

Myanmar

Ethnicity in Myanmar

Group selection

We identify the majority group of the **Bamar (Barman)** (68%) as politically relevant as well as the groups living in the seven official ethnic minority states of Myanmar, namely **Kachins**, **Karenni (Red Karens)**, **Kayin (Karens)**, **Mons**, **Shan**, **Zomis (Chins)**, **Buddhist Arakanese**, and **Muslim Arakanese** (both inhabit Rakhine state). Further relevant groups are **Chinese**, **Indians**, and **Wa**.

The group sizes rely on the last official figures from 1983 (²⁹⁵⁸). They cannot be adjusted to more recent data as the figures on ethnicity from the 2014 census were still withheld at the time of the last review. The census was heavily criticized by human rights and ethnic minority organizations beforehand due to growing anxiety that the status of ethnic minority peoples could be undermined before the 2015 general election (²⁹⁵⁹; ²⁹⁶⁰). It excluded the Rohingya in Rakhine state (mainly Muslim Arakanese) and was not conducted in Kachin state at all (²⁹⁶¹; ²⁹⁶², 2). The figures given here largely correspond to current numbers given by the CIA World Factbook (²⁹⁶³).

²⁹⁵⁸ [IRIN, 2012]

²⁹⁵⁹ [Burma Centrum Nederland, 2012]

²⁹⁶⁰ [Transnational Institute, 2014]

²⁹⁶¹ [International Crisis Group, 2014]

²⁹⁶² [UNHRC, 2016]

Power relations

1948-1957

After independence from Great Britain in 1948, a democratic period followed with the **Bamar** majority as Senior Partner and the **Kachins** and the **Shan** in Junior Partner positions. However, this period was short and marked by political instability and increasing ethnic conflicts on the country's periphery (²⁹⁶⁴). The remaining minorities were cut off from executive power and are coded either Powerless (**Buddhist Arakanese**, **Muslim Arakanese**, **Mons**, **Wa**) or Discriminated (**Chinese**, **Indians**, **Zomis**, and **Karenni**) respectively. Concerning the **Karenni**, reports suggest their forced incorporation into Burma in 1947 without any political representation at the national level and continuous military presence in Karenni state. The army suppressed political expression, forcefully relocated citizens and even attempted to assassinate political leaders (²⁹⁶⁵, 30; ²⁹⁶⁶). Based on this assessment, their status remains Discriminated for the entire period under review. This applies to the **Chinese** and **Indian** minorities as well, while the status of other

²⁹⁶⁴ [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2018]

²⁹⁶⁵ [Bamforth, Lanjouw Mortimer, 2000]

²⁹⁶⁶ [Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization]

groups is subject to change in subsequent periods.

The **Kayin** openly went into armed rebellion as their demands for independence, or at least federalism, voiced by organizations such as the Karen National Union (the KNU) and its armed branch, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), appeared increasingly futile (²⁹⁶⁷). Thus, their political status is considered Self-Excluded in this period.

²⁹⁶⁷ [Minority Rights Group International, 2017]

1958

The **Muslim Arakanese** become Self-Excluded.

1959

Since independence, the military sought to prevent national disintegration by use of force but without offering a long-lasting political solution to the minority problems (²⁹⁶⁸). As the military, locally known as Tatmadaw, rose to power in the 1950ies, its inner circle emerged as the ruling elite with exclusive access to executive power. This new elite was made up entirely of Burman Buddhists, i.e. members of the **Bamar** ethnic group (²⁹⁶⁹). Thus, their coding is subsequently Dominant, while the **Kachins** and **Shan** become Discriminated.

²⁹⁶⁸ [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014]

²⁹⁶⁹ [Leibenluft, 2008]

1960-1962

The **Buddhist Arakanese** and the **Mons** become Self-Excluded, the **Shan** become Powerless.

1963-1982

In 1962, General Ne Win staged a coup against the democratically elected government, citing the rise of regional rebellions against the national government as a pretext for military intervention (²⁹⁷⁰). The coup finalized the rule of the **Bamar** military elite.

²⁹⁷⁰ [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014]

The **Kachins** become Powerless, the **Shan** and the **Zomis** Self-Excluded.

1983-1989

The Citizenship Act of 1982 marked a fundamental deterioration for the situation of the **Muslim Arakanese** by excluding the Rohingyas and other Muslims from the list of 135 officially recognized national minorities (²⁹⁷¹, 10; ²⁹⁷²). The majority of the Muslim Arakanese, whose name refers to their homeland in Rakhine state - historically called Arakan - self-identifies as “Rohingya” (²⁹⁷³, 1). This denomination is used by most of the reports covering their precarious situation. However, here the label Muslim Arakanese seems appropriate in regard of the religious component of their exclusion by the Buddhist majority of the country, and also to distinguish

²⁹⁷¹ [Transnational Institute, 2014]

²⁹⁷² [Staniland, 2017]

²⁹⁷³ [Nemoto, 2013]

them more clearly from the Buddhist Arakanese who face less discrimination by the state (²⁹⁷⁴). While the **Bamar** military elite usually tried to contain other ethnic groups within their territory, it treated the Muslim Arakanese as alien to their country in the first place (²⁹⁷⁵). It is difficult to clearly separate ethnic from religious or nationalist motives behind the increasing state-led discrimination they faced since the military took over power in 1962 (²⁹⁷⁶). Already in 1978, many were expelled to Bangladesh by a military operation which targeted people who were not considered citizens of Burma (²⁹⁷⁷, 9; ²⁹⁷⁸). Based on their official denial of minority status in the Citizenship Act, the Muslim Arakanese are coded as Discriminated starting in 1983.

²⁹⁷⁴ [Minority Rights Group International, 2017]

²⁹⁷⁵ [Staniland, 2017]

1990-2011

In the early 1990ies, the military government signed several cease-fire agreements with insurgents representing ethnic minority groups in exchange for territory and de facto administrative autonomy. Thus, most parts of the outer provinces, which are inhabited by the ethnic minorities, came under de facto control of powerful guerrilla groups (²⁹⁷⁹). However, the power balance at the national level did not change significantly with the **Bamar** led military still in power.

²⁹⁷⁹ [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2010]

The continuing dominance of the army was further enshrined by the 2008 Constitution granting 1/4 of all national and 1/3 of all regional parliamentary seats to active-duty military appointees. Moreover, it provided for the military's indefinite power over all branches of government should the president, who must be of military background as well, declare a national state of emergency (²⁹⁸⁰; ²⁹⁸¹). According to the new constitution, a quorum of more than 75% would be necessary for further constitutional amendments, granting the military effectively veto power (²⁹⁸²).

²⁹⁸⁰ [US State Department, 2013]

²⁹⁸¹ [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014]

²⁹⁸² [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014]

The only applicable changes here concern the **Kachins** who become Self-Excluded, and the **Wa**, who are coded with regional autonomy based on the fact that the embattled Burmese military made heavy concessions in return for an end of the conflict. The heavily armed Wa militia, the UWSA, was given full autonomy over what the regime termed "Special Region No. 2" or "Wa state". The UWSA was also granted lucrative business concessions, including tacit permission to deal in narcotics (²⁹⁸³).

²⁹⁸³ [Marshall Davis, 2002]

2012-2017

Despite the fact that the ethnic power balance did not shift decisively in favour of the minority groups, this period is marked by some important political developments which are outlined below:

Myanmar held multi-party elections in 2010 for the first time after five decades of military rule. However, they were considered neither free nor fair (²⁹⁸⁴). The newly elected parliamentary government was headed by President Thein Sein, himself a former general and chairman of the military-backed and powerful Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) (²⁹⁸⁵). He appointed predominantly former senior military officers and/or USDP representatives, who had played important roles in the previous military junta. Only very few of the appointed ministers, namely in the departments of Education, Electric Power and Health, had no military background, even after cabinet re-shuffles in 2012 and 2013.

In 2012, the country held largely transparent and inclusive by-elections for 45 out of the total 664 seats in the legislature of which the National League for Democracy (NLD) party, chaired by Aung San Suu Kyi, won 43 (²⁹⁸⁶). However, the ruling USDP continued to hold the majority of seats in the national parliament and the regional assemblies, and active-duty military officers continued to wield authority at each level of government (²⁹⁸⁷).

In the subsequent general elections in November 2015, Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD defeated the USDP with an overwhelming majority. Ethnic minority groups did poorly and continued to lack access to important decision-making processes (²⁹⁸⁸; US Department of State 2016, 34). Despite the majority of seats won by the NLD, the constitution still guaranteed the military 25% of the seats in parliament, which further continued to control the three important ministries of Defense, Border Security and Home Affairs (²⁹⁸⁹, 6; ²⁹⁹⁰; UNHRC 2016, 3). Therefore, even after the inauguration of a civilian government on 30 March 2016, the Tatmadaw remained very powerful. Moreover, because both dominant parties, the USDP as well as the NLD, were **Bamar** dominated, ethnic minorities barely gained any influence in decision-making processes (²⁹⁹¹). Thus, the Bamar are still coded Dominant despite the historic political changes.

The seven minority states remained strictly controlled by the Bamar-led USDP (²⁹⁹²). During the 2015 elections hundreds of thousands of **Muslim Arakanese** as well as ethnic **Indian** and **Chinese** residents were prevented from voting by annulation of their temporary identity cards (²⁹⁹³; ²⁹⁹⁴, 6). Furthermore, Muslim candidates – first and foremost Rohingya – were almost non-existent on the final voting lists due to disqualification by election officials or to nationalists' pressure to dispense with Muslim candidates (²⁹⁹⁵; ²⁹⁹⁶, 7). Therefore, the status of these three groups remains Discriminated.

Similarly, the **Karenni** are still considered Discriminated given

²⁹⁸⁴ [US State Department, 2012]

²⁹⁸⁵ [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014]

²⁹⁸⁶ [US State Department, 2012]

²⁹⁸⁷ [US State Department, 2012]

²⁹⁸⁸ [Freedom House, 2017]

²⁹⁸⁹ [Burma Centrum Nederland, 2012]

²⁹⁹⁰ [Minority Rights Group International, 2017]

²⁹⁹¹ [Freedom House, 2017]

²⁹⁹² [Sandar, 2014]

²⁹⁹³ [Minority Rights Group International, 2017]

²⁹⁹⁴ [UNHRC, 2016]

²⁹⁹⁵ [Freedom House, 2017]

²⁹⁹⁶ [International Crisis Group, 2017]

continued land confiscation and forced displacements in the context of hydropower and mining projects (²⁹⁹⁷). Moreover, ongoing fighting and huge socio-economic problems added to the Karenni peoples' status as one of the most vulnerable ethnic groups in the country. Note that other ethnic minority groups such as the **Kachins** and **Shan** as well as the **Kayin** to a somewhat lesser extent also lived in states where intense fighting persisted and faced similar human rights violations and abuse from both local ethnic armed groups and the Tatmadaw (²⁹⁹⁸, 380; ²⁹⁹⁹; ³⁰⁰⁰, 9). The decision to code those groups as Powerless – as opposed to Discriminated – is due to less evidence for deliberate discrimination at the hand of the state. Given that they regularly faced violence by armed groups of their own ethnicity, it is more difficult to specifically isolate a pattern of discrimination by state actors.

Peace negotiations were held in 2016 between the government and ethnic armed groups. However, no agreement was reached and fighting even intensified. While the armed groups demanded administrative autonomy for the ethnic minority states as well as strict separation of power between military and government, the government favoured decentralization over complete autonomy (³⁰⁰¹, 379). Hence, there is no justification for any “regional autonomy” coding in this period.

²⁹⁹⁷ [Minority Rights Group International, 2017]

²⁹⁹⁸ [International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs

²⁹⁹⁹ [Minority Rights Group International, 2017]

³⁰⁰⁰ [UNHRC, 2017]

³⁰⁰¹ [International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs

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Political status of ethnic groups in Myanmar

From 1948 until 1957

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bamar (Barman)	0.68	SENIOR PARTNER
Shan	0.085	JUNIOR PARTNER
Kayin (Karens)	0.07	SELF-EXCLUSION
Chinese	0.03	DISCRIMINATED
Zomis (Chins)	0.021	DISCRIMINATED
Muslim Arakanese	0.02	POWERLESS
Mons	0.02	POWERLESS
Buddhist Arakanese	0.02	POWERLESS
Indians	0.02	DISCRIMINATED
Kachins	0.015	JUNIOR PARTNER
Karenni (Red Karens)	0.004	DISCRIMINATED
Wa	0.002	POWERLESS

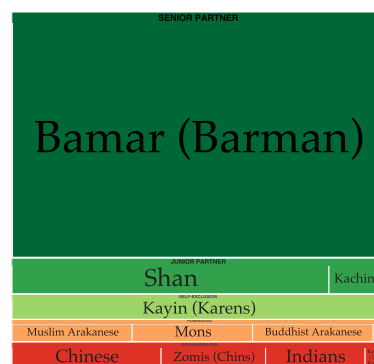


Figure 616: Political status of ethnic groups in Myanmar during 1948-1957.

From 1958 until 1958

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bamar (Barman)	0.68	SENIOR PARTNER
Shan	0.085	JUNIOR PARTNER
Kayin (Karens)	0.07	SELF-EXCLUSION
Chinese	0.03	DISCRIMINATED
Zomis (Chins)	0.021	DISCRIMINATED
Muslim Arakanese	0.02	SELF-EXCLUSION
Mons	0.02	POWERLESS
Buddhist Arakanese	0.02	POWERLESS
Indians	0.02	DISCRIMINATED
Kachins	0.015	JUNIOR PARTNER
Karenni (Red Karens)	0.004	DISCRIMINATED
Wa	0.002	POWERLESS

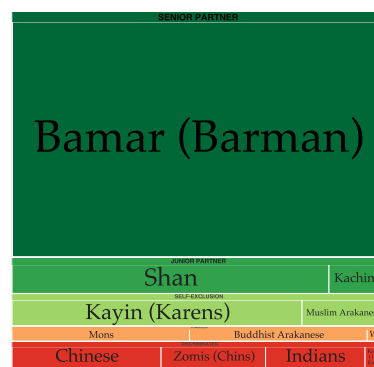


Figure 617: Political status of ethnic groups in Myanmar during 1958-1958.

From 1959 until 1959

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bamar (Barman)	0.68	DOMINANT
Shan	0.085	DISCRIMINATED
Kayin (Karens)	0.07	SELF-EXCLUSION
Chinese	0.03	DISCRIMINATED
Zomis (Chins)	0.021	DISCRIMINATED
Mons	0.02	POWERLESS
Buddhist Arakanese	0.02	POWERLESS
Indians	0.02	DISCRIMINATED
Muslim Arakanese	0.02	SELF-EXCLUSION
Kachins	0.015	DISCRIMINATED
Karenni (Red Karens)	0.004	DISCRIMINATED
Wa	0.002	POWERLESS

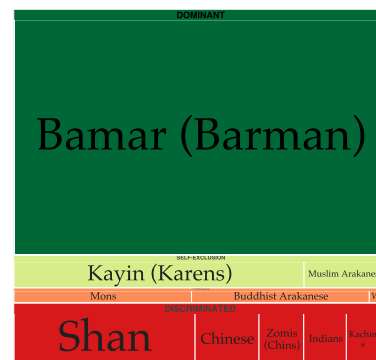


Figure 618: Political status of ethnic groups in Myanmar during 1959-1959.

From 1960 until 1962

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bamar (Barman)	0.68	DOMINANT
Shan	0.085	POWERLESS
Kayin (Karens)	0.07	SELF-EXCLUSION
Chinese	0.03	DISCRIMINATED
Zomis (Chins)	0.021	DISCRIMINATED
Mons	0.02	SELF-EXCLUSION
Buddhist Arakanese	0.02	SELF-EXCLUSION
Indians	0.02	DISCRIMINATED
Muslim Arakanese	0.02	SELF-EXCLUSION
Kachins	0.015	DISCRIMINATED
Karenni (Red Karens)	0.004	DISCRIMINATED
Wa	0.002	POWERLESS



Figure 619: Political status of ethnic groups in Myanmar during 1960-1962.

From 1963 until 1982

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bamar (Barman)	0.68	DOMINANT
Shan	0.085	SELF-EXCLUSION
Kayin (Karens)	0.07	SELF-EXCLUSION
Chinese	0.03	DISCRIMINATED
Zomis (Chins)	0.021	SELF-EXCLUSION
Mons	0.02	SELF-EXCLUSION
Buddhist Arakanese	0.02	SELF-EXCLUSION
Indians	0.02	DISCRIMINATED
Muslim Arakanese	0.02	SELF-EXCLUSION
Kachins	0.015	POWERLESS
Karenni (Red Karens)	0.004	DISCRIMINATED
Wa	0.002	POWERLESS

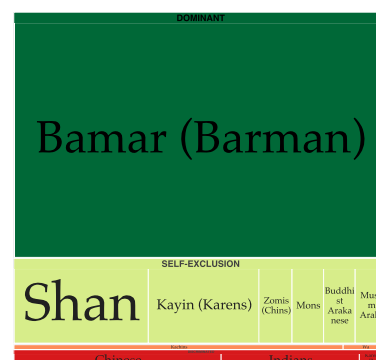


Figure 620: Political status of ethnic groups in Myanmar during 1963-1982.

From 1983 until 1989

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bamar (Barman)	0.68	DOMINANT
Shan	0.085	SELF-EXCLUSION
Kayin (Karens)	0.07	SELF-EXCLUSION
Chinese	0.03	DISCRIMINATED
Zomis (Chins)	0.021	SELF-EXCLUSION
Mons	0.02	SELF-EXCLUSION
Buddhist Arakanese	0.02	SELF-EXCLUSION
Indians	0.02	DISCRIMINATED
Muslim Arakanese	0.02	DISCRIMINATED
Kachins	0.015	POWERLESS
Karenni (Red Karens)	0.004	DISCRIMINATED
Wa	0.002	POWERLESS

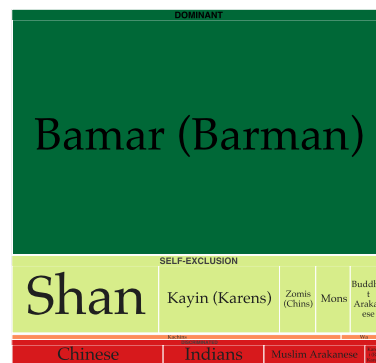


Figure 621: Political status of ethnic groups in Myanmar during 1983-1989.

From 1990 until 2011

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bamar (Barman)	0.68	DOMINANT
Shan	0.085	SELF-EXCLUSION
Kayin (Karens)	0.07	SELF-EXCLUSION
Chinese	0.03	DISCRIMINATED
Zomis (Chins)	0.021	SELF-EXCLUSION
Mons	0.02	SELF-EXCLUSION
Buddhist Arakanese	0.02	SELF-EXCLUSION
Indians	0.02	DISCRIMINATED
Muslim Arakanese	0.02	DISCRIMINATED
Kachins	0.015	SELF-EXCLUSION
Karenni (Red Karens)	0.004	DISCRIMINATED
Wa	0.002	POWERLESS

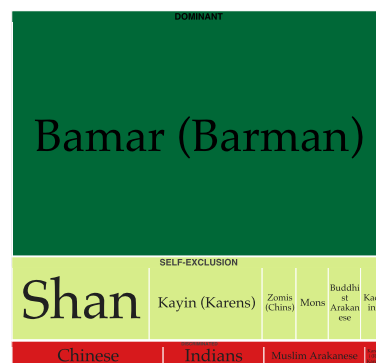


Figure 622: Political status of ethnic groups in Myanmar during 1990-2011.

From 2012 until 2017

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bamar (Barman)	0.68	DOMINANT
Shan	0.085	POWERLESS
Kayin (Karens)	0.07	POWERLESS
Chinese	0.03	DISCRIMINATED
Zomis (Chins)	0.021	POWERLESS
Mons	0.02	POWERLESS
Buddhist Arakanese	0.02	POWERLESS
Indians	0.02	DISCRIMINATED
Muslim Arakanese	0.02	DISCRIMINATED
Kachins	0.015	POWERLESS
Karenni (Red Karens)	0.004	DISCRIMINATED
Wa	0.002	POWERLESS

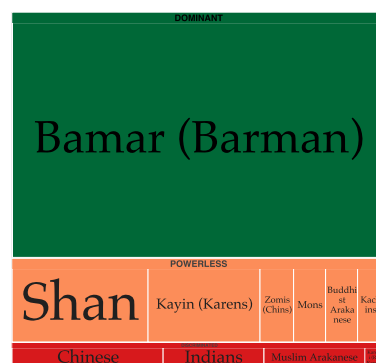


Figure 623: Political status of ethnic groups in Myanmar during 2012-2017.

Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Myanmar

From 1948 until 2017

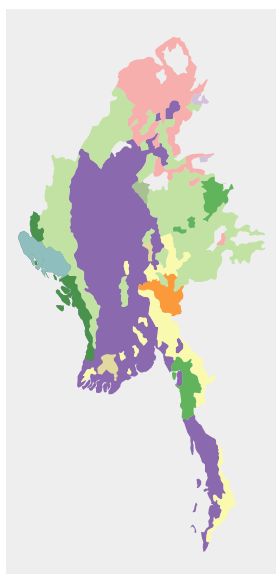


Figure 624: Map of ethnic groups in Myanmar during 1948-2017.

Group name	Area in km ²	Type
■ Bamar (Barman)	282 531	Regional & urban
■ Shan	131 109	Regionally based
■ Kachins	66 734	Regionally based
■ Kayin (Karens)	57 204	Regionally based
■ Zomis (Chins)	47 635	Regionally based
■ Buddhist Arakanese	32 716	Regional & urban
■ Muslim Arakanese	15 647	Regionally based
■ Mons	14 076	Regionally based
■ Karenni (Red Karens)	12 751	Regionally based
■ Wa	11 196	Regionally based
■ Chinese	2 267	Regional & urban
■ Indians		Urban

Table 221: List of ethnic groups in Myanmar during 1948-2017.

Conflicts in Myanmar

Starting on 1948-01-30

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	APLP	Buddhist Arakanese	1948-01-30	Explicit	Yes	No
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	Mujahid Party	Muslim Arakanese	1948-07-30	Presumed	Yes	Yes
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	ANLP	Buddhist Arakanese	1964-12-30	Explicit	Yes	Yes
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	CPA	Buddhist Arakanese	1964-12-30	Presumed	Yes	No
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	RPF	Muslim Arakanese	1973-12-30	Explicit	Yes	Yes
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	ALP		1977-05-31			
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	RSO	Muslim Arakanese	1991-12-25	Explicit	Yes	No
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	ARSA	Muslim Arakanese	2016-10-08	Explicit	Yes	No

Starting on 1948-02-28

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	CPB-RF		1948-02-28			
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	CPB	Buddhist Arakanese	1948-05-30	No	Yes	Yes
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	CPB	Wa	1948-05-30	No	Yes	Yes
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	CPB	Chinese	1948-05-30	No	Yes	Yes
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	CPB	Bamar (Barman)	1948-05-30	No	Yes, from EGIP	Split
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	PVO - "White Band" faction	Bamar (Barman)	1948-08-30	No	Yes, from EGIP	Yes
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	ABSDF		1990-12-30			

Starting on 1948-12-30

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	MFL-MUF	Mons	1948-12-30	Explicit	Yes	Yes
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	MPF	Mons	1952-12-30	Explicit	Yes	Yes
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	NMSP	Mons	1959-12-30	Explicit	Yes	
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	BMA	Mons	1996-12-22	Explicit	Yes	No

Starting on 1948-12-30

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	KNUP	Kayin (Karens)	1948-12-30	Explicit	Yes	Yes
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	KNU	Kayin (Karens)	1966-12-30	Explicit	Yes	Yes
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	God's Army	Kayin (Karens)	2000-01-26	Explicit	Yes	No
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	DKBA 5	Kayin (Karens)	2010-08-04	Explicit	Yes	Yes

Starting on 1949-12-30

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	PNDF	Kachins	1949-12-30	Explicit	Yes	
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	KIO	Kachins	1961-02-27	Explicit	Yes	Yes

Starting on 1957-12-30

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	KNPP	Karenni (Red Karens)	1957-12-30	Explicit	Yes	Yes

Starting on 1959-11-21

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	NSH	Shan	1959-11-21	Explicit	Yes	Yes
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	SSIA	Shan	1960-07-30	Explicit	Yes	
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	SNUF	Shan	1962-12-30	Presumed	Yes	Yes
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	SSA	Shan	1964-12-30	Explicit	Yes	Yes
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	SSNLO	Shan	1969-12-30	Explicit	Yes	
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	SURA	Shan	1969-12-30	Presumed	Yes	No
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	SSRA		1976-08-30			
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	TRC	Shan	1984-04-29	No	Yes	No
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	MTA	Shan	1985-12-30	Explicit	Yes	Yes
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	RCSS	Shan	1996-09-27	Explicit	Yes	No
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	SSPP	Shan	2006-11-21	Explicit	Yes	

Starting on 1969-02-27

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of China	Government of Myanmar (Burma)		1969-02-27			

Starting on 1973-01-10

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	LNUP		1973-01-10			

Starting on 1991-12-30

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	NSCN-K	Naga	1991-12-30			No

Starting on 1994-05-01

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	PSLF	Shan	1994-05-01	Explicit	Yes	Split

Starting on 1997-03-15

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	UWSA	Wa	1997-03-15	Explicit	Yes	Yes

Starting on 2009-08-26

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Myanmar (Burma)	MNDAA		2009-08-26			