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Purpose

IFES designed and conducted a pre-election national survey in June 2015 to create baseline data to gain greater understanding of opinions and attitudes of citizens of Myanmar toward the election process in the country. The survey was specifically directed at determining the level of knowledge about the election process among the overall population and major population sub-groups in the country, as well as ways and means through which Myanmar citizens obtain information about the political and electoral process in the country. This baseline data helped the UEC, IFES, and other electoral stakeholders to target gaps in knowledge and understanding of the election process and to design and implement voter education and motivational programs in the period leading up to the 2015 elections. The data also allowed electoral stakeholders to understand attitudes toward the electoral process and electoral institutions. IFES conducted a post-election national survey in January 2016 to measure the change in attitudes and knowledge about elections and assess the impact of the voter education campaign.
Overview of Findings

The findings from IFES’ post-election survey in Myanmar examines attitudes towards the 2015 elections among citizens of Myanmar and compares views on elections that were voiced by Myanmar citizens in IFES’ pre-election survey in June 2015. The survey finds that the vast majority of citizens in the country positively evaluate the November elections, as well as the electoral process and electoral institutions. Regarding the conduct of the elections, many in the country see the elections as having been credible, and conducted with more integrity than the 2010 elections. Overall, most voters were able to cast votes peacefully and quickly, giving high marks to the organization of the elections by the UEC. The survey data also finds that positive views on the elections contribute to an increase in positive sentiments towards democracy in Myanmar.

Methodology

The key findings detailed below are based on comparative data from two IFES national surveys conducted in all states and regions in Myanmar: a pre-election survey in May-June 2015 and a post-election survey in December-January 2016*. The fieldwork for the post-election survey was conducted from December 22, 2015 to January 14, 2016. Similar to the pre-election survey, the post-election survey included a total of 2,850 interviews that were conducted throughout Myanmar for the national sample, including oversample interviews in several states (Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Shan, Chin and Rakhine). The data was weighted to ensure that it is representative of the national population of Myanmar. The margin of error for a survey of this size is +/- 1.8 percent.

In addition to the national sample, 426 internally displaced persons (IDPs) were also sampled. Due to the difficulties inherent in locating and interviewing IDPs, this sample is not representative of the IDP population in Myanmar. The sample design was purposive and provides indicative, not representative, data on the opinions and attitudes of IDPs in Myanmar. Interviews were conducted both in established camps and in communities where a large number of IDPs have settled. Interviews were conducted in Kachin, Shan and Tanintharyi.

Positive Views on 2015 Elections

The survey finds that the vast majority of citizens have very positive views of the 2015 elections and a large percentage also believe that the elections have established Myanmar on a firm path to a strong democracy. Overall, a vast majority of citizens say that the 2015 elections were generally credible, with 57% saying that the elections were completely credible and an additional 35% saying that although there were some flaws, the elections were generally credible. Only 4% of citizens say that the elections either had major flaws or were not credible at all. The percentage of Myanmar citizens saying that the elections were generally credible increased from 20% in the pre-election survey in June to 35% in this survey. The percentage saying elections were completely credible largely stayed the same (56% pre-election; 57% post-election).

A clear majority of Myanmar citizens also see the 2015 elections as being better organized and more credible than the elections held in 2010. Overall, 85% say that the 2015 elections were better organized than the 2010 elections, and a further 85% say that they were more credible than the elections in 2010.
Indeed, examining different aspects of the integrity of the elections, wide majorities agree that the elections were free of violence and intimidation (95%), free of fraud (91%), that all candidates and parties were treated equally and fairly during the election process (91%).

In addition to the generally positive attitudes on the elections, there are also very positive attitudes toward several aspects of the process. Ninety-eight percent strongly or somewhat agree that they had the freedom to vote for whomever they wanted in the election, 95% strongly or somewhat agree that the elections process in Myanmar provides equal opportunities for all voters to participate in elections, and 95% strongly or somewhat agree that voting gives people like them a chance to influence decision-making in the country. Furthermore, 94% believe that their vote is kept secret. Indeed, in all of these aspects, the number of respondents agreeing with each statement has increased since the pre-election period, indicating that the conduct of the 2015 elections has had a positive impact on overall attitudes towards the electoral process in the country.

Ninety-two percent also strongly or somewhat agree that official results from the elections reflect the way people actually voted in the elections. Eighty-two percent strongly disagree that government officials tried to pressure voters to vote a certain way in the elections. Given these positive views on multiple aspects of the electoral process, it is not surprising that most Myanmar citizens see the country making progress towards democracy. When asked about the relationship between the elections and the progress toward democracy, over two-thirds of citizens say that the country is now either a full democracy (9%) or making progress as democracy, but with more work to do (58%). Slightly less than one-quarter of the country say that elections do not have much significance, and that there is much more to be done.

### 2015 Elections Seen as Well Organized and Credible

Attitudes toward the organization of the elections among Myanmar’s citizens are largely positive, with reports of high turnout and positive evaluations of polling station management on Election Day. Most of those who report voting also report that they did not spend much time traveling to polling stations or voting, and there are very few reports of vote buying and violence during the election process.

Many voters abroad did not return home or use advance voting.

| Ninety percent of respondents report voting in the elections. This is higher than the 69.82% official turnout figure reported by the UEC, and there are both methodological reasons as well as reasons related to the electoral process in Myanmar that likely account for this difference. One reason for this increase may reflect that turnout inside the country was extremely high, but many voters working abroad did not return home to vote or used advance voting making the overall official voter turnout figure lower. Another reason may be related to a phenomenon known as Social Desirability bias in survey research, where some respondents may give responses that they view as putting them in a positive light, and thus may lead to some respondents to report that they voted even though they did not. These two factors may account for the difference in actual versus reported turnout. The difference in actual turnout versus reported turnout in the survey should still allow for reliable analysis of Election Day experiences. The survey data shows that turnout patterns were largely equal among both genders, different age cohorts and in urban and rural areas. Some differences can be seen in terms of regional turnout, with higher turnout being reported in Ayeyarwady (95%), Sagaing (95%) and Mandalay (95%), while lower rates of turnout are reported in Shan (79%), Kachin (79%) and Kayin (77%). |
| Lower participation reported in ethnic states such as Kachin, Kayah and Shan with a history of conflict. |

Among those who report having voted in the 2015 elections, most report that their polling stations were organized and that the voting process largely went smoothly. Over nine-in-ten voters agree that polling stations were organized in a manner to enable voters to cast their ballots (98%), that the elections were well-organized at their polling place (98%), that the polling station staff were knowledgeable about their duties and responsibilities (97%) and that it was easy for polling station staff to find names on the voter
Almost all voters say that polling staff found their names easily on the voter list. One third of voters found casting multiple ballots confusing.

list during the voting process (99%). Indeed, only 8% of Myanmar voters report that there were irregularities at their polling station on Election Day, while 89% report there were none. The only area that voters report some confusion was the use of multiple ballots to vote for different offices, which was reported by over one-third of voters (34%).

Voting was not a time-consuming endeavor. For almost all voters (96%), travel time to the polling place was under 30 minutes, with 66% of respondents needing to travel less than 10 minutes from their home or place of business to vote. At the polling stations, 69% of Myanmar voters waited in line less than 30 minutes to vote, with 40% waiting fewer than 10 minutes. There were some regional differences. Nationally, 16% of voters say it took over an hour to wait in line to vote, but reports of this type wait time were more common in Naypyidaw (49%), Kayah (31%), Shan (29%) and Sagaing (26%) than in other areas of the country.

Despite some concerns about vote buying and election violence in the run-up to the 2015 elections, both were seen to be rare occurrences during the electoral process. While 30% of Myanmar citizens report being concerned about the possibility of violence in the run-up to the elections, 97% report that they felt at least somewhat safe going to their polling station on Election Day. Regarding vote buying, only 6% of Myanmar citizens report that a candidate or representative provided the respondent with a gift of any kind in the pre-election period, while only 1% say they were paid to attend a campaign rally or event for a candidate.

Most voters did not have to travel far to reach their polling stations and generally did not wait long in line.

While Knowledge of UEC Remains Low in Myanmar, Citizens are Highly Satisfied with its Work

Overall, just over one-in-ten individuals (12%) are able to correctly identify the UEC as the body that is responsible for managing Myanmar’s elections. While most citizens may not be able to identify the UEC as the body responsible for managing elections, they have extremely positive views on its performance during the general elections, and the data shows that positive views of the UEC’s work have increased significantly from the pre-election survey in June 2015. When asked about the UEC’s performance in several areas of the election process, views of the UEC’s work were very positive including in the following areas:

- To inform and educate the public about the election process (94% very or somewhat satisfied, up 13% from June 2015);
- To ensure the rights of all voters to take part in elections (94% satisfied, up 87% from June);
- To maintain independence from political pressures in the conduct of elections (94%, up 89% from June);
- Ensuring the accuracy of results (93%, up 90% from June)
- Ensuring equal treatment of political parties (91%, up 9% from June)

Given these views, it is not surprising that eighty six percent of respondents express confidence in the UEC to organize credible elections, 39% a great deal and 47% a fair amount.

The UEC started to establish an online and social media presence in order to conduct outreach with voters and increase awareness of the institution among voters. The data on awareness indicates that the UEC still has a lot more work to do to increase awareness of its presence among Myanmar voters. The
survey data also shows that the same is the case for its online and social media presence. In the survey, just 11% report being aware of the UEC website and 14% report the same for its Facebook page.

Interestingly, almost two-thirds of voters checked their names in the preliminary display rather than the official nationwide one.

Despite the low knowledge of the UEC, many voters did interact with one of the UEC’s major projects in the run-up to the 2015 elections: the update of the national voter list. The UEC worked to update and ensure that the voter list was as accurate as possible prior to the elections. To do so, they hosted two display periods, where citizens could check their names on the voter list to ensure that it was accurate. Overall, 75% of citizens report that they checked the voter list during either the preliminary display period (62%) or during the nationwide display period (13%). Voters received information on the display periods from numerous sources, including township authorities (51%), television (41%), family and friends (39%), loudspeaker announcements (34%) and billboards or pamphlets (20%). Overall, only 12% of citizens say that they did not hear announcements to check the voter list. With so many in the country being able to check the accuracy of the voter list and participate in the process, it is unsurprising that 86% of citizens say that they are satisfied with the UEC’s updates to the voter list.

Citizens See Myanmar Moving Closer to Democracy, Although Some Problems Remain

As was noted earlier, the elections in Myanmar marked a major step on the country’s course towards democracy, but work still remains. While attitudes have improved since the 2015 elections, work remains to ensure continued democratic development for the country’s future.

Almost three-quarters of Myanmar’s citizens see democracy as the most preferable form of government, reflective of a 34 percent increase from the pre-election survey. Since June 2015, the percentage of people saying that they do not care about the form of government or seeing certain situations where non-democratic governments are preferable have both decreased.

While most in Myanmar prefer democracy, they still recognize that there are problems with democracy in the country. While 78% of Myanmar’s citizens say that their country is a democracy, many recognize that there remain issues with democracy in the country. Only 5% say that the country is a full democracy, while 73% say that the country is a democracy with either minor (44%) or major (29%) problems, compared to 10% who say that the country is not a democracy at all. Despite these attitudes, many in the country see that Myanmar is taking steps towards becoming a full democracy. Over three-quarters of respondents (76%) thought that Myanmar has taken either significant (12%) or small steps (64%) towards democracy, compared to 14% who say that there has been no progress.

The improving attitudes towards democracy in country can be seen through the lens of the credibility of the 2015 elections. Over half of the country’s citizens say that the elections were completely credible, while an additional 35% note some flaws, but that the elections were generally credible. In concert with the successful elections, the actions of the government and attitudes towards democracy will do much to influence citizen attitudes towards democracy in Myanmar over the coming years.

Combined this leads towards a degree of optimism in the country, with 78% of respondents saying that the country is currently heading in the right direction, while only 6% see it as heading in the wrong direction. This optimism applied towards the coming year as well, with 78% saying that they see the situation in the country improving over the coming year, with only 2% saying that it will be worse. Despite the optimism, citizens are aware and concerned about a number of things in the country, which should be focus of the new government, including poverty (34%), economic development (33%), unemployment (33%), education (26%) and insurgency (23%).
Knowledge of Electoral Process Increased, Although Some Gaps Remain

In IFES’ pre-election survey, findings showed that there was a need for greater voter education, with voters lacking knowledge of many aspects of the electoral process and not having a great deal of access to knowledge about the political situation in country. The post-election survey highlighted that knowledge of electoral processes has increased, with three-quarters saying that they had at least a fair amount of information about the elections.

Prior to the elections, only 42% of citizens said that they had at least a fair amount of information on politics and government, with an additional 52% saying that they had either not too much or no information at all about the process. This number increased sharply following the elections, with 83% now reporting at least a fair amount of knowledge of the electoral process. This finding holds constant across genders; however, some differences appear regarding the urban/rural divide, with rural citizens being slightly more likely to report having more information (84%) than those living in urban areas (79%).

With more information available to citizens, there has been a corresponding increase in level of information about the 2015 elections. Following the elections, three-quarters of respondents note that they had either a great deal (14%) or fair amount (61%) of information about the elections prior to voting. This represents a sharp increase from IFES’ pre-election survey, which found only 21% had a fair amount of information, compared to 79% who had either not very much or no information at all about the elections.

Despite this, information is not distributed equally to all in Myanmar, with women and older Myanmar citizens being less likely to have had information about the election process.

Despite the increased levels of information, many in the country say that they needed either some more or a lot more information about different aspects of the electoral process. Only in the areas of how to mark a ballot (93%), on where and when to vote (93%) and checking their name on the voters list (80%) do a majority of Myanmar citizens say that they had enough information prior to the elections. In all other areas, a majority of respondents say that they needed more information. In spite of this, in all areas, the number of Myanmar citizens reporting having enough information on each element of the electoral process increased from before the elections.

This increase in information can be in part attributed to educational campaigns in the run-up to the elections. Overall, almost nine-in-ten (88%) saw or heard some sort of voter education messaging in the run-up to the 2015 elections. Most of the messaging heard by respondents correspond to areas where knowledge was highest, including messaging on where to vote (91%), how to vote (91%), how to mark the ballot (90%) and the date of the elections (90%). Another message that many reported hearing was about how to check the voter register (54%), which can help explain the high number of citizens who checked their name on the voter list prior to the elections.

Important to future messaging and outreach campaigns will be media consumption patterns and their perceived usefulness among the population. Myanmar citizens report receiving information from a variety of sources, and that the information received from these sources was by in large useful. Among the most used sources for information about the elections included face-to-face dialogue (81%), leaflets and posters (69%), television news (67%), television ads (64%), street banners (57%) and SMS messaging (50%). While other media sources reached voters in the country, the number of voters reached was far fewer.
Men and women participate equally in voting but twice as many men than women participate actively in other civic activities.

The survey data finds that while women were as likely as men to report that they had voted in the 2015 elections, there is a significant gender gap when it comes to other forms of civic participation in Myanmar. In most areas of civic participation, men are twice as likely to report taking part in an activity than women. Overall, 22% of men say that within the last 12 months that they have attended a meeting or rally organized by an election candidate, compared to only 11% of women. Similarly, while 23% of men have attended a community meeting to express their opinion on a matter, only 10% of women have done the same. Similar patterns are observed for other forms of civic participation: men are more likely to have talked with others to convince them to vote for someone (18% men; 9% women), or to have worked as part of a political candidate’s campaign (14% men; 5% women). This data indicates that while participation as voters may be an area where women are as likely to participate as men, other forms of civic participation, which can lead to deeper engagement with the political and civic process, are far less likely to see participation by women compared to men and may limit the participation of women in the political process beyond their roles as voters. One such area of participation for women is as political leaders and candidates.

A high number of respondents said they preferred men over women to address critical socio-political issues which hinders further opportunities for women’s leadership.

While only 15% of Myanmar citizens say that the gender of a candidate was an important factor in selecting the candidate they voted for, data from another question on the survey indicates that women are not as likely to be trusted as men to address important socio-political issues. When asked whether men or women are more likely to address several important issues facing the country, significantly higher percentages of Myanmar citizens prefer men over women for several important issues. Overall, 57% say that men are better suited to deal with issues of national security and defense, 53% that men are better suited to deal with crime and public safety and 49% that men are better suited to deal with civil unrest. For other issues, including honesty in government, representing the interests of citizens in government, dealing with social and economic issues and working out compromise in government, a majority of almost two-thirds say that women and men are equally likely to address these issues. Only in the case of social issues such as health and education do a higher percentage say that women are more likely to address these issues than men (16% say women and 11% say men would be better at addressing social issues). While women are slightly more likely to have positive attitudes than men in assessing women’s abilities to address these issues, a solid plurality of women still think men are better able to address these issues. The perception among a significant portion of the population that women are not able to address important issues as well as men can be a key obstacle in greater participation for women as political leaders and should be addressed if women are to take on leadership positions in higher numbers and at all levels in Myanmar.
Positive Attitudes Towards 2015 General Elections

The public in Myanmar has overwhelmingly positive attitudes about the credibility of the 2015 general elections, with large majorities saying that the elections were credible, and that all candidates and parties were treated equally.

- **92%** say the 2015 general elections were either completely credible or generally credible while only **4%** doubt the credibility of the elections.
- **91%** agree that all parties were treated equally and fairly during the election process in Myanmar.
- **91%** also agree that all candidates were treated equally and fairly during the election process in Myanmar.

**Results reflect public will**
- **92%** agree that official results from elections in Myanmar reflect the way people actually vote in elections.

**Citizens see equal opportunities to participate**
- **94%** agree that the election process provides equal opportunities for all voters to take part in elections.

Attitudes Towards the Union Election Commission (UEC)

Voters in Myanmar express widespread confidence in the UEC’s capacity to manage successful elections. They are also satisfied with the UEC’s ability to maintain its independence from public pressures, and in the performance of polling station staff.

- **86%** express either a great deal or fair amount of confidence in the UEC. Only **4%** express very little or no confidence.

**Positive Attitudes on Polling Station Organization**
- **98%** agree that polling station staff were able to find names on voter roll w/o difficulty
- **98%** agree that elections were well organized at their polling station
- **98%** agree that polling stations were organized in a manner to ensure people can cast their votes
- **97%** agree that polling station staff were knowledgeable about duties and responsibilities
- **95%** agree that polling station officials were available to help blind voters
- **95%** agree that polling stations were accessible for persons in wheelchairs or w/ physical disabilities
Widespread Information on Elections

Widespread Information on Elections

74%

Had either a great deal or fair amount of information about the 2015 general elections. 24% say they had either not very much or none at all.

88%

Heard or saw some form of voter education messages prior to the 2015 general election.

Sources used included:

- 81% Face-to-face dialogue
- 69% Leaflets and pamphlets
- 67% TV News

The levels of information on elections increased greatly from the pre-election to post-election period (% saying they had enough information on each issue)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Pre-election June 2015</th>
<th>Post-election Jan 2016</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How to mark the ballot</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where and when to vote</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checking their name on the voter list</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter list update process</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How a candidate is elected</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote counting</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating legislative candidates</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>18%</td>
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Attitudes towards Democracy in Myanmar

Nearly three-quarters of citizens prefer democracy as the system of government for Myanmar, a significant increase from the pre-election survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>January 2016</th>
<th>June 2015</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democracy is preferable to any other form of government</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To people like me, it doesn’t matter what type of government we have</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In certain situations, a non-democratic government can be preferable</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know/No response</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>14%</td>
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While most citizens of Myanmar are at least somewhat satisfied with the way democracy works in Myanmar, most also realize that Myanmar is a democracy with either minor or major problems.

Eight-in-ten Myanmar are satisfied with the way democracy works in Myanmar

- Very satisfied: 24%
- Somewhat satisfied: 56%
- Somewhat/very dissatisfied: 12%

78%

Note that Myanmar is currently a democracy, but many also believe that it has minor or major problems.
Gender Gap in Civic Activism in Myanmar

There is a significant gender gap in civic participation in Myanmar, with men being twice as likely to say that they have participated in at least one civic activity apart from voting compared to women.

- Men: 44%
- Women: 22%

Rural women are slightly more likely to be active in civic affairs than women in urban areas.

- Rural: 26%
- Urban: 21%

Women under 35 are more likely to be active than older women.

- 18-34 years: 27%
- 35+ years: 23%

A higher percentage of men has taken part in each of the civic activities listed compared to women (% saying they had done within the last 12 months or longer)

- Attended a meeting or rally organized by an election candidate: Men 22%, Women 11%
- Attended a community meeting to express your opinion: Men 23%, Women 10%
- Worked as a part of a political candidate's campaign: Men 18%, Women 9%
- Contacted or visited a community leader or public official to express an opinion: Men 9%, Women 3%
- Signed a written or email petition: Men 8%, Women 3%
- Taken part in a protest, march, or demonstration: Men 7%, Women 3%
- Contributed to Facebook to express your opinion on a political or social issue: Men 7%, Women 2%

Attitudes towards Female Candidates in Myanmar

- Almost three-quarters of both men and women say that men and women generally have the same effectiveness as political leaders.
- Men: 72%
- Women: 70%

Less than a third of Myanmar recall women candidates for the races in which they voted, indicating limited opportunities for women in political office.

- Women on ballot: 32%
- No women on ballot: 48%
- Do not recall: 22%

...while most Myanmar say that men and women are equally likely to address many political issues facing the country, men are favored for the more salient issues (+ men and women equally likely to address)

- Keeping government honest: Men 17%, Women 7%, 74%
- Representing the interests of the people of Myanmar: Men 15%, Women 12%, 71%
- Dealing with social issues such as health and education: Men 13%, Women 16%, 69%
- Dealing with economic issues: Men 23%, Women 9%, 68%
- Dealing with civil unrest: Men 49%, Women 5%, 44%
- Dealing with crime and public safety: Men 53%, Women 3%, 42%
- Dealing with national security and defense: Men 57%, Women 3%, 38%
### Increased knowledge of electoral processes

#### Levels of information on elections increased significantly from the pre-election to post-election survey

- **Pre-election**
  - Percent who report at least a 'fair amount' of information: 21%

- **Post-election**
  - Percent who report at least a 'fair amount' of information: 74%

While a majority of both men and women report having a fair amount of information about the elections, men are more likely to report having had a fair amount of information than women. Men: 80%; Women: 69%.

The vast majority in the post-election survey reported they had enough information on the procedural aspects of voting, but fewer had enough information on the more technical aspects of elections.

- Information on how to mark the ballot: 93%
- Information on where and when to vote: 93%
- Checking whether my name is on the voter’s list: 80%
- The voter list update process: 35%
- Vote counting – seat allocation: 26%
- Vote counting – how a candidate is elected: 26%
- Information on participating candidates: 18%
- Information on participating political parties: 17%

### Use of Media Sources for Election Information

Sources of information used to learn about the 2015 general elections:

- Face-to-face dialogue: 81%
- Pamphlets/Leaflets: 69%
- TV Ads: 64%
- Banners: 57%
- SMS: 50%
- Billboards: 42%
- Print News: 33%
- Radio News: 28%
- Political Rally: 23%
- Internet: 22%

Internet and Facebook use is limited, but those under 35 tend to use at a higher rate suggesting that future election cycles should see greater use of these tools for voter education.

(Percent using each at least once per week)

#### Internet and Facebook use limited for voter education

- All population:
  - Internet: 25%
  - Facebook: 21%

- Population under 35:
  - Internet: 43%
  - Facebook: 35%

Most of those exposed to voter education messages report receiving information on procedural issues:

- Where to vote: 91%
- How to vote: 91%
- How to mark ballot: 91%
- How to check voter list: 54%
- Procedures at polling stations: 39%
- Messages encouraging Myanmar to vote: 26%