to follow two decisions which were made by police and ULA/AA. Some people still want to complain to the police as they can bribe the police and win the case. If they inform police, the police come

to the camp or village and arrest the perpetrators but ULA/AA do not have police and in crime cases they do not arrest the perpetrators immediately so people inform police rather than the ULA/AA... I think we should just have one judicial system.”<sup>26</sup>

Additionally, for those associating especially closely with the ULA/AA, there are risks they will face if hostilities rise once again. In particular, ward and village tract administrators will face pressures from both sides of the conflict, as they did during the period of active armed conflict.

26 Interview with Kaman Woman, Pauktaw Township, March 2022.



Disclaimer: Data is based on surveys conducted in rural areas of central and northern Rakhine State in late 2021 and early 2022, and should not be considered comprehensive. This product is designed for information purposes only. This map may not show all the topographical areas due to scale limitations. Base map data provided by MIMU and copyrighted to MIMU at <http://themimu.info/mimu-terms-conditions>.

## The Only Game in Town?

Another institution that the ULA/AA has partly repurposed for its governance expansion is the Arakan National Party (ANP). The ANP is the most popular political party in Rakhine State, formed in a merger of the two leading political parties ahead of Myanmar's 2015 election.<sup>27</sup> Despitewinning a majority of elected seats<sup>28</sup> in the Rakhine State legislature in the 2015 election, and becoming the third largest party nationwide, the ANP's influence was curtailed by the National League for Democracy, which selected the Rakhine State Chief Minister from amongst its own ranks. With avenues for representation in party politics restrained, the AA's promise of self-determination appeared more attractive.

A number of high-ranking ANP members, some now officially resigned from the party, have taken up positions as political officers in the ULA/AA. In one example, communities, observers and ANP colleagues were surprised to see former Mrauk-U member of parliament U Oo Hla Saw attend the SAC's Union Day ceremony on behalf of the ULA on 12 February 2022 in Naypyidaw.<sup>29</sup> While many ANP members have substantial support from their communities, where they operated as parliamentarians for years, the extent to which they align with ULA/AA policies is not always clear. As discussed above, the ULA/AA's policy (if not always the practice of local administrators) on Muslims in Rakhine State has prioritised mending relationships and promoted intercommunal harmony. While the ANP's divisive communal rhetoric was moderated in their 2020 election campaign, the party and its predecessor, the Rakhine Nationalities Development Party, were well known for their narrow ethnic nationalism. The extent to which other ANP members are behind the ULA/AA's communal harmony policy is not yet clear, and some have resisted the ULA/AA's expansion, citing differences in politics or dissatisfaction with how the ULA/AA has operated.

Indeed, the ANP has long been a party divided. It was formed to win against Myanmar's first-past-the-post single member district electoral system, which rewarded larger parties. The merger was despite strong differences in opinion on policy and direction, and despite divisions between leaders. While the ANP had already

split into three separate parties by the 2020 elections, divisions continued to plague the party after the military's 1 February 2021 coup, when high-level leaders Daw Aye Nu Sein and Zaw Aye Maung took positions in the military's SAC.<sup>30</sup> Regardless, the ULA/AA's adoption of ANP members, and in some cases reportedly committees, shows no signs of slowing. In a January 2022 interview, Tun Mrat Naing also suggested it was "likely" that the ANP might merge with the ULA, if there were no elections in the future.<sup>31</sup>

## Administrative Structures

At the village level, the ULA has appointed APA Village Administration Committees, typically consisting of some 10 members. Exactly who is appointed to the committee varies. A focal person, or chair, from the Village Administration Committee will report to the higher levels of the administrative structure, who sit at a sub-level of the AA's three military commands. These three levels are Alpha, Victor, and Nova, and typically have three or four sub-levels. The ULA/AA does not have any public-facing administrative policy.

*In Rohingya villages, the approach is more ad-hoc, reflecting the ULA/AA's cautious approach to Rohingya communities in general.*

The composition of Village Administration Committees in ethnic Rakhine villages is generally uniform, typically consisting of the SAC-appointed village leader, heads of hundred households, and educated young people. In Rohingya villages, the approach is more ad-hoc, reflecting the ULA/AA's cautious approach to Rohingya communities in general. Village Administration Committees in Rohingya villages may comprise SAC-appointed village leaders or heads of hundred households, religious leaders, or other community elders or leaders.

27 The merging parties were the Rakhine Nationalities Development Party and the Arakan League for Democracy.

28 They did not have a majority after the military's 25 per cent quota was taken into account.

29 Development Media Group 2022, *ULA attends Diamond Jubilee Union Day ceremony*, 12 February, available from: <https://www.dmediag.com/news/4037-ula-attends>.

30 Myanmar Now 2021, *Senior Arakan National Party figure resigns over leaders' support for coup regime*, 23 August, available from: <https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/senior-arakan-national-party-figure-resigns-over-leaders-support-for-coup-regime>.

31 Bertil Lintner 2022, *Rebel yell: Arakan Army leader speaks to Asia Times*, Asia Times, 18 January, available from: <https://asiatimes.com/2022/01/rebel-yell-arakan-army-leader-speaks-to-asia-times/>.

However, this is not always the case, largely because in some locations individuals have declined invitations to join committees. In some locations, although religious leaders are not officially members of the committees, they are invited to meetings as discussants.<sup>32</sup> As covered later in this paper, Rohingya community reactions to the APA expansion are not always united.

While collaboration between the ULA and SAC administrations is widespread, there are also points of tension between administrations at the village level. In some cases, ideological differences prevent individuals from collaboration. Elsewhere, the ULA/AA's administrative spread has disrupted the interests of existing SAC administrators, prompting new tensions. In one Rohingya village in Sittwe Township, where the ULA/AA has recently appointed a Village Administration Committee, SAC-appointed administrators and Hundred Heads of Households reportedly feel they have lost their influence and rent-seeking opportunities. After deciding not to join the APA Village Administration Committee, in fear of SAC reprisals, they are unhappy with the new arrangements in their village. The head of the APA Village Administration Committee there explains:

“Ten members are in the committee, but not the Heads of Hundred Households. All five Heads of Hundred Households are not satisfied with us [the ULA-appointed committee members] because the ULA said that SAC's administration would now be under this committee, and so now they cannot charge people for solving disputes.”<sup>33</sup>

While the APA's administrative structures are designed to disrupt Naypyidaw's GAD structures, there are other unintentional consequences. There will be individuals, at every level, who emerge as 'losers' from the APA's re-structuring, whether due to a loss of influence, loss of income, or an ideological difference.

*Elsewhere, the ULA/AA's administrative spread has disrupted the interests of existing SAC administrators, prompting new tensions.*

## Functions

The three most prominent governance functions of the ULA to date, in addition to the establishment of its APA administrative structures, have been its judiciary, taxation, and intercommunal harmony initiatives.

### Taxation

To accompany its administrative expansion, the ULA/AA has formalised its taxation system. Via Village Administration Committees, the ULA/AA collects monthly household taxes, often referred to locally as a 'monthly donation'. Like almost all ULA/AA policies and regulations, taxation policies are not widely distributed, at least on paper. Taxation receipts, however, are issued regularly as proof of payment.

*Like almost all ULA/AA policies and regulations, taxation policies are not widely distributed, at least on paper.*

The ULA/AA taxation system contains elements of proportionality. Low- and middle-income households are required to pay 2,000 Myanmar Kyat monthly, while wealthier households pay 3,000 Myanmar Kyat. In addition, villages in areas of ULA/AA influence are required to pay annual 'donations' which often consists of a mix of cash and rice. In addition to the proportionality described above, administrators have also allowed leeway for particularly vulnerable families who are unable to pay the 2,000 Myanmar Kyat per month. These households are simply allowed to pay what they are able to afford. In the absence of any formalised policy, however, it remains unclear if this is an ULA/AA policy, or simply a flexibility allowed by individual administrators. Taxation offices sit in each main control area, and are responsible for the taxation of larger businesses in their zones of control. In another example of layered governance, several township level ULA and SAC personnel have reportedly made arrangements for the sharing of businesses' taxation.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Rohingya Man, Rathedaung Township, March 2022.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Rohingya Man, Sittwe Township, March 2022.

## Judiciary

Alongside its taxation activity, the ULA/AA has begun delivering services. Its flagship service to date has been its judicial or dispute resolution function. Naypyidaw's justice system is well-known for corruption and inefficiency, and as such the ULA's system has been an alternative generally welcomed by communities. Reflecting this, communities have reportedly referred a high number of cases to it. According to the ULA/AA, 1,845 cases were referred to it in the first three months of 2022, of which 1,026 were already resolved as of April. Of 3,838 cases reported to the ULA in 2021, some 1,900 had been resolved.<sup>34</sup>

The ULA's judicial sector is not yet entirely independent from its administration, although it aspires to be eventually. For cases solved locally, ULA administrators and administration committees are involved in resolution, but more serious or sensitive cases are reported to higher levels where independent judges arbitrate. In part, this reflects the fact that the ULA has prioritised existing and traditional dispute resolution systems in many instances. In Rohingya villages, the ULA allows community elders or religious leaders, who may or may not include APA members, to resolve village-level criminality and other disputes including those related to marriage. Only if community leaders cannot resolve disputes will they be reported to higher-level ULA/AA officials or judges.<sup>35</sup> A similar system operates in other minority communities. One Rohingya man in Sittwe Township noted that "Our villagers prefer the ULA's judicial system. At first, we tried to solve problems in our village, but the APA responsible people have told us to raise issues with them when we cannot solve disputes in our village."<sup>36</sup> The judiciary is supported by a diverse police force which also reportedly includes Rohingya members.<sup>37</sup> Prioritisation of local structures, while perhaps designed to be sensitive to Rohingya and other Muslim communities, also risks formalising troubling practices with seriously negative protection impacts for women and girls, however.<sup>38</sup>

In some locations, the ULA's judicial system remains just one route for accessing justice. Illustrating the multiple options available for justice, the Kaman woman in an internment camp in Pauktaw Township noted:

"For family cases we go to religious leaders and for general disputes we ask the Camp Management Committee. Sometimes we complain to the ULA/AA appointed village tract administrators. For criminal cases we go to the police, because in our area the ULA/AA is not very active and its system takes time compared to police."<sup>39</sup>

However, in other areas, there is little choice. The SAC's system is inaccessible for some due to the prevalence of the ULA/AA, while the opposite is true in other areas. The Rohingya man in Maungdaw Township shared that:

"We do not have the choice to complain where we want to. But in Buthidaung many Rohingya are afraid of AA and they only complain to ULA. In those areas police have not been very active since last year and only APA members solve problems."<sup>40</sup>

Few respondents were able to point to a set of laws that the ULA/AA was enforcing in its judiciary. Even the head of an APA Village Administration Committee in Sittwe Township noted that the ULA/AA "solve problems and disputes fairly but I am not sure what laws they are using."<sup>41</sup> In Thandwe Township, the Kaman woman had heard that the ULA/AA was enforcing laws, including "the Myanmar penal code, Myanmar cultural law, Christian Religious law and Islamic Sharia law... but for child cases, they use the 2019 child rights and child protection law."<sup>42</sup>

There is also a recognition among community members that the implementation of ULA/AA policies and laws is dependent on the local administrators. In Thandwe Township, the Kaman woman noted that "In some areas, ULA members are transparent and fair in solving the problems but some members take bribes when they solve complaints in some areas. I heard and experienced that myself."<sup>43</sup>

34 Gaung 2022, *Arakan Army Grows Up Quickly*, Development Media Group, 19 April, available from: <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/arakan-army-grows-quickly>. There is no independent monitoring to verify these numbers.

35 Interview with Rohingya Man, Rathedaung Township, March 2022.

36 Interview with Rohingya Man, Sittwe Township, March 2022.

37 Altaf Parvez, Shafiqul Alam, Ashfaqur Ronnie 2022, 'We recognise the human rights and citizen rights of the Rohingyas': Interview: Arakan army chief Twan Mrat Naing, Prothom Alo, 2 January, available from: <https://en.prothomalo.com/opinion/interview/we-recognise-the-human-rights-and-citizen-rights-of-the-rohingyas>.

38 In one case from Buthidaung Township in 2021, ULA administrators, and Rohingya community and religious leaders reportedly settled a case according to local leaders' preferences according to Sharia law, requiring a survivor of sexual violence to wed her attacker.

39 Interview with Kaman Woman, Pauktaw Township, March 2022.

40 Interview with Rohingya Man, Maungdaw Township, March 2022.

41 Interview with Rohingya Man, Sittwe Township, March 2022.

42 Interview with Kaman Woman, Thandwe Township, March 2022. On 23 July 2019, the President of Myanmar enacted the Child Rights Law. International Committee of the Red Cross, *National Implementation of IHL, Child Rights Law*, 2019, <https://ihl-database.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl-nat.nsf/implementingLaws.xsp?documentId=BFBAB7AD3A65FEF6C12584AE007B3FDC&action=OpenDocument#:~:text=On%202023%20July%202019%2C%20the,children%20affected%20by%20armed%20conflict>.

43 Interview with Kaman Woman, Thandwe Township, March 2022.

## Intercommunal Harmony

The ULA/AA has spoken in inclusive terms about intercommunal harmony in Rakhine State, and has implemented intercommunal harmony activities in townships across the state, including football matches, and formed committees to deal with issues affecting cohesion between different communities. The focus of many activities has been between Rakhine and Rohingya communities, but other ethnic and religious groups have also been included. In a further gesture towards a central approach to communal harmony, ULA/AA representatives have made requests to Rakhine and other non-Rohingya community members in multiple townships to refer to the Rohingya simply as Muslims, rather than ‘Bengalis’—a contentious term which suggests the Rohingya are outsiders and therefore unqualified for citizenship. In some of these locations, Rohingya have also been told by ULA/AA authorities not to identify as Rohingya.

The ULA/AA has also prioritised opening freedom of movement for the Rohingya. Naypyidaw has restricted freedom of movement for the Rohingya and other Muslim communities in Rakhine State for decades, and imposed its harshest restrictions in 2012—policies which officially remain in place.<sup>44</sup> In a new approach to intercommunal harmony, and as a demonstration of their growing influence and authority, the ULA/AA has opened freedom of movement dramatically in several locations. In Kyauktaw Township for example, the ULA/AA has encouraged non-Rohingya communities to accept Rohingya movement through their areas, and Rohingya can now freely access the downtown area—from where they were barred by the Myanmar armed forces after communal violence in 2012. Importantly, this has allowed Rohingya people to access livelihoods and services, including healthcare, which they were previously restricted from. It has also allowed for new interactions between communities, an important step towards healing the violent divisions of 2012. Despite these improvements, massive limitations still remain, not least in the form of ongoing restrictions from the SAC. Indeed, in response to the ULA/AA’s opening of movement, the SAC has newly barred Rohingya movement through some rural areas where they retain the physical presence to do so.

These changing dynamics are captured in a popular joke which has spread through western Myanmar in recent years. In the joke, a group of Rohingya people are harassed by ethnic Rakhine townsfolk while travelling in downtown Kyauktaw. The Rohingya retort by saying “We pay our taxes to the AA... if you’ve got a problem, talk to them!”, and the harassing townsfolk henceforth leave the group alone. Although told in jest, the joke also betrays that certain elements of the Rakhine community remain dissatisfied with mixing with the Rohingya, but the ULA/AA is granted such a high level of legitimacy and authority by communities that it is able to attempt to tackle even this most sensitive of issues.

While freedom of movement for Rohingya has not been opened to such a dramatic degree in other townships, the ULA/AA has facilitated an improved ability of Rohingya to move through Rakhine villages in most townships, both through collaboration with Rakhine villagers and the dismantling of the Myanmar armed forces and police force presence. The Rakhine farmer in Rathedaung Township noted that “Muslim people can travel and enter into Rakhine villages in our area now, because the APA informs Rakhine people not to restrict Muslim people.”<sup>45</sup> Similarly, a Rohingya leader in Sittwe Township noted how the ULA/AA had facilitated greater movement, and thereby greater access to livelihoods, in his area:

“They [the ULA/AA] told us to inform and ask help from them if any ethnic Rakhine people make security troubles when we go to their villages. So, we can go through Rakhine villages to work by relying on the ULA’s help.”<sup>46</sup>

The ULA/AA’s more inclusive approach to the Rohingya, and to inter-ethnic and inter-religious harmony in western Myanmar in general, sets them apart from previous political movements of note in recent decades in Rakhine State. The ULA/AA’s exact motivations for this inclusive approach remain difficult to define—some cite that it is because the ULA/AA recognises the importance of the Rohingya issue to the international community—but international agencies engaging in western Myanmar should note this progression among political movements, and identify at least a recognition among the ULA/AA leadership that communal harmony between communities in western Myanmar is a precondition for building peace and prosperity.

<sup>44</sup> See: Independent Rakhine Initiative 2020, *Freedom of Movement in Rakhine State*, March, available from: <https://express.adobe.com/page/2yY6hUP7Q48bb/>. While the restrictions were imposed by the Myanmar armed forces, they were also enforced in part by hardliners from the Rakhine community, who made sure that Muslims travelling through downtown were made unwelcome, through both threats and the use of violence.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Rakhine Man, Rathedaung Township, March 2022.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Rohingya Man, Sittwe Township, March 2022.

*Rohingya and other Muslim respondents are divided, with some reporting fair treatment, and others reporting bias and discrimination*

Despite these improvements in conditions for the Rohingya, there remain key issues surrounding discrimination and bias. Critically, while the top leadership of the ULA/AA may have a policy of non-discrimination and intercommunal harmony promotion, it is questionable as to how much of this is supported among administrators on the ground. As noted throughout this paper: the ULA/AA governance system is still highly decentralised, and considerable authority lies in the hands of local commanders and administrators. Indeed, Rohingya and other Muslim respondents are divided, with some reporting fair treatment, and others reporting bias and discrimination,<sup>47</sup> often dependent on the administrator of the village tract or the local commander.

## Implementation Variation

As mentioned above, there is variation in how the APA has been established and in how it operates. Village Administration Committees are constituted differently, while the application of taxation policies, or the degree of interaction with the SAC administration, also differs across space. While the APA has also established itself in all ethnic and religious communities—including Rohingya communities—there is variation in its approaches to different communities. There are three key factors informing variation in APA activity: armed SAC presence, ongoing military tensions, and personnel.

First, stand-alone APA activity is most prominent in rural areas away from the presence of SAC armed forces. The APA has thrived in remote areas where there has been little administrative activity from Naypyidaw in recent decades, allowing the APA to quickly move in and establish itself as a service provider, just as the AA moved into these locations militarily with relative ease. This is unsurprising, and aligns with findings from other contexts in Myanmar, such as a 2016 report on education in ethnic areas of Myanmar,

which found that Naypyidaw’s school system was often strongest nearby Myanmar armed forces’ battalions.<sup>48</sup> By contrast, in rural areas away from zones where the state has already established a militarised and administrative presence, new systems of governance and service delivery can quickly be established and are welcomed.

Conversely, it has been difficult for the APA to establish a visible presence near SAC armed forces. In Rambree Township, a Kaman man noted that while the APA had an active presence in his village, there was not AA military presence, allowing SAC to enter and “block” the APA system intermittently.<sup>49</sup> In contrast, the Rakhine businessperson in Ann Township noted that a strong AA presence prevented the SAC from disrupting ULA administrative activities.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, a strong presence of AA forces supports greater independent ULA and APA governance activity, and this is usually achieved in rural areas or those far from SAC armed forces battalions.

Closer to urban areas or nearby SAC armed forces’ presence, the ULA/AA has established its governance with a more collaborative approach. In these locations, ULA activity is more likely to intersect with SAC structures, whether from the GAD, or the ministries of health, education, or more. This creative approach is borne from necessity, and appears based on a pragmatic philosophy of adopting what exists, rather than rebuilding—at least for the time being. In Mrauk-U Township, a youth leader notes that: “there is strong collaboration between the APA and the SAC-appointed staff from health and education. These staff collaborate with the APA to implement their activities.”<sup>51</sup>

*Closer to urban areas or nearby SAC armed forces’ presence, the ULA/AA has established its governance with a more collaborative approach.*

48 Kim Jolliffe and Emily Speers Mears 2016, ‘Strength in Diversity: Towards Universal Education in Myanmar’s Ethnic Areas,’ *Asia Foundation*, p.15 available from: <https://asiafoundation.org/publication/strength-in-diversity/>.

49 Interview with Kaman Man, Rambree Township, April 2022.

50 Interview with Rakhine Man, Ann Township, March 2022.

51 Interview with Rakhine Woman, Mrauk-U Township, March 2022.

47 Interview with Kaman Man, Rambree Township, April 2022.



The second variable is the current state of military tension. APA activity and its ability to latch on to Naypyidaw's structures is limited in locations where military tensions remain high. Most prominently, this includes areas of Maungdaw Township bordering Bangladesh; the gateway between central Myanmar, central Rakhine State, and southern Rakhine State in Ann Township (where the SAC's Western Command also lies); and the strategic upper reaches of the Kaladan river, in Kyauktaw Township, where southern Chin State meets Rakhine State. In these areas, it is more difficult for the APA to establish itself, and the SAC has issued warnings to communities not to engage with the APA. Similar tensions are also present elsewhere. The shopkeeper in Ponnagyun Township notes that: "Both sides have a close presence in our area—which might cause intense tensions if one group tries to enter another group's area. But there is no working together, apart from the SAC-appointed village administrators' collaboration with the APA."<sup>52</sup>

Localised histories of armed conflict define these tensions, in part. The Myanmar military has consistently asserted itself militarily in areas where armed conflict was absent during 2018–20, but has allowed the ULA/AA greater reign in locations which were heavily contested during those years.<sup>53</sup> For example, the SAC allowed recent water festival celebrations in Kyauktaw Township, hosted by the ULA/AA, to continue undisrupted, while their military deployments to a religious festival in Pauktaw Township in December 2021 effectively cancelled the event. Similarly, the SAC took a violent approach to discouraging Rohingya cooperation with the ULA/AA in Sittwe Township in May 2022, including the abductions of at least 6 Rohingya businesspeople for allegedly paying tax to the ULA, despite tolerating such payments in formerly contested rural areas.

The final condition is that of the individual personnel acting as APA representatives. The implementation of ULA policies is highly dependent on the individuals acting as administrators, judges or otherwise. The fact that some APA administrators also serve in SAC roles, whether as village tract administrators or heads of hundred households, can also define how closely the APA is able to work with the SAC administration. Variation in individual leadership appears most obvious to Muslim respondents.

Despite the varied nature of its presence and activities, the ULA has established the APA across vast swaths of western Myanmar. The Rohingya man working for an NGO in Maungdaw Township noted that "Compared to Buthidaung, the AA presence in Maungdaw is not much. They control more in Rakhine villages, and most Rohingya villages are under the Rakhine SAC administration. But they have appointed their representatives in Rohingya villages... Police and Rakhine SAC are not allowed to enter any AA-controlled Rakhine villages."<sup>54</sup>

*As the ULA's administrative presence has grown it has encountered humanitarian responders, both national and international, with increasing frequency.*

## Responding to Humanitarians

As the ULA's administrative presence has grown it has encountered humanitarian responders, both national and international, with increasing frequency. Collaboration with local civil society organisations, both formal and informal, has been more substantive. This is unsurprising given that these groups have greater access to rural areas and deeper community connections. Collaboration during the COVID-19 pandemic was a milestone, facilitating greater coordination and supporting community perceptions that the ULA/AA was committed to facilitating humanitarian aid in rural areas. In 2022, the ULA/AA, under the auspices of its Humanitarian Development Coordination Office, has been attempting to facilitate more structured engagement with humanitarian agencies, and is increasingly requesting that agencies apply for permission, or at least notify, before carrying out travel or activities. Community respondents and other sources note that the ULA/AA apparently has a plan to register agencies on an online platform, and use that system and others for travel authorisations and security updates.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Rakhine Man, Ponnagyun Township, March 2022.

<sup>53</sup> Kyaw Lynn 2022, *The Nature of Parallel Governance and Its Impact on Arakan Politics*, Transnational Institute, 24 February, available from: <https://www.tni.org/en/article/the-nature-of-parallel-governance-and-its-impact-on-arakan-politics>.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Rohingya Man, Maungdaw Township, March 2022.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Kaman Woman, Thandwe Township, March 2022.

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In terms of international-ethnic armed group relationships, the emergence of the ULA/AA is unique. This is the first time in Myanmar that an ethnic armed organisation has risen to prominence, as either an armed or governance actor, in a location already hosting a significant international response. The international response to communal violence and displacement in 2012 has resulted in a larger international presence in western Myanmar than elsewhere in the country, where responses have also relied more on established national organisations.

International agencies are frequently wary of formalised engagement with the ULA/AA, especially due to the potential for SAC retaliation against them. International agencies also continue to rely on travel and activity permissions from the SAC. Signalling that the risks of engagement with the ULA/AA remain high, civilians have been arrested, and jailed, on charges of affiliation with the ULA/AA throughout April and May 2022.<sup>56</sup> International agencies are between a rock and a hard place; some level of coordination with the ULA/AA is necessary to access village locations across much of the state, but overtly visible engagement risks an SAC backlash. There is also little precedent for international agencies to draw on, at least from Myanmar. Most international agencies are designed to work with states, and there is no script for engagement with an emergent non-state actor like the ULA/AA.

Many residents of Rakhine State have encouraged humanitarian coordination with the ULA/AA. The Kaman woman in Pauktaw Township noted that “I think they [international agencies] should work with ULA/AA as they become more influential in Rakhine. ULA/AA does not restrict agencies like RSAC. As ULA/AA already gets trust from the Rakhine community it is easier for agencies to work in

Rakhine.”<sup>57</sup> Some Rohingya respondents, however, warn against close engagement, suggesting that the ULA/AA may seek to limit aid to Rohingya communities.<sup>58</sup> Others also recognise the limitations for agencies, and point to the fact that the SAC may retaliate against agencies engaging with the ULA/AA.<sup>59</sup>

An issue crucial to the international response in western Myanmar is the repatriation of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh, and it is increasingly clear that the ULA/AA will play a crucial role in any repatriation. While conditions in Rakhine State remain unstable, making returns under international standards extremely unlikely, there is a potential for at least small-scale returns under agreements of the SAC and Bangladesh government. In early 2022, the SAC announced that they would accept 700 refugees as a first cohort, and later raised the number to approximately 1,000 and specified that the group would include Rohingya and Hindu refugees.<sup>60</sup> There is no indication that the ULA/AA have been consulted during this process, despite the fact that they have a large degree of influence over the border territories, and places of origin of many refugees.

Some Rohingya are not optimistic about the ULA/AA’s position on returns, which remains unstated. The NGO staff member in Maungdaw Township noted that “most villages are controlled by the ULA and they will oppress them if they return. I think ULA do not want to accept the Rohingya because the Rakhine community think most of the Rohingya living in Cox’s Bazar are affiliated with ARSA and they are terrorists.”<sup>61</sup> Others suggested that the ULA/AA was likely to support repatriation, because they want to develop a closer relationship with neighbouring Bangladesh, and enjoy the benefits of trade at the border.<sup>62</sup>

*It is increasingly clear that the ULA/AA will play a crucial role in any repatriation.*

57 Interview with Kaman Woman, Pauktaw Township, March 2022.

58 Interview with Rohingya Man, Mrauk-U Township, March 2022.

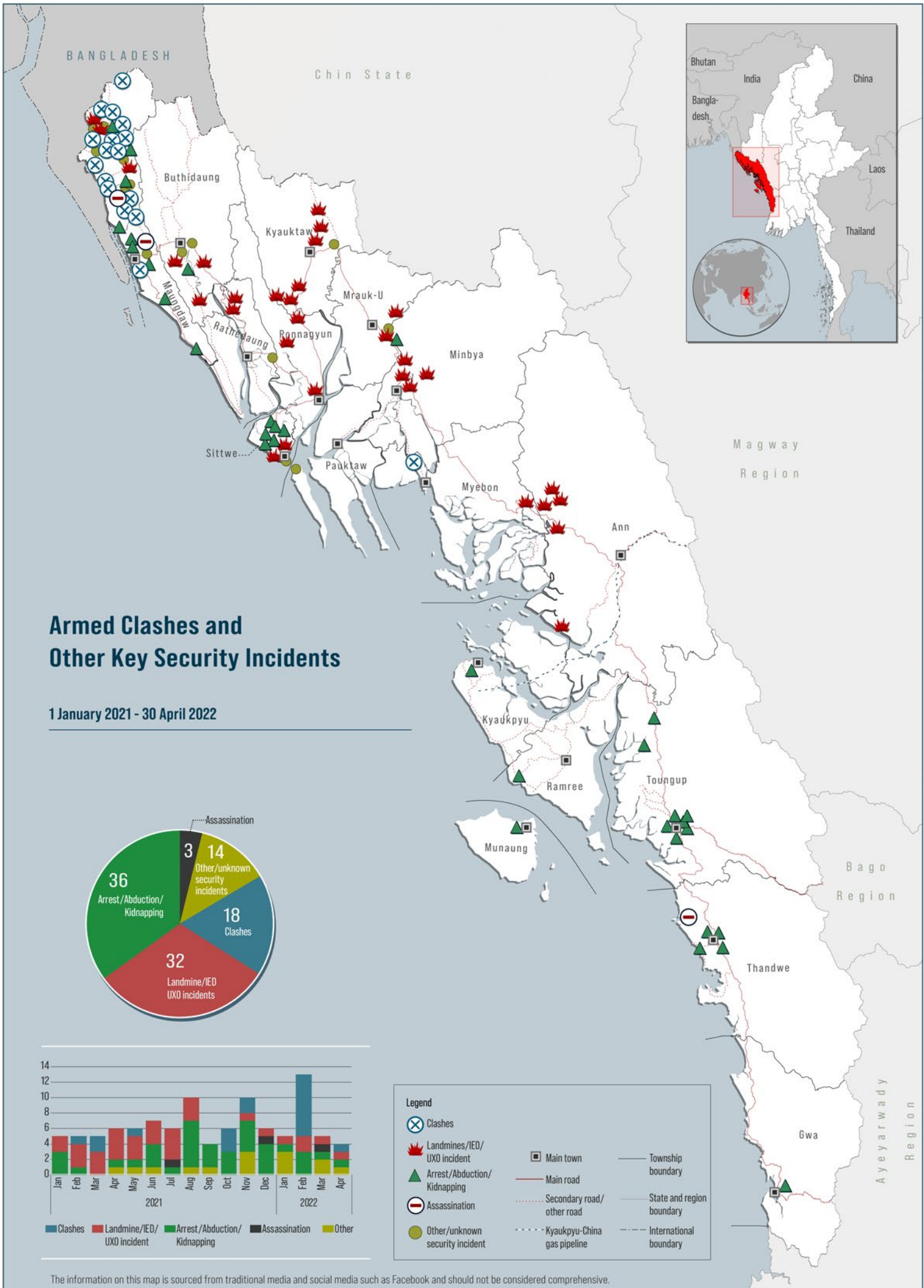
59 Interview with Chin Woman, Minbya Township, March 2022.

60 Border News Agency 2022, မှဆလင်နှင့် ဟိန္ဒူဒုက္ခသည် တစ်ထောင်ကျော်ကို ပြန်လက်ခံဖို့ အဆင်သင့်ပြင်ထားပြီးပြီလို့ စစ်ကောင်စီဆို (လက်ရှိအချိန်ထိ တရားဝင်ပြန်လာတာ တစ်ယောက်မှ မရှိသေး) [SAC: We are ready to receive more than 1,000 Muslim and Hindu refugee returnees (none have returned to date), 1 May, available from: <https://www.facebook.com/107469705028678/posts/164379426004372/?d=n>].

61 Interview with Rohingya Man, Maungdaw Township, March 2022.

62 Interview with Rakhine Man, Rathedaung Township, March 2022; Interview with Chin Woman, Minbya Township, March 2022.

56 Western News 2022, အကြမ်းဖက်အဖွဲ့မှ ရုပ်သိမ်းထားသော်လည်း မောင်တောဒေသခံ ၂ ဦး အား အကြမ်းဖက်မှုဖြင့် ထောင်ဒဏ် ၁၀ နှစ်ချမှတ် (sic) [Two Maungdaw residents sentenced to 10 years prison on terrorism charges despite terrorist designation withdrawal], 21 April, 2022, available from: <https://www.facebook.com/westernnewsagency/posts/507249967748179>



The information on this map is sourced from traditional media and social media such as Facebook and should not be considered comprehensive.

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## Critical Acceptance

In recent months, a new challenge has surfaced for the ULA/AA: public criticism. Until early 2022, public criticism of the ULA/AA was rare. This was likely due to the strong sense of Rakhine community solidarity which continues to exist behind the ULA/AA, and an associated recognition that unity was essential for success, especially during the years of active armed conflict. Censure from community members, or the risk of being labelled a detractor, meant that few people dared to criticise the ULA/AA even if they disagreed with its politics or means. The ULA/AA's reputation for violently abducting its critics also serves as a key disincentive to criticism, while previous reporting has also noted that a sense of victimhood among ethnic Rakhine communities bolsters a sense of righteousness in the ULA/AA's struggle, and thereby limits the space for critical assessment.<sup>63</sup>

In February 2022, however, the floodgates of criticism opened. Among the first critics were Western News, a Rakhine-based media outlet known for their sympathies towards the ULA/AA. As such, the criticism was significant, and pointed out shortcomings in the ULA's judicial sector and growing community discontent.<sup>64</sup> Subsequently, dozens of cases were reported of ULA/AA abuses against civilians, from nepotism and corruption to miscarriages of justice, land-grabbing, and unlawful execution.<sup>65</sup> Cases are reported from all ethnic and religious communities, but the media primarily features the grievances of the Rakhine community, which dominates media circles in western Myanmar. The open frustration of elements of the Rakhine community is significant, given that it forms the ULA/AA's key support base.

*In recent months, a new challenge has surfaced for the ULA/AA: public criticism.*

Amid growing criticism, on 27 February the ULA/AA announced that they would hold monthly press conferences to address questions from the media.<sup>66</sup> While subsequent press conferences have been broadcast live on Facebook, the first was behind closed doors. In the first press conference on 5 March, ULA/AA spokesperson (and former Arakan Liberation Party cadre) Khaing Thu Kha acknowledged that low-level ULA/AA officials were abusing their power, and committed his organisation to taking action against them. By the second press conference, on 5 April, approximately half of the questions fielded concerned specific allegations of abuses. While the ULA/AA has taken some action against administrators accused of abuses, it continues to face new accusations. In some ways, the ULA/AA has become a victim of its own success. With the conditions ripe for expansion, and no shortage of volunteers, the ULA/AA expanded its governance systems rapidly, with little time for training or vetting, and higher-level officers have had difficulties controlling the multiple representatives of the organisation on the ground.

In Mrauk-U Township, the youth leader noted that her community prefers the ULA's judicial system because it is effective and affordable, but that "bias and corruption among some members lead to unfair decisions for us." She also indicated that concerns were being relieved because the "higher level of the ULA/AA conducted investigations among those who committed power-abuses and replaced them with new educated people."<sup>67</sup> A Chin woman in Minbya Township also noted discrimination and abuses by ULA members, including torture of suspected criminals, but also noted that higher levels of the ULA apologised to victims and their families, and punished those responsible.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, recognition of shortcomings has been a consistent response by the ULA/AA to its recent critiques.

Despite some community misgivings, for the time being governance in western Myanmar is a one-horse race. Despite their frustrations, communities show no signs of wishing for an SAC resurgence, and overwhelmingly report a preference for the ULA/AA's system. For the most part, respondents from both Rakhine and Rohingya communities report little corruption, efficient resolution of cases, and a general satisfaction with the system.

63 Simbulan, Karen. *Exploring ethno-religious identities and community perceptions of social cohesion in Central Rakhine State*. November 2020. RAFT Myanmar.

64 Western News 2022. ရက်စွဲပြည့်သည့် အာဏာပိုင်အဖွဲ့ လက်အောက်ရှိ တရားရေးဌာနအချို့၏ အမှု ပြုစုပေးမှုနှင့် တရားစီရင်မှု ပိုင်းတို့၌ အမှု တချို့တွင် မကျေနပ်မှု ရှိနေ (There is dissatisfaction with the ULA/AA's Judicial Sector). 22 February, available from: [https://www.facebook.com/westernnewsagency/posts/470409658098877?\\_cft\\_\\_\[0\]=AZXnh6ntCJE8xHM0Mh8gmHWX8Ao6glvNd3tgo2YSeeS8H0pSm56\\_ycqctBJXh8out306egbtg4vHy3\\_YNQN\\_TQhnZffkj5IBPyLcTsittF4uq-HV-OffONRj3AKY2gKps6\\_\\_tn\\_\\_=%2C0%2CP-R](https://www.facebook.com/westernnewsagency/posts/470409658098877?_cft__[0]=AZXnh6ntCJE8xHM0Mh8gmHWX8Ao6glvNd3tgo2YSeeS8H0pSm56_ycqctBJXh8out306egbtg4vHy3_YNQN_TQhnZffkj5IBPyLcTsittF4uq-HV-OffONRj3AKY2gKps6__tn__=%2C0%2CP-R).

65 Interview with Rakhine Man, Rathedaung Township, March 2022.

66 Facebook post, Khaing Thu Kha, 27 February 2022, [https://www.facebook.com/voicearakan/posts/433316805203837?\\_\\_cft\\_\\_\[0\]=AZX0s5rNcRoAE09KWL006gnHeSItkCE7qwPg9kH8tsSgziyxky6FManjFDmH-tpegHoM0HaxaAK5Kk0EwlcF-CsLzfFbEjYh1KnsyVjv39xTIPY54wjVgOGZKRia56rlcziwRBQ-ehQFFEP-HmeG0Es6\\_\\_tn\\_\\_=%2C0%2CP-R](https://www.facebook.com/voicearakan/posts/433316805203837?__cft__[0]=AZX0s5rNcRoAE09KWL006gnHeSItkCE7qwPg9kH8tsSgziyxky6FManjFDmH-tpegHoM0HaxaAK5Kk0EwlcF-CsLzfFbEjYh1KnsyVjv39xTIPY54wjVgOGZKRia56rlcziwRBQ-ehQFFEP-HmeG0Es6__tn__=%2C0%2CP-R).

67 Interview with Rakhine Woman, Mrauk-U Township, March 2022.

68 Interview with Chin Woman, Minbya Township, March 2022.

It is rare to hear a preference for SAC justice.<sup>69</sup> Given the scale of the issue, reflected in the ULA/AA's massive presence in western Myanmar, community dissatisfaction is likely to remain a thorn in the ULA/AA's side for some time. If the ULA/AA cannot solve these issues, there is a risk that another movement may dislodge the ULA/AA, although this would not be a quick process and shows no signs of emerging yet. Another key risk is that the ULA/AA will seek to divert attention from its limitations through combative rhetoric against the SAC, bringing the threat of war closer again.

## Rohingya Reactions

The ULA/AA leadership have spoken positively about the space for the Rohingya in its political community. In an interview with Bangladesh media outlet Prothom Alo in January 2022, the ULA/AA Commander-in-Chief Twan Mrat Naing said that “we recognise the human rights and citizen rights of the Rohingyas,” but was also quick to note the complexities of the issue in terms of identity and history.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, in an interview the same month with Asia Times, he noted that “We recognize the human rights and citizenship rights of all residents of Arakan (Rakhine), but a massive repatriation of refugees in the current situation could unleash a new wave of unrest,” and added that most Rakhine people would not accept the term ‘Rohingya’.<sup>71</sup>

In the same vein, Rohingya communities report mixed experiences of the ULA's governance, again reflecting that policy implementation is highly contingent on individual administrators. In Pauktaw Township, the Kaman woman believed that non-Rakhine ethnic groups were treated fairly by the ULA/AA, and suggested that this was because they want to win the trust of the Muslim community.<sup>72</sup> In other areas, such as Sittwe Township, Rohingya accepted the ULA/AA for protection against security threats from neighbouring Rakhine villages. “We need to rely on the ULA/APA for protection when our villagers go into Rakhine villages. ULA told us they do not charge for solving any disputes or complaints and they stand only for justice and fairness. They did not force us to collaborate with them.”<sup>73</sup>

Others had more mixed experiences. The Kaman woman in Thandwe Township noted that the potential for discriminatory rule “depends on the qualification of its [APA] members. In some areas, its members whose qualifications are low treat ethnic and religious groups unfairly. All members in ULA/APA are not in balance with each other.”<sup>74</sup> A Rohingya teashop owner in Rathedaung Township suggested that the ULA/AA policies towards Rohingya were fair, but were misdirected by ULA/AA representatives on the ground:

“The ULA/AA do not discriminate or abuse towards Rohingya directly, but they have some discrimination based on the information its village leaders send to them wrongly. So, let me say it depends on the information from the village leaders. If its village leaders share false information about a person who opposes them in the village, ULA/AA abuse him or her or are discriminatory.”<sup>75</sup>

Some residents have welcomed at least a semi-formalised taxation system. The teashop owner also noted that the extortion of cows, chickens, or other animals from farmers, regularly committed by the Myanmar armed forces, was not replicated by the ULA/AA, and neither were additional ‘fees’ required for permissions to build new structures or fix existing ones.<sup>76</sup> This differs from reports from other locations, where APA administrators have extorted fees from Rohingya people for permission to construct on their own land.<sup>77</sup>

Others have complained that additional ‘taxes’ are leveraged at the will of local administrators. For example, in one Rohingya village in Mrauk-U Township, each household was required to pay an additional 1,000 Myanmar Kyat one month to fund the construction of a ‘judicial court shelter’ for the ULA. Despite the high cost—especially during a time of economic hardship amid the COVID-19 pandemic and post-coup economic crisis—households reportedly paid in fear of abuses from the ULA/AA if they did not.<sup>78</sup> While the ULA/AA has semi-formalised many of its functions, they remain dependent on the individual administrators or armed personnel implementing them.

69 The only reason typically given for a preference for SAC justice is their speed in apprehending alleged perpetrators.

70 Altaf Parvez, Shafiqul Alam, Ashfaque Ronnie 2022, ‘We recognise the human rights and citizen rights of the Rohingyas’: Interview: Arakan army chief Twan Mrat Naing, Prothom Alo, 2 January, available from: <https://en.prothomalo.com/opinion/interview/we-recognise-the-human-rights-and-citizen-rights-of-the-rohingyas>.

71 Bertil Lintner 2022, Rebel yell: Arakan Army leader speaks to Asia Times, Asia Times, 18 January, available from: <https://asiatimes.com/2022/01/rebel-yell-arakan-army-leader-speaks-to-asia-times/>.

72 Interview with Kaman Woman, Pauktaw Township, March 2022.

73 Interview with Rohingya Man, Sittwe Township, March 2022.

74 Interview with Kaman Woman, Thandwe Township, March 2022.

75 Interview with Rohingya Man, Rathedaung Township, March 2022.

76 Interview with Rohingya Man, Rathedaung Township, March 2022.

77 Documentation on file.

78 Interview with Rohingya Man, Mrauk-U Township, March 2022.

The Rohingya are trapped between two systems, and often have to pay both taxation and extorted fees to both. For example, in Mrauk-U Township, one Muslim religious

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leader noted that although the SAC police are no longer able to operate in his area, township administrators continue to contact the village to extort cash for permission to construct a madrassa.<sup>79</sup> Meanwhile, a Rohingya woman in Buthidaung Township expressed frustration with having to report to both the SAC and ULA. “We need to pay tax to both of them but they do not provide any services or protection to us. Sometimes we feel confused about who we should inform if the community faces a problem. Although ULA/AA is growing in Rakhine there is RSAC and the police are still active.”<sup>80</sup> Similarly, in Maungdaw Township, respondents noted that the APA administrators reportedly threaten Rohingya who report cases to the police or SAC administrators, but treat Rohingya with bias and indifference when they do report to them.<sup>81</sup>

A case commonly raised by Rohingya communities comes from Buthidaung Township in February 2022, when an elderly Rohingya man was found guilty by the ULA/AA of murdering a 10 year old girl.<sup>82</sup> The judgement was passed just days after his arrest and with very little transparency in process. Among Rohingya communities it is rumoured that AA soldiers were seen in the vicinity when the girl first disappeared, and that the crime extended to sexual violence or rape.<sup>83</sup>

This case and others have fed perceptions of bias. The Muslim religious leader in Mrauk-U Township mused that: “if any problem happens between Rohingya, ULA will be transparent in its judicial mechanism. If it happens between Rohingya and Rakhine, they will not be transparent.”<sup>84</sup> Despite this, the SAC’s system remains in such low repute that the APA remains attractive for the Rohingya. In Rambree Township, a Kaman man noted:

“Currently, the community prefers the ULA’s judicial system here because it is faster than the SAC’s and takes actions immediately and effectively.”<sup>85</sup>

While some Rohingya are already committed to working with the ULA/AA, others raised deep concerns about their future under ULA/AA administration. In Maungdaw Township, the NGO worker noted that the ULA/AA had been denying the term ‘Rohingya’, and forcing Rohingya to take the name ‘Bengali’. For him, this was a bad omen for the future. “We are really concerned about those tensions as SAC does not accept us and often discriminates against us as ‘illegal Bengalis’ and now the ULA/AA is acting the same. We cannot say that the ULA/AA will not drive us out the same as the SAC did in 2017.”<sup>86</sup> Similarly, the Rohingya religious leader in Mrauk-U weighed that “it will be more dangerous for Rohingya in Rakhine State under a ULA administration than that of the current government.”<sup>87</sup> Indeed, during a March 2022 meeting, a ULA/AA representative warned Rohingya villagers in Rathedaung Township not to insist on the term ‘Rohingya’, and stated that the ULA/AA would implement a new citizenship law similar to Myanmar’s 1982 citizenship law, dividing the population into three categories of citizenship: full, associate, and naturalised. Rohingya public opinion on the ULA/AA remains split, and there is less enthusiasm for its administration among Rohingya who are isolated from Rakhine communities, suggesting that managing its relationships with the Rohingya community will continue to be a key challenge for the ULA/AA.

79 Interview with Rohingya Man, Mrauk-U Township, March 2022.

80 Interview with Rohingya Woman, Buthidaung Township, March 2022.

81 Interview with Rohingya Man, Maungdaw Township, March 2022.

82 Development Media Group 2022, *AA authority detains alleged murderer of 10-year-old girl in Buthidaung Twsp*, 7 February, available from: <https://www.dmediag.com/news/4013-detains-alleged-murderer?fbclid=IwAR1KLi8uSAT5ZUZA3GcinAtLhivJJRntfpWjYeLTVNtnOPpZK8R3kmmMMY>. The ULA/AA also posted their ruling online, via their page on social media website VK, Justice for Arakan, available here: [https://vk.com/wall-206203788\\_88](https://vk.com/wall-206203788_88).

83 Multiple interviews with Rohingya respondents, March 2022.

84 Interview with Rohingya Man, Mrauk-U Township, March 2022.

85 Interview with Kaman Man, Rambree Township, April 2022.

86 Interview with Rohingya Man, Maungdaw Township, March 2022.

87 Interview with Rohingya Man, Mrauk-U Township, March 2022.

