

[Skip to main content](#)

Fighting disinformation and fact-checking the Myanmar election

[<https://globalvoices.org/2020/10/23/fighting-disinformation-and-fact-checking-the-myanmar-election/>]

Fact-checking a challenge in communities under armed conflict

Written by Mong Palatino

Posted 23 October 2020 4:54 GMT



ဝင်မ
စာမျက်နှာ

စီမံကိန်းသော
သတင်းများ

အချက်အလက်
စုစည်းမှု ကဏ္ဍ

၂၀၂၀
ရွေးကောက်ပွဲ

ဆောင်းပါးများ
ဖတ်ရှုရန်

ကျွန်ုပ်တို့
အကြောင်း

အမှား
ပြင်ဆင်ချက်

သတင်း အမှန်
အမှား မေးမြန်းရန်

Myanmar ▾



အောက်တိုဘာ 3, 2020

Fact Check| ရန်ကုန်ကို လာမယ့် ၂ရက်အတွင်း အိမ်ထဲကအိမ်ပြင်လုံးဝမထွက်ရဘဲ ၁၀ ရက် Lockdown ချမှတ်သည့်အခါ သတင်းအမှားများ

[<https://www.realornotmm.info/>]



အောက်တိုဘာ 13, 2020

Fact Check| ဘုရားပုံကိုနင်းပြီး က တာဟာ တကယ့်ဘုရားကိုနင်းတာမဟုတ်လို့ အပြစ်မရှိဘူးလို့ ဒေါ်အောင်ဆန်းစုကြည်ပြောတယ်ဆိုပြီး ဖြန့်နေတဲ့ သတင်းအမှား



အောက်တိုဘာ 7, 2020

Fact Check| ရန်ကုန်က ဆေးရုံအချို့မှာ ကုတင်မလုံလောက်လို့ ကိုဗစ်လူနာတွေကို ထိုင်ခုံတွေနဲ့ထားနေရတယ်ဆိုတဲ့ သတင်းအမှား

Screenshot of the homepage of the 'Real or not' fact-checking news website

Fact-checking is a basic verification process to expose disinformation. This is important for Myanmar since the communal violence that targeted minority ethnic communities in recent years was partly blamed [<https://advoc.globalvoices.org/2018/08/21/facebook-admits-it-has-been-slow-in-addressing-hate-speech-in-myanmar/>] on the use of social media platforms to spread hate speech and disinformation.

Since then, tech companies like Facebook have pledged [<https://advoc.globalvoices.org/2020/08/14/building-safer-online-spaces-in-myanmar/>] to adopt measures to contain disinformation. In August, Facebook announced [<https://about.fb.com/news/2020/08/preparing-for-myanmars-2020-election/>] a set of measures it has unveiled in preparation for the November 8 elections in Myanmar such as the removal of “verifiable misinformation and unverifiable rumors that are assessed as having the potential to suppress the vote or damage the integrity of the electoral process”, the use of artificial intelligence to identify hate speech in 45 languages, including Burmese, limiting the number of times a message on Facebook can be forwarded to five since it is “a proven method of slowing the spread of viral misinformation”, and partnering with three fact-checking teams in the country.

Aside from Facebook, several groups have initiated fact-checking operations during the election campaign period.

Global Voices interviewed Thet Min, fact-checker for 'Real or not' [<https://www.facebook.com/realornot.mm>], a fact-checking news website, about their efforts to expose and stop disinformation in Myanmar. 'Real or not' is a project of Myanmar ICT For Development Organization (MIDO).

For MIDO's fact-checking team [<https://www.realornotmm.info/team-profile-english/?lang=en>], they are guided [<https://www.realornotmm.info/>] by these three questions in carrying out their work:

1. *Relevance: why does this story need to be verified?*
2. *Methodology: how is this story verified?*
3. *Real or Not: what are the facts based on the evidence we found?*

MIDO and its fact-checking team also engage users through a messenger [chatbox](https://www.messenger.com/login.php?next=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.messenger.com%2Ft%2F1480358015605581%2F%3Fmessaging_source%3Dsource%253Apages%253Amessage_shortlink) [https://www.messenger.com/login.php?next=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.messenger.com%2Ft%2F1480358015605581%2F%3Fmessaging_source%3Dsource%253Apages%253Amessage_shortlink].

They use [<https://www.realornotmm.info/methodology/?lang=en>] official sources from the government and mainstream media reports to verify viral content that has been flagged as false. If necessary, they make direct contact with relevant parties before finalizing a report. Thet Min adds more about their work:

As our fact-checking team policy, we focus on the most viral content on social media which can have negative impacts towards the social, political situation in the country.

Thet Min emphasised the importance of the work they are doing ahead of the coming elections:

False information can change people's voting choice at election time.

One of the reports they published is regarding Radio Free Myanmar, which has a similar logo [<https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/media-fake-10132020104123.html>], with news website Radio Free Asia. It is also reported for publishing [<https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/radio-free-myanmar-disinformation-network-spreads-false-news-and-hate-speech/>] misinformation about the elections.

About [two weeks] ago, we discovered a fake news website that publishes about 10 false news items a day. The fake news website imitates the logo of Radio Free Asia and attacks the NLD [National League for Democracy] Party, ethnic armed groups, civil society groups and the media including fact-checkers, with false information.

NLD is Myanmar's ruling party which defeated a military-backed party in the 2015 general election. NLD continues to be a target [<https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/fighting-lies-defending-speech-on-the-election-battlefield/>] of disinformation from sources allegedly linked to the military.

But the NLD-led government is also accused [<https://globalvoices.org/2020/04/06/blocked-websites-internet-shutdown-and-media-arrests-undermine-free-speech-in-myanmar/>] of blocking more than 200 websites to contain disinformation even if the list included ethnic news media providing independent coverage in remote regions. The 'Justice for Myanmar' website exposing military corruption was also blocked [<https://globalvoices.org/2020/09/11/website-exposing-military-corruption-blocked-in-myanmar/>] for allegedly spreading rumors.

Thet Min shared some of the challenges they are facing today:

One of the main difficulties for us is having access from different stakeholders, particularly the government. In Myanmar, since some ethnic areas are in armed conflict situations, mis/dis information that came up into the form of propaganda and dangerous speech in the issues of conflicts are prominent. So it is difficult for the news media to obtain accurate information on those areas as they cannot get the evidence and voice from the people. For fact-checkers, it is hard for us to fact check most of the news from those areas. We can't know the exact situation including numerical facts.

Myanmar has more than 100 ethnic groups with some of them engaged in armed conflict with the national government. The conflict in some townships of Rakhine in north Myanmar has led to internet disruption since June 2019. The government's election body also announced the cancellation [<https://www.irrawaddy.com/elections/myanmars-election-commission-defends-choice-no-vote-areas-criticism.html>] of elections in hotspot areas that could disenfranchise more than a million voters.

Thet Min gave this advice to Myanmar internet issuers:

People are sensitive during the election period. We want voters not to be biased in reading the news, whatever political parties they support. Voters might share false news about political parties that they don't like without checking and verifying. Disinformation can damage our society.

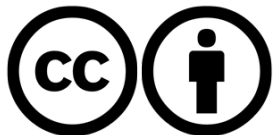
Support our work

Global Voices stands out as one of the earliest and strongest examples of how media committed to building community and defending human rights can positively influence how people experience events happening beyond their own communities and national borders.

Please consider making a donation to help us continue this work.

[Donate now](#)

This site is licensed as Creative Commons Attribution 3.0. Please read our attribution policy to learn about freely redistributing our work



Some Rights Reserved