Youth, Identity, and the Post-Coup Experience in Myanmar

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TERMINOLOGY

- **Bamar**: Refers to the ethnic majority group in Myanmar.

- **Ethnicity**: Refers to "a subset of identity categories" in which membership is acquired by descent-based attributes.[1] These attributes may include, but are not limited to, culture, language, and/or religion.

- **Heartland**: Refers to parts of Myanmar known as *a-nya* in Burmese. These are the areas comprising regions where the Bamar are the dominant local population. Areas encompassing the heartland can also be thought of as parts of Myanmar that were historically ruled by the Bamar kings prior to British arrival.

- **Ingroup/outgroup**: Ingroup refers to a social group to which a person identifies as being a member. Outgroup, conversely, refers to any social group to which a person does not identify as being a part of. For example, to someone who identifies as a Chin, fellow Chin individuals are ingroup members, whereas non-Chin individuals are members of the outgroup. In our work, we specify which outgroups the survey respondents should focus on.

- *Taingyintar*: Refers to ethnic groups that are officially recognized as indigenous by the Myanmar state. When referring to officially recognized groups that are not Bamar, we utilize the term *taingyintar minority*. When referring to both *taingyintar* minorities and non-*taingyintar* minorities, we use the term *minorities* or *ethnic minorities*.

- **Youth**: Defined here as those between the ages of fifteen and thirty-four years as per the definition in the 2017 Myanmar National Youth Policy.

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[1] Kanchan Chandra, "What Is Ethnic Identity and Does It Matter?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 9 (2006): 397–424.

INTRODUCTION

One of the biggest challenges facing Myanmar today is its lack of a cohesive national identity. Its colonial legacy and half a century of authoritarian rule has reified group divisions and hardened societal cleavages, leading to negative, and sometimes outright hostile, relations between different groups. These ingroup–outgroup distinctions exist along two planes: the first distinguishes between ethnic groups that are considered indigenous to Myanmar (*taingyintar*) and groups like the Rohingya, which are considered foreign and hence effectively ineligible for full citizenship rights under the Burmese Citizenship Law of 1982. The second differentiates between the "indigenous" ethnic minorities and the Bamar ethnic majority, which is closely associated with the Myanmar state and Myanmar national identity. These intergroup hostilities have been perpetuated by the Tatmadaw, the armed forces of Myanmar, which frequently undertake violent and oppressive military operations in ethnic minority areas. Consequently, this has created different experiences of citizenship for various groups in Myanmar, exacerbating the elusiveness of an overarching national identity. Despite handing over political power to a quasi-civilian government in 2011, the Tatmadaw seized power from a popularly elected government by staging a coup on February 1, 2021. The coup was met with fierce opposition nationwide and catalyzed the formation of a resistance movement across different segments of Myanmar society.

Against this background, the questions motivating this research are twofold: First, how do the Myanmar youth perceive their social identity, in particular national identity, and how do they conceptualize notions of citizenship within the Myanmar context? Second, what are the implications of the coup and the post-coup experience for the youth's perceptions of social identity and interethnic relations in Myanmar?

Grappling with these questions is crucial to understanding the political development and prospects for peace in Myanmar for years to come. Myanmar youth, defined as individuals between the ages of fifteen and thirty-four, number over 17 million according to the most recent census, constituting a third of the country's population.[2] Moreover, they stand at the forefront of resistance

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[2] In Myanmar, youths are defined by the Myanmar National Youth Policy of 2017 as being between fifteen and thirty-four years of age. In our analysis, we also differentiate between youths who are between fifteen and twenty-four years of age and those who are between twenty-five and thirty-four years of age.

against the current military regime, which was immediately installed in place of the democratically elected government in the aftermath of the coup.[3] By participating in the ongoing battle for democracy, tens of thousands of young people stalled their pursuit of, or gave up on, professional, educational, and other opportunities.[4] The young people of Myanmar are undoubtedly an important force shaping the country's current political landscape and beyond.

To systematically examine Myanmar youth's perception of national identity and citizenship, as well as the impact of the post-coup experience, we fielded a web-based survey with an embedded experiment in March 2022. The survey has two objectives. The first is to gauge various dimensions of national identity and interethnic relations in Myanmar at the grassroots level, while the second is to evaluate the extent to which the post-coup experience changed these perceptions. To effectively administer the experimental component of the study, the recruited respondents were randomly sorted into a control group, a placebo group, and two treatment groups. The two treatment groups differed in terms of how the post-coup experience was framed. Responses from those in the control group yielded a "baseline" measure of identity-related perceptions, while responses from those in the treatment groups measured changes in perceptions because of the post-coup experiences in Myanmar.

Based on this study, we find that Myanmar youths strongly identify with both their ethnic groups and the superordinate Myanmar nation. Although *taingyintar* minorities' attitudes toward the Bamar majority are less positive than the Bamar's views of minorities, these outgroup attitudes are still overall positive. This does not necessarily reflect the acrimonious picture of intergroup relations that is sometimes painted by the popular media.[5] On the other hand, there is a higher degree of prejudice toward severely marginalized groups like the Rohingya. Myanmar youths in general, however, had a more inclusive conception of the nation compared to their older counterparts.

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[3] For a closer look at youth leadership and involvement in the antiregime movements, see Ingrid Jordt, Theraphi Than, and Sue Ye Lin, "How Generation Z Galvanized a Revolutionary Movement against Myanmar's 2021 Military Coup," ISEAS, 2021, www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/TRS7_21.pdf.

[4] Yashraj Sharma, "Across the Border from Myanmar, Some Avoid the Fight While Others Sign Up for It," *NBC News*, February 8, 2022, www.nbcnews.com/news/world/year-coup-myanmar-military-faces-growing-resistance-rcna14865.

[5] Consider, for example, a *New York Times* article that describes the interethnic relations in Myanmar this way: "A visit to the Kachin region is a sobering reminder of how much hatred and mistrust exist between the majority Burman and the ethnic minorities who live in the country's highlands." Thomas Fuller, "Ethnic Rifts Strain Myanmar as It Moves toward Democracy," *New York Times*, April 4, 2013, www.nytimes.com/2013/04/05/world/asia/ethnic-rifts-strain-myanmar-as-it-moves-toward-democracy.html?smid=url-share.

Regarding the implications of post-coup experiences, our study suggests that the framing matters, and can in fact have opposing effects on outgroup attitudes. When the anti-coup resistance at the grassroots level is framed as a multiethnic collective effort, this had a positive effect on Bamar youths' inclusion of the Rohingya as part of the national community. However, outgroup and policy attitudes by and large were not affected. When the post-coup violence is framed as a shared threat, however, this negatively affected aspects of outgroup attitudes, specifically Bamar attitudes toward *taingyintar* minorities and *taingyintar* minorities' attitudes toward both the Bamar and Rohingya.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Descriptive Analysis

- There is a high level of national identification, including high levels of national pride and identity centrality, among Myanmar youths.

- Ethnic and national identity is not an either-or equation: Myanmar youths strongly identify with *both* their ethnic groups and the superordinate Myanmar nation. This is the case for both the Bamar majority and ethnic minorities, although ethnic minorities have a higher level of ingroup trust.

- While very few Myanmar youths embrace hardline nationalist ideologies, the proportion of youths holding inclusive conceptions of who belongs to the nation is comparable to those holding exclusive understandings of citizenship.

- Although *taingyintar* minorities' attitudes toward the Bamar outgroup are less positive than the Bamar attitudes toward *the taingyintar* minority outgroup, intergroup attitudes are on the whole generally positive.

- Just under half of Myanmar youths surveyed are open to accepting the Rohingya as part of the national community; however, social attitudes toward the Rohingya are more negative compared to outgroup attitudes toward the Bamar or *taingyintar* minorities.

- Myanmar youths hold more inclusive attitudes than the adult population. In particular, younger youths (those aged between fifteen and twenty-four years) are most inclusive in terms of their attitudes toward the Rohingya community.

Experimental Results

- Our experiment yielded mixed findings. While effects on Bamar–*taingyintar* minority intergroup attitudes were mostly null, we find both positive and negative effects on outgroup attitudes toward the Rohingya, depending on the framing and subgroup.
- Framing the post-coup experience as collective effort increased support for Rohingya citizenship rights and expanded conceptions of Myanmar society to include the Rohingya among Bamar youths, but not among ethnic minority youths. However, this frame did not have an effect on intergroup attitudes between the Bamar majority and ethnic minorities.
- Framing the post-coup experience as one of a shared threat by and large did not yield any positive effects on outgroup attitudes. Instead, among ethnic minorities, it had the effect of worsening outgroup attitudes toward both the Rohingya and Bamar majority.

The report proceeds as follows: We begin with a brief overview of the ethnic politics and historical trends in interethnic relations in Myanmar. In particular, we highlight that membership in *taingyintar* has been the gold standard for citizenship in Myanmar since the socialist era (1962–88), and that this perception of citizenship has detrimental implications for severely marginalized groups like the Rohingya. Then we discuss the popularly held belief among Myanmar grassroots and commentators that interethnic perceptions have improved in post-coup Myanmar. After describing our methodology and our sample, we elaborate on our baseline findings of how youths perceive national identity and interethnic relations. We then present our results from a series of statistical analyses that evaluate implications of different framings of the post-coup experiences for interethnic relations in Myanmar. Finally, we conclude with a set of recommendations for different stakeholders.

BACKGROUND

The present-day Myanmar is an amalgamation of the territories known as "Ministerial Burma" and the "Frontier Areas" in the British colony. The former was mostly populated by the Bamar ethnic group and was directly ruled by the British. The latter was inhabited by various ethnic groups including the Shan, Kachin, Chin, Kayin, and Kayah, and was indirectly governed, left to traditional authorities. In addition to different systems of rule, the populations in these two areas had vastly different colonial experiences. The people from the Frontier Areas were receptive to Christian missionary activities, actively recruited into the British military, and often used by the British to break up anticolonial movements, which were organized by the people of Ministerial Burma. As a result, the nationalist movement, led by Bamar political leadership, came to view these ethnic groups as colonial collaborators.

These two areas became a single political unit for the first time in 1948 as the Union of Burma, and the aforementioned populations with disparate histories and colonial experiences became countrymen. Despite occasional attempts to represent all the ethnic groups in the country's politics, the Bamar culture, religion (Buddhism), and history came to play a central role in the new national narrative.[6] Today, national identity in Myanmar is understood to be both contentious and elusive. It is contentious because it is synonymous with the ethnic identity of the Bamar, which is both the numerical majority and the politically dominant ethnic group. This national identity is also elusive because the country's ethnic minorities generally express dissension.

Political Dominance and Civil War

An important driver of the variation in citizenship experiences in Myanmar is the minority/majority cleavage. The Bamar have been the politically dominant group since the country's independence, and the Bamar political leadership sees itself as the guardian of the union. This position taken by the Bamar leadership contributed to the onset of civil war in Myanmar, which began immediately after the

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[6] David Brown, *The State and Ethnic Politics in Southeast Asia* (London: Routledge, 2003).

country's independence. Aside from the Bamar, most of the politically salient ethnic groups have mobilized ethno-nationalist rebellion against the central government.[7] Although several rounds of peace talks have been attempted, civil war remains a persistent phenomenon in Myanmar's states, which are the subnational administrative units in which *taingyintar* minorities are the dominant population.[8]

With the onset of civil war, the Bamar leadership's dominant position was further institutionalized in the country's political landscape. Concurrently, the Bamar cultural identity also became normalized as the basis of a Myanmar national identity, driving a further wedge between the Bamar and the country's numerous ethnic minority groups.[9] Consequently, various policies the central government pursues in the ethnic minority areas are often seen as "Burmanization."

The civil war itself also contributed to varying citizenship experiences. Those caught in the crossfire suffered conflict casualties, including forced displacement, injury, and death. Ethnic minorities who live in relatively safe zones experience the conflict indirectly, as many of them have relatives in conflict zones. In contrast, the Bamar civilian population by and large has been spared from warfare. The armed conflict between ethnic minorities and the central government is ongoing, and this protracted civil war plays a large role in majority–minority relations in Myanmar.

Nation-Building, Citizenship, and the Rohingya Genocide

Nation-building generally refers to the process of constructing a national identity, including determining what the nation is and who belongs to the nation. For the construction of the "Myanmar nation," the most significant determination was made after the 1962 coup led by General Ne Win. The new regime instituted the "Burmese Way to Socialism" and began a series of exclusionary policies with regard to the population considered to be nonindigenous to Myanmar, including the Chinese, South

[7] There are many cultural and linguistic groups in any given country context, but only a few of them are relevant for political competition and social conflict. For example, in Myanmar, Zaiwa and Jinghpaw are different linguistic groups, but the prevailing cleavage that matters for both groups when it comes to politics is Kachin identity. The term "politically relevant ethnic groups" refers to such identity groups. This term is most associated with Daniel Posner, *Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
[8] Civil war has spilled over to certain areas in the regions, especially those areas with heavy ethnic minority populations. For example, there has been fighting between the armed wing of the Karen National Union and the Tatmadaw in the Tanintharyi Region.
[9] Matthew J. Walton, "The 'Wages of Burman-Ness': Ethnicity and Burman Privilege in Contemporary Myanmar," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 43 (2) (2013): 1–27.

Asians, and some Muslim groups. This regime delineated between *taingyintar* and other ethnic groups. *Taingyintar*, officially referred to as "national races" in English, is defined as "a cultural group present in what is now known as Myanmar before the first British annexation of Burma in 1823."[10]

The aforementioned racial delineation was crystallized in the 1982 Citizenship Law, which enshrines *taingyintar* status as the gold standard for citizenship. According to Brett and Hlaing, the intent of the new law was to distinguish "pure blooded nationals" from those who entered Myanmar during the colonial period, their descendants, and "mixed bloods."[11] While the 1948 Union Citizenship Act (based on the 1947 constitution) stipulated that "any person" whose family has been in Burma for at least two generations were citizens with equal rights, the new law created three classes of citizenship: "full," "associate," and "naturalized." Only *taingyintar* are eligible for full citizenship, while those who are able to provide "conclusive evidence" of citizenship under the 1948 citizenship law or that their family has been in Myanmar for at least three generations were made "associate" and "naturalized" citizens, respectively. An implication of this new law was that non-*taingyintar* were now legally denied key political rights and constantly questioned on whether they belonged in Myanmar.

For the Rohingya specifically, the new law effectively made them ineligible for Myanmar citizenship and dubbed them as outsiders. Indeed, starting with the socialist regime, successive Myanmar governments have contended that the Rohingya are "interlopers" and do not belong in Myanmar. The Rohingya have also been the target of several mass deportation and ethnic cleansing campaigns, including Operation Nagamin in 1978, Operation Pyitharyar between 1991 and 1992, and most recently between 2016 and 2017.[12] The Gambia filed a case against Myanmar at the International Court of Justice in November 2019, alleging that Myanmar's atrocities against Rohingya amount to

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[10] Ardeth Maung Thawnghmung and Yadana, "Citizenship and Minority Rights: The Role of 'National Race Affairs' Ministers in Myanmar's 2008 Constitution," in *Citizenship in Myanmar: Ways of Being in and from Burma*, edited by Ashley South and Marie Lall (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing: 2018), 117.

[11] Peggy Brett and Kyaw Yin Hlaing, "Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Law in Context," *Policy Brief Series* No. 122 (2020), www.toaep.org/pbs-pdf/122-brett-kyh/.

[12] Nicholas Farrelly, "Muslim Political Activity in Transitional Myanmar," in *Islam and the State in Myanmar: Muslim-Buddhist Relations and the Politics of Belonging*, edited by Melissa Crouch (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016), 99–126; Thant Myint-U, *The Hidden History of Burma: Race, Capitalism, and the Crisis of Democracy in the 21st Century* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2020).

genocide. On March 21, 2022, the United States government declared that the atrocities suffered by the Rohingya were genocide.

Many members of *taingyintar*, including the minorities, appear to accept the official view that the Rohingya are intruders.[13] This view is further inflamed by the Buddhist nationalist movement, which claimed that Muslim outsiders will take over the country if the *taingyintar* do not defend themselves. Such sentiments can be seen in the way the UN secretary general was met with an out-cry from the Myanmar people when he called on the Myanmar government to "ensure humanitarian access to Rohingya living in vulnerable conditions" in 2014.[14]

The 2021 Myanmar Coup and Identity Politics

Myanmar transitioned to a quasi-civilian government in 2010. Multiparty elections were held for the first time in nearly two decades that year. The military-backed party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) won; Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) boy-cotted the elections.[15] In 2011, the USDP government initiated a peace process, coordinating a Na-tionwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). While many ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), including the Karen National Union (KNU), participated in the NCA process and signed an agreement, armed hostility escalated between the Tatmadaw and a number of EAOs, including the Kachin Indepen-dence Organization (KIO). This transition period was also notable with regard to the Rohingyas'

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[13] There is very little research on the relationship between *taingyintar* minorities and the Rohingya community. It is important to consider the relationship between the Rakhine, who are predominantly Buddhist, and the Ro-hingya. Human Rights Watch (HRW), along with local reports, indicate tension and communal violence between the two communities. A report by HRW noted that in early 2012, "local Rakhine political party officials and senior Buddhist monks had begun a campaign to vilify the Rohingya population, depicting them as a threat to Rakhine State and Buddhism, denying the existence of the Rohingya ethnicity, and calling for their removal from the country" (see "An Open Prison without End: Myanmar's Mass Detention of Rohingya in Rakhine State," Human Rights Watch, October 8, 2020, www.hrw.org/report/2020/10/08/open-prison-without-end/myanmars -mass-detention-rohingya-rakhine-state). Our fieldwork in Myanmar suggests that *taingyintar* minorities consider Rakhine, a fellow *taingyintar*, to be their brethren, and tend to defer to Rakhine's position regarding the Rohingya crisis. There is no single Rakhine position on the crisis, but some segments of the Rakhine community appear to concur with a hardline view regarding the Rohingya.

[14] Lawi Weng, "Arakan State Govt 'Condemns' UN Rohingya Statement," *The Irrawaddy*, November 19, 2014, www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/arakan-state-govt-condemns-un-rohingya-statement.html.

[15] Aung San Suu Kyi was under house arrest when the 2010 general elections were held, and the NLD boycotted that election on the grounds that it would not be free and fair. NLD's victory in the 2015 election was particularly momentous, because the military reserves a quarter of the seats in the national legislature. Despite this, the NLD MPs made up a supermajority in the national legislature.

plight, specifically a series of communal violence between the Rakhine Buddhist and Rohingya Muslims in western Myanmar and the growing mobilization of Buddhist nationalists.[16]

In the 2015 general elections, the NLD won the vast majority of seats in the national parliament. Under the NLD, efforts at political dialogue with EAOs and other ethnic minority organizations continued. However, there was little progress. Regarding the NLD's relationship with ethnic parties, many ethnic party leaders expressed disappointment over the NLD's lack of serious engagement with ethnic parties.[17] Under the NLD leadership, the Rohingya crisis continued to deteriorate.

Despite many missteps during its leadership period, the NLD repeated their landslide win at the 2020 general elections. However, the military and its proxy party, the USDP, contested the results, claiming inconsistencies in the electoral roll, among other accusations of fraudulent practices. On February 1, 2021, the military staged a coup.

Opposition to the coup was widespread. Civil servants protested by refusing to turn up for work as part of a nationwide civil disobedience movement. By February 8, large-scale protests against the coup were taking place across the nation, even in remote villages far from the major cities. These protests cut across long-standing ethnic cleavages. Ethnic minority youths joined their Bamar counterparts in pro-democracy protests because they viewed the post-coup political landscape as an opportunity to bring down the military dictatorship and bring about national reconciliation.[18] Though the word federalism had long been a taboo word among the Bamar population, Bamar and ethnic minority protesters in the post-coup period expressed a collective desire for a federal democratic union. This collective desire is now a principal pillar for the National Unity Government, the opposition shadow government with representation from various ethnic communities.[19] This inter-ethnic collaboration at the grassroots level in the immediate aftermath of the coup spurred the hope that it would open up opportunities for national reconciliation.

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[16] International Crisis Group, "Buddhism and State Power in Myanmar," September 5, 2017, www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/290-buddhism-and-state-power-myanmar.

[17] San Yamin Aung, "Ignoring Ethnic Parties Will Hurt NLD in 2020," *The Irrawaddy*, July 10, 2019, www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/analysis/ignoring-ethnic-parties-will-hurt-nld-in-2020.html.

[18] Kyaw Hsan Hlaing, "Myanmar Politics Must Be Re-Made, Not Restored," *Frontier Myanmar*, February 24, 2021, www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/myanmar-politics-must-be-re-made-not-restored/.

[19] Aye Chan and Billy Ford, "A New Myanmar Forum Aims to Unite Democratic Forces," United States Institute of Peace, November 3, 2021, www.usip.org/publications/2021/11/new-myanmar-forum-aims-unite-democratic-forces.

The coup also triggered a shared experience of violence and armed resistance. As discussed above, Tatmadaw's operations thus far have been largely confined to the ethnic minority areas, as armed resistance was undertaken primarily by ethnic minorities. There are a few exceptions, including the communist insurgency and counterinsurgency in the heartland.[20]

In post-coup Myanmar, however, indiscriminate violence engulfed the entire country. To clamp down on nationwide opposition movements, the military moved swiftly, imposing a climate of fear and intimidation, including indiscriminate killings, torture, rape, and arbitrary detentions. As of a year after the coup, over 1,500 civilians have been killed by the regime's security forces and over 10,000 arrested, charged, or sentenced,[21] and more than 800,000 displaced (according to UNHCR). There were rampant torchings of residential areas and other violent operations in the Bamar heartland, including in the urban areas. Bamar civilians have also taken up armed resistance against the Tatmadaw. At the same time, military operations intensified in the ethnic minority areas as Tatmadaw troops clashed with EAOs. As the military and the security forces came to be viewed as the principal and pressing threat for all people of Myanmar, regardless of their ethnic background, a mass resistance movement of Bamar and ethnic minorities emerged against the Tatmadaw.

Given this history of disparate colonial and postcolonial experiences, the post-coup experience for Bamar and ethnic minorities in Myanmar can be considered a significant and unprecedented collective experience. These experiences can be characterized as such, not because the Bamar in the heartland lack a historical memory or experiences of violence perpetrated by Tatmadaw, nor because Bamar individuals have not rebelled against the Myanmar state—the communist insurgency in the early years of post-independence Myanmar and the 1988 uprisings are two such examples. Rather,

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[20] One of the earliest insurgencies in Myanmar was initiated by the Communist Party of Burma (CPB). The movement primarily consisted of ethnic Bamar political leaders, who were expelled from the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL)—a coalition dominated by moderate socialists—which formed the first post-independence government. During the first few years, this CPB insurgency was widespread in the Bamar heartland, but was eventually driven to the borderland. The insurgency eventually became primarily based in ethnic minority areas and allied with various ethnic armed organizations. Another exception is the All Burma Students' Democratic Front, which was established in the aftermath of the 1988 uprisings. Again, this movement became confined to ethnic minority areas and is currently headquartered in the territory controlled by the KNU. See Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity* (London: Zed Books, 1999), for an extensive account of insurgency in the heartland areas in the early years of post-independence Myanmar.

[21] For updates on these figures, see the website for the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma), https://aappb.org. Note that these figures do not include conflict casualties from war-affected areas.

we believe that widespread connectivity and easy access to information in present-day Myanmar have facilitated the recognition among Myanmar's people that their experiences are neither localized nor disparate, by drawing concrete connections between their suffering as well as strivings with those from different corners of Myanmar. Such realizations are thought to be foundational for the formation of a deep, horizontal solidarity, or a belongingness to an "imagined community."[22] As this horizontal solidarity expands across ethnic cleavages, we might also expect attitudes toward outgroup members to improve.[23]

Indeed, in the months following the coup, country observers noted a shift in attitudes toward minority groups and notions of national belonging.[24] The younger generation in particular have expressed remorse toward the treatment of the Rohingya community alongside greater solidarity for the plight of minority groups. One widely circulated photograph on social media shows a Myanmar youth holding up a poster that reads "I really regret abt [*sic*] Rohingya crisis." A major organization set up to coordinate the protest movement decided early on to remove the exclusionary term *taingyintar* from its name, replacing it with the more inclusive term *lumyosu*.[25]

While a unifying implication of the post-coup experience was apparent in the first few months after the coup, it is important to note that the post-coup situation is still one that is developing. Given the fluid nature of developments, it would be premature to speculate on the legacies of the coup. This includes the dynamic nature of interethnic interactions—at both the elite and the

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[22] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991 [1983]); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006 [1983]); Eugene Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976).

[23] John E. Transue, "Identity Salience, Identity Acceptance, and Racial Policy Attitudes: American National Identity as a Uniting Force," *American Journal of Political Science* 51 (1) (January 2007): 78–91; Blake M. Riek, Eric W. Mania, Samuel L. Gaertner, Stacy A. McDonald, and Marika J. Lamoreaux, "Does a Common Ingroup Identity Reduce Intergroup Threat?" *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations* 13 (4) (July 2010): 403–23; Samuel L. Gaertner, John F. Dovidio, Phyllis A. Anastasio, Betty A. Bachman, and Mary C. Rust, "The Common Ingroup Identity Model: Recategorization and the Reduction of Intergroup Bias," *European Review of Social Psychology* 4 (1) (January 1993): 1–26.

[24] Nikkei Asia, "Myanmar Coup Sparks Unprecedented Unity of Ethnic Groups," March 2, 2021, https://asia .nikkei.com/Spotlight/Myanmar-Crisis/Myanmar-coup-sparks-unprecedented-unity-of-ethnic-groups; Jen Kirby, "Myanmar's Coup Is Uniting a Country Riven by Ethnic Divisions. Will It Last?" *Vox,* May 12, 2021, www.vox .com/22412118/myanmar-coup-protesters-rohingya.

[25] *Taingyintar* means an officially recognized indigenous group and *lumyosu* can be translated more generally as "ethnic group."

grassroots levels—alongside changing interpretations of post-coup experiences that evolve as new events unfold. Our primary objective here, then, is not to arrive at a conclusion about the effects of the coup; rather, we are interested in how different framings of the post-coup experience can affect outgroup attitudes and conceptions of who belongs to the nation. To that end, we evaluate the extent to which different interpretations of the post-coup experiences—specifically as one of shared threat and suffering or as collective efforts in pursuit of a shared goal—inform interethnic relations at the grassroots level.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA

Web-Based Survey

Given the COVID-19 pandemic and increased surveillance and violence in post-coup Myanmar, the traditional way of (face-to-face) survey data collection was not feasible. Instead, we employed an alternative mode of data collection: a web-based survey. The survey itself was hosted on Qualtrics and fielded between March 5 and 17, 2022.[26] Respondents were recruited through Facebook advertisements and paid approximately US$3 (5,000 kyat) for their time and data usage.[27]

Once recruited, the participants were first sorted into two blocks: Bamar or non-Bamar. Then participants in each block were further sorted into four groups: control, placebo, and two experimental conditions. Those in the placebo and experimental groups received an intervention; the experiment is discussed in further detail in a later section. In contrast, those in the control group did not receive any intervention, and as such, they provide a baseline measure for the attitudinal questions in the study. All participants, regardless of which group they were sorted into, answered a series of survey questions, including about their outgroup attitudes.[28] The study participation lasted 16.5 minutes on average.

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[26] A pilot study was first conducted on January 26 and 27, 2022.
[27] IRB approval was obtained prior to any recruitment of survey respondents.
[28] Bamar participants were asked about their attitudes toward non-Bamar and vice versa. All participants were asked about their attitudes toward the Rohingya.

We opted to carry out participant recruitment on Facebook because it is the dominant social media platform in Myanmar. In fact, for most Myanmar online users, Facebook is the only site they use.[29] According to existing estimates, a little over 50 percent of the Myanmar population were Facebook users in 2021.[30] These figures dropped following the Facebook ban in February 2021. However, most Facebook users continued to access the platform using VPN; existing estimates suggest that 38 to 40 percent of Myanmar's population were Facebook users in 2022.[31]

Given that a significant segment of the Myanmar population are not online users, the resulting sample is not expected to be nationally representative (although our sample can be said to be representative of the online population). Generally speaking, those with internet access in Myanmar are younger and more educated, have more disposable income, and tend to be urban residents (see the Appendix for a breakdown of our sample demographics). Since the focus of this study is Myanmar youth, this overrepresentation of young people online is favorable for the study.[32]

The web-based approach also helped us to mitigate social desirability bias to a certain extent. Social desirability bias refers to the tendency to give responses that are deemed more socially acceptable to others; this can result in the underreporting of socially undesirable attitudes and an over-reporting of acceptable attitudes. This is especially pertinent when collecting data on outgroup attitudes. The literature on survey methodology also indicates that in-person survey enumerators' identity (i.e., ethnicity and gender) can exacerbate social desirability bias, especially with respect to identity-related questions.[33] By dispensing with survey enumerators, the web-based approach, we believe, significantly reduced respondents' social desirability considerations.

[29] Steve Stecklow, "Why Facebook Is Losing the War on Hate Speech in Myanmar," *Reuters Investigates*, August 15, 2018, www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/myanmar-facebook-hate/.

[30] According to NapoleonCat, an online marketing company, there were 28.8 million Facebook users in January 2021; note that the most recent World Bank estimate regarding the Myanmar population is 54.4 million (2020). According to Statista, 53.1 percent of the Myanmar population were active social media users in 2021. For more statistics on Facebook usage in Myanmar from NapoleonCat, see https://napoleoncat.com/stats/social-media-users-in-myanmar/. Statistics from Statista can be accessed at www.statista.com/statistics/883751/myanmar-social-media-penetration/.

[31] According to NapoleonCat, there were 21.8 million Facebook users in March 2022, and according to Statista, 37.7 percent of Myanmar's population are active social media users in 2022.

[32] Whenever appropriate, we include controls for demographic variables in our statistical analysis to ensure that a particular subgroup is not driving the results.

[33] Claire Adida, Karen E. Ferree, Daniel N. Posner, and Amanda Lea Robinson, "Who's Asking? Interviewer Coethnicity Effects in African Survey Data," *Comparative Political Studies* 49 (12) (2016): 1630–60.

Sampling

To adequately address questions motivating this research, it is necessary to construct a meaningful sample of both Bamar and ethnic minorities. A nationally representative sample, like existing survey data from Myanmar, tends to contain just a small sample of ethnic minority respondents, which is not useful for making meaningful inferences about the minority population in Myanmar.[34] To obtain a substantial sample of ethnic minorities, we targeted townships in the states over townships in the regions (see Table A1 in the Appendix for details). We also wanted to mitigate overrepresentation of respondents from the Yangon and Mandalay metropolitan areas by targeting our Facebook advertisement at major towns outside of Yangon and Mandalay regions.[35]

This approach yielded a sample of 4,012 respondents, of which 3,026 are youths (75 percent of the sample). About two-thirds of the youth sample are Gen Z (between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four). All references to the survey data and analysis presented in this report are based on the youth sample unless noted otherwise. The section comparing youth and non-youth (the section titled "Are Youths Different?") is the only component of the report based on the entire sample.

The youth sample is balanced with respect to gender (53 percent female). However, urban residents are overrepresented in the sample (53 percent urban dwellers). Data from the World Bank indicate that just over 30 percent of Myanmar's population are urban dwellers. In the wake of the coup, internal migration has also increased, including forced displacement from the post-coup violence. While reliable data are lacking, some sources estimate that by early 2022, the newly displaced population from the post-coup violence hovers at around 400,000, including resistance fighters who have fled to areas controlled by EAOs.[36] To mitigate the possible bias caused by the overrepresentation of urban dwellers, we run a separate analysis for urban and rural residents.

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[34] Consider, for example, a nationally representative sample of 1,000 survey respondents. Given that ethnic minorities are estimated to account for about 30 to 35 percent of the country's population, such a sample can be expected to contain about 350 ethnic minority respondents.

[35] Yangon and Mandalay metropolitan areas have a higher internet penetration than the rest of the country. Thus, while they account for approximately 15 percent of the country's population, they are likely to account for well over 15 percent in web-based surveys without mitigating measures.

[36] Aung Tun, "Migration in Post-Coup Myanmar: A Critical Determinant in Shaping the Country's Future?" *ISEAS Perspective* No. 37 (April 14, 2022), www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/2022-37 -migration-in-post-coup-myanmar-a-critical-determinant-in-shaping-the-countrys-future-by-aung-tun/; Kathryn Giffin, "Post-Coup Displacement in Myanmar: What We Know, and What We Don't," Internal Displacement

Table 1. Self-Reported Household Income Level

	IRI's nationally representative sample (2019)	Our online sample (2022)
50,000 kyat or less	4%	16%
50,001 to 500,000 kyat	82%	76%
More than 500,000 kyat	13%	8%

Note: These figures include youth and non-youth in both surveys. The IRI survey question and our question disaggregate the middle category at different levels; thus, they are presented in an aggregate.

Given that only those with internet access could participate in our study, it is plausible that respondents in our sample are those with more disposable income than an average Myanmar person. To assess this possibility, we compared the reported household income level in a nationally representative survey data collected by the International Republic Institute (IRI) in 2019 to the reported household income level in the current study.[37] Table 1 suggests that the reported household income level in our sample is lower than it is in a nationally representative sample. Since there was a pandemic and a coup between 2019 and 2022, it is unsurprising that the reported household income level in our sample would be lower. Accounting for the economic downturn between 2019 and 2022, individuals in our online sample are likely to be very similar in terms of income level to individuals who might have been included in the sample had this study been implemented in-person.

All the states and regions are represented in our sample, and the respondents' reported township residency is indicated in the map in Figure 1. About 70 percent of the youth sample were residing in a state, rather than a region, at the time of the survey. Since residents of the regions account for nearly three-quarters of the country's population, according to the 2014 census report, residents

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Monitoring Centre, September 2021, www.internal-displacement.org/expert-opinion/post-coup-displacement-in-myanmar-what-we-know-and-what-we-dont.

[37] Access a report summarizing the IRI Myanmar polls at www.iri.org/resources/new-burma-poll-public-satisfied-with-the-countrys-direction-supports-further-political-reform/. The Asian Barometer Survey (ABS) also conducted a nationally representative survey in Myanmar in 2019. We are, however, unable to make a direct comparison to the household income levels reported in ABS, because the income levels are reported in quintiles rather than in kyat in the accessible report; the survey data had not been released at the time this report was written. Access the ABS Myanmar reports at www.asianbarometer.org/survey/myanmar-asian-barometer-survey.
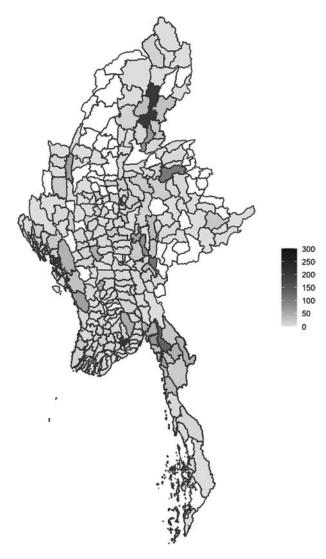
Figure 1. Heat map of townships showing the number of survey respondents from each township. Darker colors represent a higher number of respondents, while lighter colors represent a lower number of respondents. Townships that are white are those from which we did not receive any survey respondents.

of the state are overrepresented in the sample. However, as mentioned above, oversampling residents of the state was necessary in order to construct a sizable sample of ethnic minorities.

While there are 275 townships in our sample (representing 83 percent of all townships), the respondents predominantly come from fifteen townships, most of which are in the states.[38] The concentration of survey respondents from these townships is a concurrent function of (1) our recruitment

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[38] The townships are Taunggyi, Myitkyina, Mawlamyine, Hpa-an, Loikaw, Lashio, Sittwe, Nyaungshwe, Thaton, Bhamo, Mudon, Kale, Thandwe, and Kalaw.

strategy, (2) the development level and internet penetration of the township, and (3) fighting and violence in the area. Consider Chin State, for example, which is one of the areas with intense fighting between the Tatmadaw and People's Defense Forces. Falam and Hakha were targeted for participant recruitment, but our sample contains just three and sixteen respondents from these townships, respectively. In contrast, Nyaungshwe in Shan State was not targeted for recruitment—though it is about thirty miles southwest of Taunggyi, which was targeted—but seventy-six respondents in our sample are Nyaungshwe residents.

Our sample of Myanmar youth comes from twenty-six ethnic communities, while 2 percent do not identify with any one community.[39] To obtain information about the respondents' ethnicity, at the beginning of the survey respondents were asked to select an ethnic group with which they identify. They were provided with the following list, along with the option "other": Bamar, Chin, Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Mon, Rakhine, and Shan. Respondents were first presented with these eight groups because they are "major national ethnic races" and are politically salient ethnic categories in Myanmar. Furthermore, the vast majority of the Myanmar population is thought to self-identify with these groups. In our sample (youth and non-youth combined), 90 percent of the respondents selected one of these groups as their self-identified ethnicity.

If the respondent selected "other" (indicating that they do not identify with any of the eight groups listed), the survey provided them with a list of twelve minority groups (marked with an asterisk in Table 2) and the option "other." These thirteen groups were selected as response options because available data on Myanmar indicate that a relatively large population size associates with these groups. If respondents did not identify with any of the thirteen groups listed, they could either write in their self-identified ethnicity or select "other" again without further elaboration.

Note that the ethnicity recorded in our survey data is self-identified ethnicity, rather than their officially stated ethnicity. In fact, we specified in the survey question that the ethnicity respondents indicate does not need to match the ethnicity indicated on their government-issued identification

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[39] They are categorized as "mixed" and "other" in Table 1. "Mixed" respondents (1) explicitly stated that they are of mixed heritage (i.e., Kachin-Kayin), or (2) did not state their ethnicity but indicated that their parents are from different ethnic communities. "Other" respondents left ethnicity blank, and their indication of their parents' ethnicity indicates that they are not Bamar. "Other" respondents are non-Bamar who do not particularly identify with an ethnic group. Both "mixed" and "other" are treated as non-Bamar or minorities in our analysis.

Table 2. Respondents' Ethnicity (youth only)

Taingyintar	N	%	*Taingyintar*	N	%	Other groups	N	%
Bamar	1102	36.7	Lisu*	15	0.5	Chinese*	8	0.3
Kachin	166	5.5	Naga*	1	0.0	Hindu*	7	0.2
Kayin	309	3.9	Danu*	30	1.0	Muslim*	47	1.6
Kayah	118	10.3	Palaung*	9	0.3	Gurkha*	11	0.4
Chin	112	3.7	Lahu*	4	0.1	Mixed	37	1.2
Mon	229	7.6	Innthar*	32	1.1	Other	28	0.9
Rakhine	262	8.7	Pa-O*	78	2.6			
Shan	379	12.6	Ahka*	2	0.1			
			Taungyo	2	0.1			
			Kayan	5	0.2			
			Thet	2	0.1			
			Mro	5	0.2			
			Loi	1	0.0			
			Daingnet	1	0.0			

document. It is possible that for most respondents their self-identified ethnicity and their stated eth-

nicity are the same. However, for those with mixed heritage and members of groups that are not

"major national ethnic races" (eight groups listed in column 1 of Table 2), there is likely to be a

mismatch.[40] We emphasize self-identification because such ethnic identities are likely to be more

salient for the respondent, affecting their sociopolitical behaviors and attitudes.

Based on the self-reported ethnicity, we recoded the officially recognized groups as *taingyintar*

(see Table 2 for specific ethnic groups). In our analysis, the term "*taingyintar* minorities" refers to

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[40] Say an individual has a Kachin parent and a Chinese parent; their official document will indicate their ethnicity as "Kachin-Chinese." However, if the individual were raised in a Kachin community, they may feel more Kachin, and their political behavior and attitudes may be more similar to Kachin than to Chinese. Likewise, if the individual were raised in a Chinese community, they may feel more Chinese, and their sociopolitical behavior and attitudes may be more similar to Chinese than to Kachin. In a similar vein, an individual may self-identify as Rawang, one of the Kachin groups, rather than as a Kachin; their ethnicity may be listed as Kachin.

all the ethnic groups indicated in the *taingyintar* columns in Table 2, except for Bamar. Likewise, the term "minorities" refers to all except those who self-identify as Bamar.

Overall, those self-identified as Bamar make up just 37 percent of the youth sample; this proportion is significantly lower than existing estimates, which range from 60 to 70 percent. This underrepresentation of Bamar is expected to have implications for analysis when the Bamar and non-Bamar samples are pooled. However, we expect it to matter less when the Bamar and non-Bamar respondents are analyzed separately.

Limitations

The sample we constructed is neither a probability sample nor a nationally representative sample. Because of our web-based approach and sampling strategy, the study participants self-selected into the study, resulting in selection bias. Thus, there is a significant risk that the sample does not resemble the actual population of interest (i.e., Myanmar youth). Some skewness of the demographic characteristics in the sample has been noted already in the section above.

When working with nonprobability samples, calibration approaches such as weighting can help mitigate bias. However, in order to calibrate a nonprobability sample, benchmark information of the population of interest is crucial. Take ethnicity and geographic region, for example. What percentage of Myanmar youth are Bamar? What percentage of Bamar youth are residents of states as opposed to regions? What percentage of the non-Bamar minority population are Chin, Kachin, Kayin, and so on? Such information should come from a census, but in the case of Myanmar, it does not exist.[41] In other words, the information necessary to calibrate the data is largely unknown, and thus, data calibration is not feasible.

While the sample may be biased along several dimensions, we expect the conclusions drawn from this study to be a broadly accurate reflection of sociopolitical attitudes in Myanmar. This is because existing evaluations of nonprobability online surveys in both the Global North and Global South

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[41] Due to controversy surrounding the ethnicity data of the 2014 Myanmar census, it has not been released to the general public. The ethnic demography of the entire population could be estimated using data in the township reports compiled by the General Administration Department. However, it is unknown if the proportion of key characteristics for the entire population mirrors that of the youth population, which makes up 18 percent of the country's population.

indicate that while online (probability and nonprobability) samples produce different estimates, they nevertheless "tell a broadly similar story about . . . political attitudes."[42] Consider our finding regarding national pride, which reveals the extent of national identification, for example (see Table 3). Our data indicate that the non-Bamar population has a lower level of national pride compared to the Bamar population. The exact descriptive statistics (i.e., percentage selecting a certain response option) based on our data might differ from statistics drawn from a probability sample, but we anticipate the latter to also reveal a lower level of national pride among the non-Bamar population.

It should also be noted that many minorities reside in parts of Myanmar that are governed, partially or entirely, by the EAOs.[43] These minorities are systematically different from their co-ethnics in the government-controlled areas along several dimensions. They are more proximate to the conflict and thus are more likely to experience conflict-related violence compared to their counterparts in the government-controlled areas of Myanmar. Young people in the EAO areas are educated in schools overseen by the EAO rather than in government schools like their counterparts. These minorities have less contact with the Bamar. Given these systematic differences, the findings from this study are unlikely to speak to their attitudes toward their ethnic identity, Myanmar national identity, and the Bamar outgroup.

Finally, it is important to note that our study provides a snapshot of sociopolitical attitudes of online users in Myanmar approximately a year after the coup. Responses to some attitudinal questions in pre-coup Myanmar, or in the months since our survey was fielded, may yield different results.

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[42] Courtney Kennedy, Andrew Mercer, Scott Keeter, Nick Hatley, Kyley McGeeney, and Alejandra Gimenez, "Evaluating Online Nonprobability Surveys," Pew Research Center, May 2, 2016, www.pewresearch.org/methods /2016/05/02/evaluating-online-nonprobability-surveys/; Leah R. Rosenzweig, Parrish Bergquist, Katherine Hoffmann Pham, Francesco Rampazzo, and Matto Mildenberger, "Survey Sampling in the Global South Using Facebook Advertisements," *SocArXiv*, October 15, 2020, https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/dka8f/; Leah R. Rosenzweig and Yang-Yang Zhou, "Team and Nation: Sports, Nationalism, and Attitudes towards Refugees," *Comparative Political Studies* 54 (12) (2021): 2123–54.

[43] It is difficult to estimate what percentage of the minority population resides in the EAO-controlled areas due to ambiguity in the existing estimates. For example, according to Kim Jolliffe ("Ceasefires, Governance and Development: The Karen National Union in Times of Change," Asia Foundation, December 2015), KNU has governed about 800,000 people to varying degrees, of which at least 100,000 people are "under nearly autonomous KNU rule." The 2014 census report indicates an estimate of 70,000 in the KNU-controlled area; this figure is estimated rather than enumerated, as the census team did not have access to the area. It is unclear if 70,000 is the entire population in the exclusive KNU-controlled area, or if a portion of the population in the KNU-controlled area was included in the census enumeration.

HOW DO YOUTHS PERCEIVE MYANMAR NATIONAL IDENTITY?

We report results from our study in two segments: (1) descriptive statistics based on the baseline measures and (2) inferential statistics based on a series of systematic comparisons between four groups in the survey experiment (control, placebo, and two experimental groups). The "baseline measures" refers to survey responses given by those in the control group, which did not receive any intervention. This section is the first segment; and the second segment starts in the section "Implications of the Post-Coup Experience for Interethnic Relations."

National Pride

Our examination of Myanmar youths' survey responses suggests that **there is a high level of national identification in Myanmar, including high levels of national pride and identity centrality.**

Sixty percent of the youth respondents are "very proud" to be Myanmar citizens (Figure 2). The average *national pride* among the youth is estimated to be 3.4 on a scale of 1 to 4, which is

Figure 2. National pride in Myanmar.

Table 3. Proportion of Respondents "Somewhat Proud" or "Very Proud" to Be Myanmar Citizens

Survey	Year	Mode	Bamar (%)	Non-Bamar (%)
Asian Barometer Survey (ABS)	2015	In-person	99.3	94.2
Jap's dissertation survey	2019	In-person	100.0	87.8
World Values Survey (WVS)	2020	In-person	98.2	98.6
Chew's dissertation survey	2020	Online	97.8	91.6
This survey	2022	Online	88.1	85.2

Note: Numbers reported in this table pool youths and non-youths. Note that Myanmar is not anomalous in terms of the proportion of respondents reporting some level of pride in their country. According to the ABS, 93.7 percent of ethnic majority respondents across Southeast Asian countries are either "proud" or "very proud" to be citizens of their country, and 92.1 percent of ethnic minority respondents are either "proud" or "very proud" to be citizens of their country."

fairly high considering that 3 indicates "somewhat proud" and 4 "very proud." How do these estimates compare to national pride in pre-coup Myanmar?

Because national pride is a common attitudinal measure in survey research, we are able to contextualize responses in this survey to responses in existing accessible surveys. As Table 3 shows, there is relative stability across four accessible surveys regarding Bamar respondents' reported national pride in pre-coup Myanmar. By comparing these figures, we can infer that Bamar national pride in post-coup Myanmar is notably lower than Bamar national pride in pre-coup Myanmar. The lowest estimate from pre-coup Myanmar indicates that 98 percent of Bamar respondents are "somewhat proud" or "very proud" to be Myanmar citizens; this figure for Bamar drops to 88 percent in this survey. Drawing a similar inference for the non-Bamar sample is not straightforward because there is more variation across the four pre-coup surveys for the non-Bamar respondents, which is likely driven by the ethnic composition of non-Bamar sample in each survey.[44] Given that the lowest estimate from pre-coup Myanmar indicates that 88 percent of non-Bamar respondents are "somewhat proud" or "very proud" to be Myanmar citizens, it is not clear if the estimate from this survey

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[44] Some ethnic minority groups have experienced more prolonged and intense war, and thus may have more negative attitudes toward Myanmar. As such, if a survey sample contains a larger proportion of respondents from such groups, then we can expect the average national pride to be lower in this survey compared to other surveys. Another possible reason for the variation of national pride in the non-Bamar sample is the extent of social desirability bias, which can be exacerbated by survey enumerators' ethnic identity.
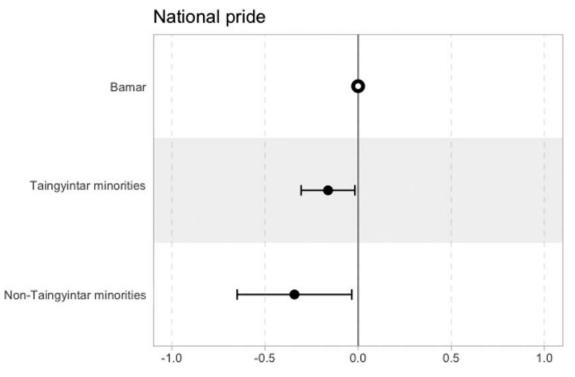
National pride

Figure 3. Minorities' pride in being Myanmar citizens relative to that of Bamar. The figure indicates the estimated difference (95 percent confidence interval) between the average national pride for Bamar respondents compared to the average national pride of the minority groups. The differences are statistically significant at the conventional level.

(85 percent for non-Bamar) should be interpreted as a decreased or similar level of national pride compared to pre-coup Myanmar.

Are there across-group differences in the level of national pride? **When responses are disaggregated into Bamar, *taingyintar* minorities, and other minorities, we find that the latter two groups have slightly lower national pride compared to the former (Figure 3).** National pride levels of *taingyintar* minorities and other minorities are estimated to be about 5 percent and 10 percent lower than that of the Bamar, respectively. It is not surprising that the average national pride of the Bamar is the highest among the three groups, because they are the politically dominant ethnic group. It is also not surprising that the average national pride of other minorities is lower than the other two groups, because as non-*taingyintar* minorities, these individuals tend to have fewer political rights while facing more restrictions and discrimination.

Despite variation across groups, these figures for national pride in post-coup Myanmar are still overwhelmingly positive, suggesting that despite the coup and its aftermath, Myanmar youth

continue to have a generally high commitment to their nation. This finding suggests that their under-standing of the "imagined community" they are part of and their identification with the superordi-nate community is largely detached from the country's political instability and their support/disdain for the current political leadership.

National Identity Centrality

How important is national identity to the Myanmar youths? We answer this question based on the extent to which respondents agree or disagree with the following statements: (1) *Being a Myanmar citizen is an important part of how I see myself*, (2) *Being a [member of ethnic group] is an important part of how I see myself* (here, the text in brackets is replaced with the ethnicity respondents indicated in the beginning of the survey).[45] The respondents rated these statements on a scale of 1 ("strongly disagree") to 4 ("strongly agree"). The difference between these two ratings would indicate whether national identification or ethnic identification is more or equally important (see Figure 4).

For the Myanmar youth, national identification appears to be highly central to their own sense of identity. The average rating of the importance of national identity is 3.54 on a scale of 1 to 4. The average rating of the importance of ethnic identity is also high; 3.35 on a scale of 1 to 4 (see Figure 5 for distribution of responses). However, when the two measures are calibrated with one another, national identification appears to be slightly more central than ethnic identification for Bamar, *taingyintar* minorities, and other minorities. Overall, the centrality of national identification is on average 0.2 points higher than the centrality of ethnic identification on a scale of 1–4. While the difference is fairly minuscule, this is surprising because ethnic identities are thought to be the most salient identity cleavage in Myanmar society. This means that while ethnicity is important for politics in Myanmar, it is not the only identity that matters.

While national identification is highly central among Myanmar youths overall, a higher pro-portion of minorities compared to Bamar express that ethnic identification is more important. While

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[45] If the respondent indicated that they were Kachin, the second statement would appear as "Being a Kachin is an important part of how I see myself." Likewise, if the respondent indicated that they were Bamar, the second statement would appear as "Being a Bamar is an important part of how I see myself." These two questions were not asked back-to-back in the survey.
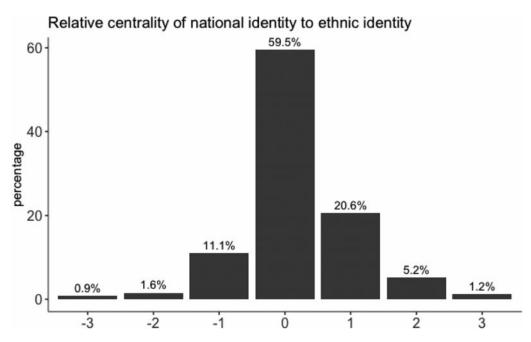
Figure 4. National versus ethnic identity centrality. Relative identity centrality is calculated as an individual respondent's rating of national identity centrality minus their rating of ethnic identity centrality. Positive numbers on the *x*-axis indicate that national identity is more central than ethnic identity, whereas negative numbers indicate that ethnic identity is more central than national identity. Zero on the axis indicates that the two identities are equally central or important for the respondent; this is the case for the majority of Myanmar youths (almost 60 percent). Myanmar youth indicating that national identity is more central than their ethnic identity (27 percent) are almost twice as many as those indicating the opposite (14 percent).

Figure 5. Ethnic identity centrality. When asked how important their ethnicity is to their identity, more than half, or 54 percent of respondents state that it is "very important." Another 31 percent indicate that it is "somewhat important."

Figure 6. Minorities' relative identity centrality compared to that of Bamar. The figure indicates the estimated difference (95 percent confidence interval) between the average measure of relative identity centrality for Bamar respondents compared to that of the minority groups. The estimated differences are negative and statistically significant at the conventional level; this indicates that for non-Bamar, national identity is slightly less central than it is for the Bamar. Recall that for relative identity centrality measures, positive numbers indicate that national identity is more central than ethnic identity, whereas negative numbers indicate that ethnic identity is more central than national identity.

only 7 percent of Bamar youth indicated that their Bamar ethnic identity is more important than their Myanmar national identity, 18 percent of *taingyintar* minority youths made a similar indication. In other words, ethnic identification is relatively more central for minorities compared to the Bamar (see Figure 6). (But as discussed above, it is not more central *overall*; 82 percent of *taingyintar* minority youths still indicated that national identity is equally or more important than ethnic identity.)

Who Belongs to the Nation?

Who do Myanmar youths perceive to be members of the Myanmar nation? From our survey, we find that **very few youths espouse hardline nationalist ideologies. At the same time, the proportion of youths holding inclusive perceptions is comparable to the proportion of youths holding fairly exclusive perceptions of who belongs to the nation.**
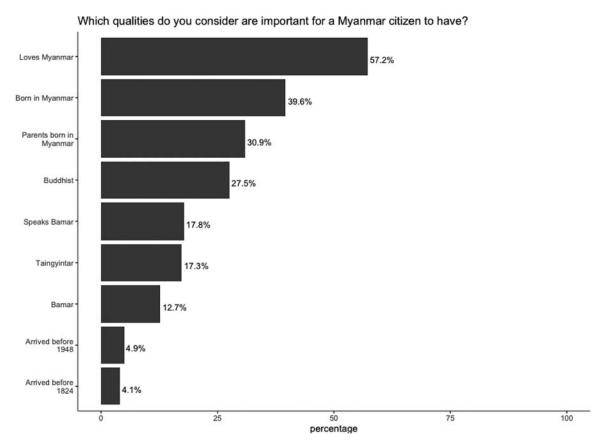
Which qualities do you consider are important for a Myanmar citizen to have?

Figure 7. Important qualities for a Myanmar citizen. Myanmar youths' response to the question *Which qualities do you consider are important for a Myanmar citizen to have?* The response options include inclusionary and exclusionary qualities, which were displayed in random order to respondents. While respondents were allowed to select more than one option, the majority of respondents selected just one option (53 percent).

Our analysis is based on responses to our survey question about qualities that the respondents think a Myanmar citizen should have. We listed nine qualities that are exclusionary to varying degrees (see Figure 7 for the full list of qualities listed). We perceive "exclusionary" qualities as those that define membership in the nation on the basis of ethnicity or religion as these are ascriptive identity markers that are hard to change (e.g., being Buddhist, Bamar, and/or *taingyintar*). In Myanmar, ascriptive identity markers are also the cornerstone of (legal) rights to citizenship as well as societal perceptions of who belongs to the Myanmar nation. The 1982 Citizenship Law, for example, explicitly enshrines being *taingyintar* as the gold standard for citizenship rights.

The 1982 Citizenship Law also laid the foundation for denying Rohingya citizenship rights, and Buddhist nationalist movements like the MaBaTha have strongly advocated for not amending this exclusionary law. Two important dates in Myanmar history are mentioned in this law: 1823,

which is the year prior to the British occupation, and 1948, which is the year in which Myanmar became independent. Our expectation is that individuals sympathetic to Buddhist nationalist movements would select qualities specifying settlement in Myanmar prior to 1824 and citizenship by 1948. We find that 9 percent of Myanmar youth selected these exclusionary citizenship criteria as qualities important for a Myanmar citizen to have. This figure indicates that conceptions of membership in the nation advanced by the Buddhist nationalist movement are not absent from the youth population, but the proportion that have adopted this view is fairly small.

While nationalist ideologies are not completely absent, the most popular responses among Myanmar youths were: "love Myanmar" (57 percent) and being "born in Myanmar" (40 percent). These two qualities are not exclusionary in themselves—that is, they do not define membership in the nation on the basis of ethnicity or religion. At the same time, a high proportion (44 percent) of those who selected nonexclusionary qualities also selected exclusionary qualities. For example, a respondent who selects both "loves Myanmar" and *"taingyintar"* may think that all members of the Myanmar nation should exhibit positive affect for their country but only *taingyintar* should have citizenship rights.

Given this conflation, we recoded the respondents who selected any of the exclusionary criteria as having an exclusionary perception of who belongs in the nation. Based on this coding, we find that 42 percent have exclusionary perceptions. While this figure does not indicate the majority, it is a significant proportion of Myanmar youth and speaks to the way societal understandings of national identity take on ascriptive characteristics.

Among the ascriptive characteristics, religion, specifically being Buddhist, is the most popular quality. This result reflects the largely cross-cutting nature of religious identity in Myanmar. While Bamar are predominantly Buddhist, the non-Bamar population are also majority Buddhist.[46] The combined data of ABS and WVS, which are both nationally representative samples, indicate that

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[46] Chin is commonly thought to be predominantly Christian. However, our fieldwork in Myanmar suggests that only Chin of northern Chin State are predominantly Christian; Chin of southern Chin State and Chin of the lowland are predominantly Buddhist or animist. Kayin is also commonly thought to be predominantly Christian. But according to Thawnghmung, "the majority of Karens are Buddhist, with the rest divided among Christians, animists and Muslims." Among the *taingyintar*, Kachin and Kayah are perhaps the only groups that are predominantly Christian. Ardeth Maung Thawnghmung, *The "Other" Karen in Myanmar: Ethnic Minorities and the Struggle* (London: Lexington Books, 2012).

72 percent of the non-Bamar population identify as Buddhist. If we look at the percentage of respondents that selected either "being Bamar" or "being *taingyintar*" (26.4 percent), it corresponds approximately to the percentage that selected "being Buddhist" (27.5 percent).

GROUP ATTITUDES AMONG YOUTHS

Ingroup Attitudes

The social psychology literature indicates that individuals tend to favor their ingroup, perceive a high level of commonality with their co-ethnics and exhibit a high level of trust for co-ethnics.[47] These are the very qualities that undergird group solidarity. Our study suggests that this trend is evident among Myanmar youth.

Our analysis is based on a series of survey questions that aimed to gauge respondents' rating of commonality with and trust toward their co-ethnics. For example, the question about perceived commonality asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with the following statement: "I have a lot in common with [members of my ethnic group]." Here, the text in brackets is replaced with the ethnicity respondents indicated at the beginning of the survey. As Figure 8 shows, Myanmar youths perceive a high level of ingroup commonality; 92 percent of them agree or strongly agree that they and their co-ethnics have a lot of common experiences. They also have a high level of ingroup trust; when asked if they think a co-ethnic stranger would return a lost wallet containing their National Registration Card and 100,000 kyat, nearly 81 percent responded in the affirmative. This is higher than the 73 percent who responded positively when asked about a stranger who is not a co-ethnic. Again, for the trust question, the respondent's self-identified ethnicity was specifically mentioned in the survey question.[48]

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[47] Henri Tajfel and John Turner, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict," in *Organizational Identity: A Reader*, edited by Mary Jo Hatch and Majken Schultz (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2004); Marilynn B. Brewer, "The Psychology of Prejudice: Ingroup Love or Outgroup Hate?" *Journal of Social Issues* 55 (3) (1999): 429–44.
[48] In measuring ingroup attitudes, our survey questions specifically mentioned respondents' self-identified ethnicity, rather than broader group categories like *taingyintar*. That is because it is uncertain if even the *taingyintar* minorities consider *taingyintar* minorities outside their specific ethnic group to be ingroup or outgroup. Additionally, it is also uncertain whether *taingyintar* minorities feel closer to certain outgroup *taingyintar* minorities compared to Bamar. For example, where do Kachin individuals place Kayah individuals in terms of
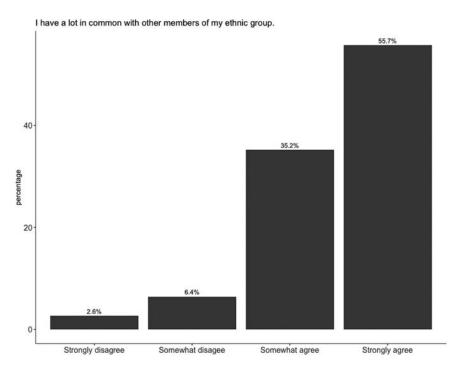
Figure 8. Ingroup commonality. The wording in the survey mentioned the ethnicity respondent indicated at the beginning of the survey (e.g., I have a lot in common with members of the Chin group).

Note that group solidarity is not necessarily chauvinism or xenophobia. In fact, **high ingroup solidarity does not always translate to ethnocentrism.**[49] To measure respondents' sense of ethnocentrism, we asked them their views on intermarriage: "If your family member were marrying a person belonging to a different ethnic group, how would you feel?" Only 5 percent of Myanmar youth indicated that they would be against the prospective union (Figure 9).

While Myanmar youths—both Bamar and minorities—perceive a strong sense of ethnic group identity, minorities have a higher level of ingroup trust (Figure 10). *Taingyintar* and non-*taingyintar* minorities are 9 percent and 10 percent, respectively, more trusting of their co-ethnics compared to the Bamar. This difference between Bamar and minorities may be due to the latter's

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group distance? Do they feel closer to Kayah than to Mon or Bamar? To our knowledge, interethnic relations at the grassroots level (as opposed to the EAO and party levels) among various *taingyintar* minority groups remain understudied; this topic is also beyond the scope of our current study.

[49] Ethnocentrism can be defined as "a strong sense of ethnic group self-centeredness." This includes "intergroup expressions of ethnic group preference, superiority, purity, and exploitativeness, and intragroup expressions of ethnic group cohesion and devotion." See Boris Bizumic and John Duckitt, "What Is and Is Not Ethnocentrism? A Conceptual Analysis and Political Implications," *Political Psychology* 33 (6) (2012): 887–909.

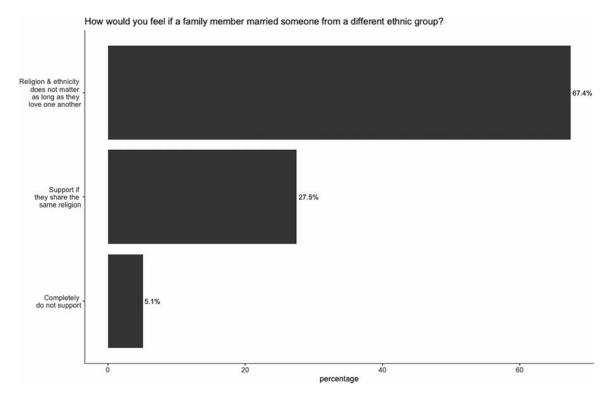How would you feel if a family member married someone from a different ethnic group?

Figure 9. Support for intermarriage. Less than 3 percent of the respondents selected "other" and wrote in their response. They are excluded from the distribution presented here. While there is a fairly high level of support for intermarriage, the rate of intermarriage is fairly low (13 percent); this measure is estimated based on a survey question about the respondents' parents' ethnicity.

experiences of violence (direct and indirect) and discrimination, as the literature indicates that such experiences can reinforce ingroup preferences.[50]

Outgroup Attitudes (Bamar vs. *Taingyintar* Minorities)

The general literature on social identities indicates that majority and minority groups possess different intergroup attitudes due to differences in status.[51] Minority group members are more likely to be on the receiving end of discrimination; unsurprisingly, this negatively impacts the way they view members of the majority group. We find this trend in our survey as well. While intergroup attitudes

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[50] Vera Mironova and Sam Whitt, "The Evolution of Prosociality and Parochialism after Violence," *Journal of Peace Research* 53 (5) (2016): 648–64; Vera Mironova and Sam Whitt, "Social Norms after Conflict Exposure and Victimization by Violence: Experimental Evidence from Kosovo," *British Journal of Political Science* 48 (3) (2018): 749–65.

[51] Linda R. Tropp and Thomas F. Pettigrew, "Relationships between Intergroup Contact and Prejudice among Minority and Majority Status Groups," *Psychological Science* 16 (12) (December 2005): 951–57.
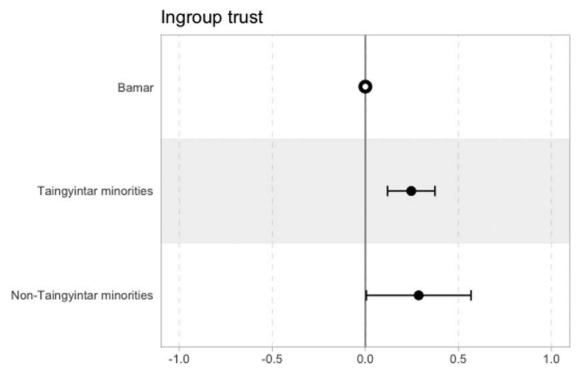
Figure 10. Ingroup trust. Respondents were asked if a stranger belonging to their ethnic group (the group they indicated at the beginning of the survey was specifically mentioned) was likely to return their wallet containing 100,000 kyat and their National Registration Card. On a scale from 1 to 4, where higher numbers indicate higher levels of trust, Bamar trust for other Bamar is 2.8 on average, whereas it is 3.1 for both *taingyintar* (e.g., Kachin trust for a stranger Kachin) and for non-*taingyintar* minorities (e.g., Chinese trust for a stranger Chinese).

were by and large positive, **_taingyintar_ minorities held less positive outgroup attitudes toward the Bamar compared to the Bamar's attitudes toward the _taingyintar_ minorities.**

To examine outgroup attitudes, respondents were asked a different set of questions depending on whether they self-identified as Bamar or not at the beginning of the survey. Those self-identifying as Bamar were asked about their views on *taingyintar* minorities and policies related to *taingyintar* minorities. Likewise, those self-identifying as non-Bamar were asked about their attitudes toward the Bamar. While both groups express similarly low rates of dislike for having an outgroup neighbor,[52] *taingyintar* minorities have lower rates of outgroup trust as compared to Bamar respondents; 83 percent of Bamar indicated that they trust a member of the *taingyintar* minority. In contrast, only 66 percent of *taingyintar* minorities express trust in a Bamar individual (Figure 11).

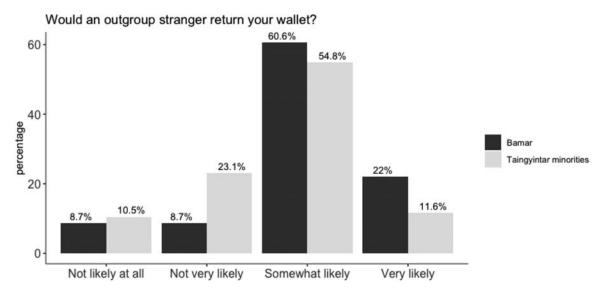[52] 3.1 percent for Bamar and 2.3 percent for *taingyintar* minorities.

Figure 11. Outgroup trust. Respondents were asked if a stranger belonging to an outgroup was likely to return their wallet containing 100,000 kyat and their National Registration Card. On a scale from 1 to 4, where higher numbers indicate higher levels of trust, Bamar on average have a score of 2.96. Comparatively, *taingyintar* on average have a score of 2.68, with a statistically significant difference of 9 percent.

We see this pattern again when it comes to positive assessments of outgroup warmth and competence: Bamar respondents are more than twice as likely to consider the *taingyintar* minorities as trustworthy and 1.5 times more likely to consider them competent (Figure 12).

This divergence in outgroup attitudes is likely driven by a heightened sense of threat from the Bamar majority as well as a higher sense of marginalization among *taingyintar* minorities. Not only are *taingyintar* minorities three times more likely to perceive that Bamar discriminate against their ingroup, but they are also more likely to perceive the Bamar as a source of economic and cultural threat (Figure 13). It is important to note, however, that these baseline percentages are low. When provided with a list of statements meant to gauge perceived levels of threat, the highest proportion of respondents that selected any one of these statements was only 8 percent. This was among *taingyintar* minorities concerning the perception that the Bamar outgroup discriminates against them.

Unsurprisingly, we see that a smaller proportion of *taingyintar* minorities perceive commonalities with the Bamar majority than the other way around (Figure 14).[53] While nearly half of Bamar

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[53] Bamar are more likely to perceive commonalities with *taingyintar* minorities (3.34) compared to the other way around (3.12). This is statistically significant at conventional levels.

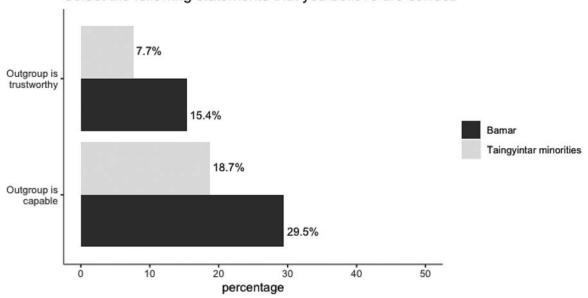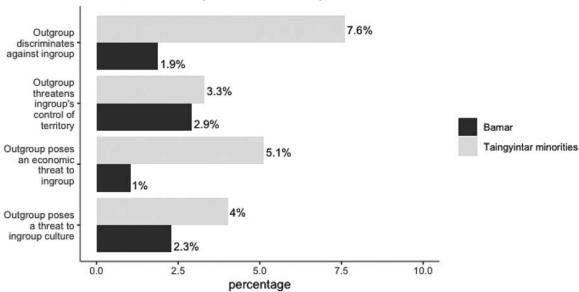**Select the following statements that you believe are correct.**

Figure 12. Assessments of outgroup warmth and competence. Respondents were given a list of statements that were randomly ordered and asked to select all the statements they agreed with. Although only 8 percent of *taingyintar* youths selected the statement "Bamar are trustworthy," twice this percentage of Bamar youths (15 percent) agree that *taingyintar* are trustworthy. When it came to assessments of capability, both groups fare better. Nineteen percent of *taingyintar* respondents agree that Bamar are capable, while an even higher percentage of Bamar respondents (30 percent) feel this way toward their *taingyintar* counterparts.

Select the following statements that you believe are correct.

Figure 13. Outgroup threat perception. Respondents were given a list of statements that were randomly ordered and asked to select all the statements they agreed with. While 8 percent of *taingyintar* respondents perceive that the Bamar outgroup discriminates against them, only 2 percent of Bamar respondents feel that way about the *taingyintar* minority outgroup. This trend is repeated for economic and cultural threats. Five percent of *taingyintar* respondents agree that the Bamar pose an economic threat to their ingroup, in contrast to only 1 percent of Bamar. Likewise, 4 percent of *taingyintar* respondents feel that the Bamar threatened their ingroup culture, whereas only 2 percent of Bamar respondents feel this way. The only area in which both groups were similar in their threat perception is ownership threat. Approximately 3 percent of both groups believe that the outgroup threatens their control of the territory.
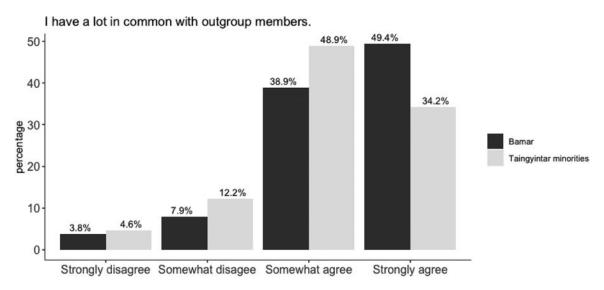
Figure 14. Perceived outgroup commonalities. When asked if they agreed with the statement "I have a lot in common with members of the outgroup," a majority of the respondents agree (83.1 percent of *taingyintar* minorities and 88.3 percent of Bamar). However, Bamar are more likely to strongly agree with this statement (49.4 percent) compared to *taingyintar* minorities (34.2 percent).

youths strongly agree that they shared commonalities with *taingyintar* minorities, only 34 percent of *taingyintar* youths feel the same way about Bamar. This relates to the historical and continued marginalization of the *taingyintar* minorities by the Myanmar state, which has traditionally been associated with the Bamar majority.

This sense of marginalization is especially stark when we look at the level of support for increased allocation of governmental budget to the underdeveloped regions inhabited by the outgroups. An overwhelming 94 percent of Bamar respondents support increased allocation for the development of minority areas. However, this percentage is lower among the *taingyintar* minorities, at 81 percent (Figure 15). Notwithstanding the high rates of support, this disparity is likely due to the perception among the *taingyintar* minorities that they have been sidelined and neglected by the Myanmar state.

Similarly, when asked about their support for a federal system—a system that has long been advocated by ethnic minorities—90 percent of Bamar indicate their support for a federal system (Figure 16). This is an extremely positive response. It is possible that this level of support would
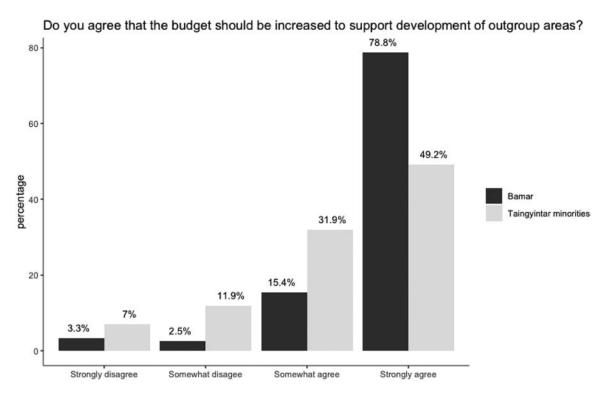
Figure 15. Support for allocating more government budget for the development of outgroup areas. Respondents were told that outgroup areas were underdeveloped and asked if they would support allocating more government budget to help develop these outgroup areas. While 79 percent of Bamar respondents strongly agree with this, slightly less than half (49 percent) of *taingyintar* minorities feel the same way toward the development of Bamar areas.
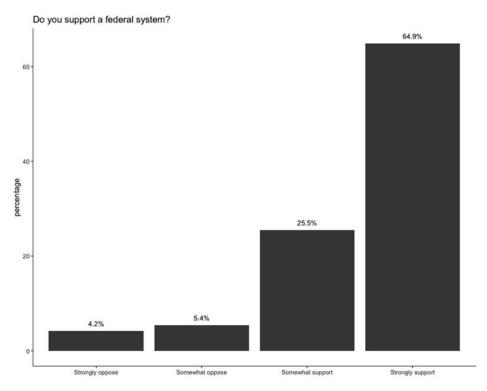

Figure 16. Bamar support for a federal system. Bamar respondents were told that *taingyintar* minorities wanted equality and self-determination, and that they believed that the best way to achieve this is by implementing a federal system. Bamar respondents were then asked if they support a federal system; 64.9 percent indicated that they strongly support such a system, and another 25.5 percent somewhat support federalism.

have been lower had this question been asked before the coup.[54] In the aftermath of the 2021 coup, minorities' federal cause gained traction as well as legitimacy among mainstream society, especially among the Bamar majority, when the National Unity Government (NUG) endorsed the principles of federal democracy in their charter released in March 2021.

Outgroup Attitudes (Rohingya)

Having looked at intergroup attitudes between the Bamar and *taingyintar* minorities, what about outgroup attitudes toward non-*taingyintar* minorities, specifically the Rohingya? The plight of the Rohingya in Myanmar exists in two dimensions. One is concerned with the vertical, or legal, relationship between the Rohingya and the Myanmar state. As discussed in a prior section, the Rohingya are severely marginalized with regard to their political and citizenship rights. They have suffered violence perpetrated by state actors that has amounted to genocide. Beyond the vertical dimension, the marginalization of Rohingya also exists in the horizontal, or social, relationship between the Rohingya and other groups in Myanmar. It is generally thought that there is a high level of prejudice and social discrimination against the Rohingya. Against this backdrop of violence and deep hostilities, **our findings suggest that Myanmar youths are cautiously accepting of the Rohingya as part of the Myanmar nation and state (i.e., expanding the legal boundaries of citizenship), but are hesitant to accept them socially.**[55]

Although Rohingya citizenship is a particularly contentious issue in Myanmar, 36 percent of the youth respondents indicate that the Rohingya should have full citizenship rights, just like the *taingyintar*, and another 46 percent indicate that the Rohingya should have some citizenship rights (Figure 17). These figures run counter to the historical and contemporary treatment of the Rohingya by the state. At the same time, almost 40 percent of the youth agree that the "Rohingya are an important part

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[54] This is merely a speculation as we are not aware of a survey conducted in pre-coup Myanmar that asked about support for federalism.

[55] Compared to other ethnic minority youths, Rakhine youths are less likely to hold inclusive attitudes toward the Rohingya (i.e., agree with the statement that "Rohingya are an important part of Myanmar society"). They also have lower levels of outgroup trust toward the Rohingya. This is likely because Rohingyas are a more salient outgroup for the Rakhine people, especially within Rakhine State, where most Rakhine and Rohingya reside. Especially after 2011, there have been numerous incidents of sectarian violence occurring between the Rohingya and the predominantly Buddhist Rakhine communities in Rakhine State.
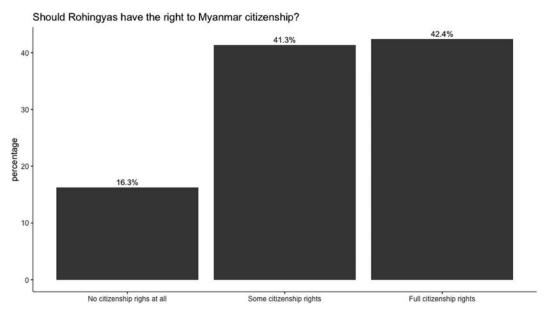
Figure 17. Support for Rohingya's citizenship rights. Nearly 6 percent selected the option "other" rather than selecting the options indicated above. Several of them were recoded into one of the indicated options. The ones we could not discern as clearly indicating the policy attitudes conveyed in the indicated options are excluded from the distribution presented.

of Myanmar society" (Figure 18). While these percentages may seem low, we need to situate them within the context of sustained hostilities and suspicions.

Indeed, social acceptance, or the lack thereof, of Rohingya in Myanmar is evident in our survey. To gauge general prejudice toward Rohingya, we asked the participants to select neighbors whom they do not want living in their vicinity, and we presented them with a list of nine groups including the Rohingya, Bamar, and *taingyintar* (see Figure 19). Eight percent of the youth indicated that they did not want Rohingya as neighbors. To contextualize this result, we compared it to results for Bamar and *taingyintar*. As Figure 19 shows, the proportion of Myanmar youth not wanting a Rohingya neighbor is twice the proportion of Myanmar youth not wanting Bamar or *taingyintar* neighbors (3 and 4 percent), but it is roughly the same as those not wanting Chinese neighbors (7 percent). Similarly, outgroup trust toward Rohingya is significantly lower than outgroup trust toward other groups that are traditionally seen as part of the Myanmar nation. For example, 9 percent indicated a high level of trust when the outgroup in question is Rohingya, but the number almost doubles (16 percent) when the outgroup in question is Bamar or *taingyintar* (Figure 20).
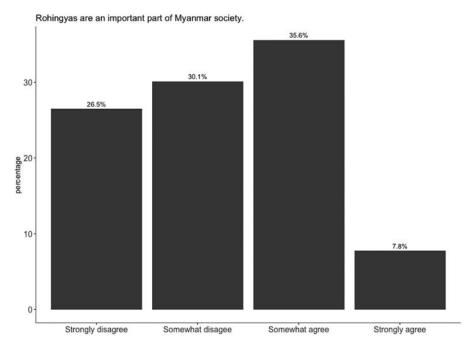
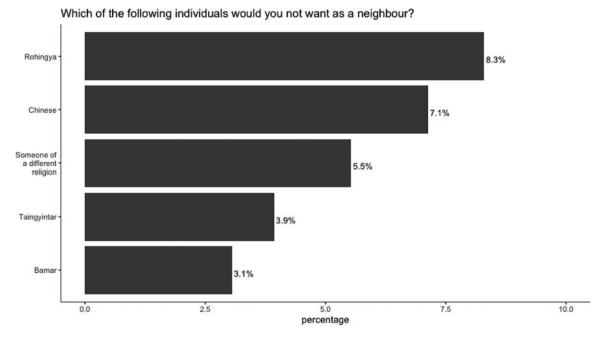**Figure 18. Perceptions of Rohingyas' place in the Myanmar nation.**

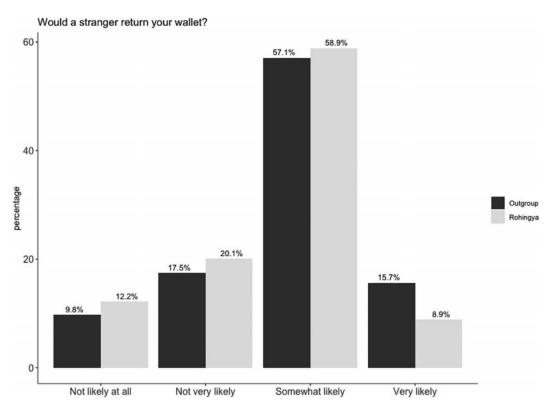
Figure 19. Prejudice.

Figure 20. General outgroup trust versus trust for Rohingya. "Outgroup trust" pools Bamar and non-Bamar's trust for one another. "Rohingya" pools Bamar and non-Bamar's trust toward Rohingya.

In terms of outgroup altruism, although our survey showed that Myanmar youth would by and large consider making monetary donations to help the Rohingya, 11 percent of youths indicate that they would not donate (Figure 21). While we do not have a comparable question for Bamar and *taingyintar* minorities, it is noteworthy that only 6 percent of respondents *strongly* oppose increasing the budget allocation to help develop outgroup (Bamar or *taingyintar* minority) areas.

ARE YOUTHS DIFFERENT?

Do youths' attitudes differ from their older counterparts? **In convergence with the broader literature, we find that youths tend to hold more inclusive and progressive views than adults. This includes attitudes toward who belongs to the Myanmar nation.**
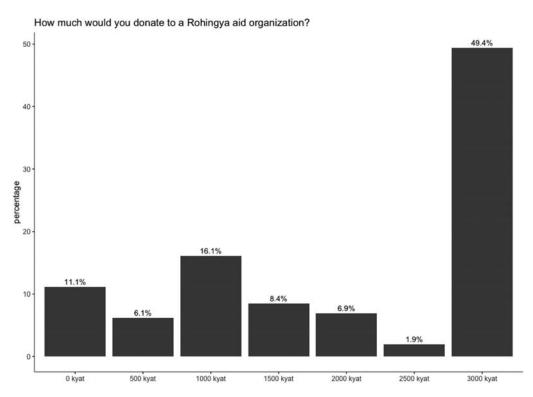
How much would you donate to a Rohingya aid organization?

Figure 21. Willingness to contribute to a Rohingya aid organization. At the end of the survey, respondents were asked to imagine that the study offered them 3,000 kyat that they can keep for themselves or donate to a Rohingya aid organization. They were then asked how much they would donate. The average hypothetical donation was 1,987 kyat, with nearly 50 percent of respondents indicating that they would donate all 3,000 kyat to the aid organization.

When assessing the criteria for citizenship, the proportion of youths selecting exclusionary criteria based on the 1982 Citizenship Law more than halves compared to the non-youth population. On average, youths are 11 percent less likely than non-youths to select criteria in accordance with the 1982 Citizenship Law (Figure 22). This points to a generational gap in understandings of who belongs in the Myanmar nation.

This inclusive conception of the Myanmar nation extends to youths' attitudes toward the Rohingya. Not only did they have a higher degree of outgroup trust toward the Rohingya as compared to the non-youth population, but they are also more likely to believe that the Rohingya are an important part of Myanmar society and support citizenship rights for the Rohingya. On a scale of 1–4, where a higher number represents higher levels of trust toward the Rohingya, the youth (2.6) have a score that was 6 percent higher compared to the non-youth population (2.5) (Figure 23).
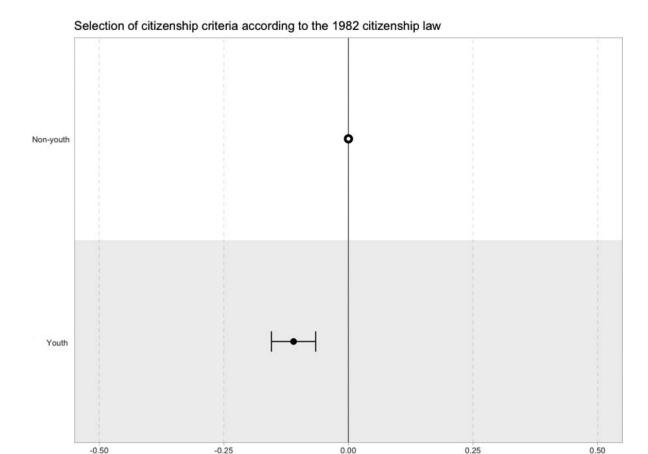
Selection of citizenship criteria according to the 1982 citizenship law

Figure 22. Important qualities for a Myanmar citizen. When respondents were given a list of criteria for citizenship, 18.1 percent of the non-youth population selected one of the provisions under the 1982 Citizenship Law (i.e., arrival prior to 1824 or citizenship by 1948). However, 7.1 percent of youths selected one of these exclusionary criteria.

We see this same story when it comes to how the Rohingya are perceived as part of the Myanmar nation. When respondents were asked if the Rohingya are an important part of Myanmar society, youth on average have a score of 2.2 on a scale of 1–4 where higher numbers indicate stronger agreement. This is 8 percent higher than the non-youth population's average score of 2.1 (Figure 24). Likewise, youth are more likely to indicate support for Rohingyas' citizenship rights. On a scale of 1–3, where higher scores represent stronger support, youths have an average score of 2.3 compared to the non-youth population's average score of 2.1 (Figure 25).

But what explains this difference between the youth and non-youth populations? While higher levels of tertiary education are commonly believed to be a driver of more inclusive attitudes, this
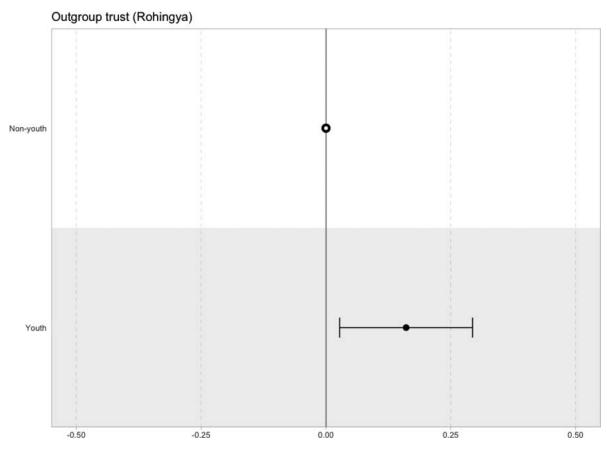
Outgroup trust (Rohingya)

Figure 23. Difference in outgroup trust toward the Rohingya. Youth respondents have, on average, a 0.16 higher score than non-youth respondents. This difference is statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

positive relationship continues to hold even after controlling for a university education.[56] Youths may simply be more exposed to diversity growing up in the era of the internet, where alternative perspectives are more easily shared and consumed. Consequently, they may be more open to and accepting of outgroups. This explanation gains further traction if we disaggregate youths into two subgroups: those aged between fifteen and twenty-four years (Gen Z), who would have spent their formative years during the post-reform period (2011–20), and those aged twenty-five to thirty-four years, who would still possess memories of growing up in the pre-reform era. Many of the results presented above are driven by the post-reform youths, who possess more inclusive attitudes toward the Rohingya compared to *both* the pre-reform youth and non-youth population.

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[56] Ethnicity, gender, urban/rural residence, and state/region were also included as controls.
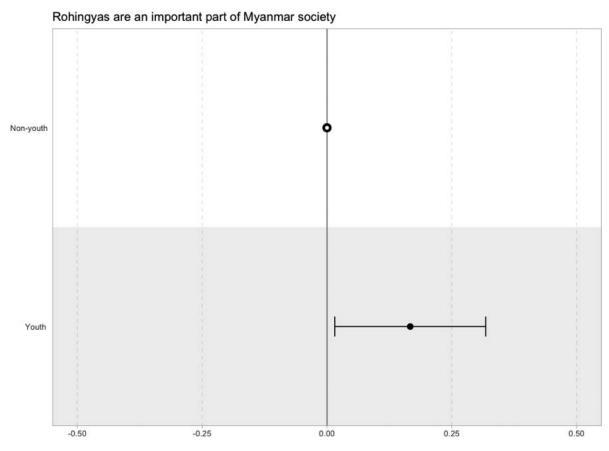
Figure 24. Perception of Rohingyas as a member of the national community. Youth respondents have, on average, a 0.16 higher score than non-youth respondents. This difference is statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE POST-COUP EXPERIENCE FOR INTERETHNIC RELATIONS

Research Design

Popular narratives suggest positive changes in interethnic relations due to the post-coup experiences. Was there a change? If so, which dimensions of interethnic relations changed? And which aspect of the post-coup experience is the agent of change? Our study is designed with these questions in mind.

We use a survey experiment with a randomized block design to evaluate the effect of shared experiences of post-coup Myanmar on respondents' perceptions of national identity, citizenship, and outgroup attitudes. As mentioned in the methodology section, the participants were first sorted into
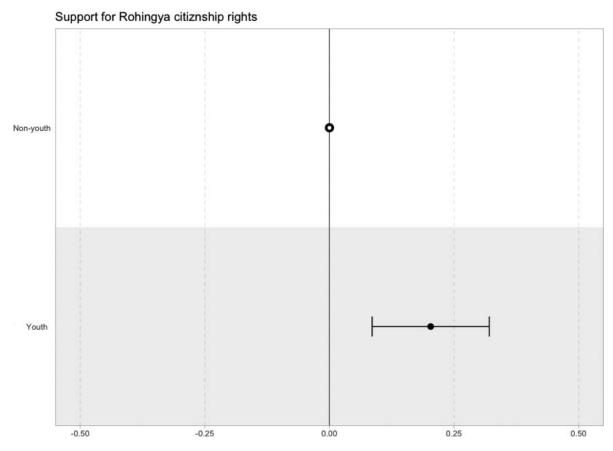
Support for Rohingya citiznship rights

Figure 25. Support for Rohingya citizenship rights. Youth respondents have, on average, a 0.20 higher score than non-youth respondents. This difference is statistically significant at the 0.001 level.

two blocks (Bamar or non-Bamar). Then participants within each block were randomly assigned to control, placebo, and two treatment groups.

The treatments are vignettes designed to prime participants to think about their collective experience in the aftermath of the coup (see Table 4 for the full text). We recognize that collective experiences are multidimensional. Our treatment vignettes are designed to emphasize two dimensions: the shared threat that Tatmadaw poses, or the collective efforts toward nonexcludable public goods (in this case, democracy).

We also included a placebo vignette that primes participants to think about the 2021 coup without an emphasis on the shared experience (see Table 4 for the full text). In addition to the mode of treatment (i.e., the text vignette), we also expect that the topic of a military coup itself may exert an independent effect on our outcomes. For example, reading or thinking about the coup itself can evoke

Table 4. Vignette for Experimental Intervention

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TREATMENT 1 (Shared threat)

The people of Myanmar all share a common experience of violence and repression by the Tatmadaw. Since 1948, the Tatmadaw has terrorized ethnic minority communities by looting, burning down houses and villages, and killing civilians. The Tatmadaw has also employed these ruthless tactics against the Rohingya community in western Myanmar. Between 1978 and 2016, Tatmadaw's operations in western Myanmar arrested, killed, and displaced thousands of Rohingya. Since the coup on February 1, these atrocities have extended to the Bamar heartlands (*a-nya*) and ethnic Bamar communities. As of October 1, 1,147 civilians have been killed, 7,022 arrested, and thousands more have had to flee their home.

Regardless of ethnic background, everyone in Myanmar has experienced, in one form or another, violence and repression committed by the same perpetrator, the Tatmadaw.

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TREATMENT 2 (Collective effort)

The people of Myanmar are united in their struggle to overthrow the coup regime and obtain democracy. Since the coup of February 2021, people of all backgrounds—Bamar, *taingyintar*, and Rohingya—have come out to protest the Tatmadaw, participate in the civil disobedience movement, and take up arms against the Tatmadaw. These pro-democracy movements have taken place across the country, including in the ethnic minority states, the Bamar heartlands, and Rohingya refugee camps.

Regardless of ethnic background, everyone in Myanmar is committed toward ending the military regime and establishing a democratic country.

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PLACEBO

In the early hours of February 1, the Myanmar military staged a coup, overthrowing civilian leaders who had been popularly elected during the 2020 elections. The state counselor, president, and other top political leaders were arrested in a series of raids. Soldiers also blocked off roads in Nay Pyi Taw and Yangon. The military cracked down on international and domestic media outlets, and enacted internet blackouts. The military formed a State Administrative Council (SAC) on February 2, and on August 1, the SAC declared itself a caretaker government for the country. The military promises to reinstate multiparty elections at a later date. As of October 1, 1,147 civilians have been killed, 7,022 arrested, and thousands more have had to flee their home.

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CONTROL

~ no vignette ~

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anger, frustration, and/or fear. Our objective in including the placebo was to sufficiently disentangle these emotive implications of reading the vignette from the shared experience in post-coup Myanmar. In other words, the placebo captures the nonspecific effects associated with our treatment delivery.[57]

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[57] Ethan Porter and Yamil R. Velez, "Placebo Selection in Survey Experiments: An Agnostic Approach," *Political Analysis* 30 (4) (2021): 1–14.

While those in the two treatment groups and the placebo group answer key attitudinal questions after reading the vignette texts discussed above, those in the control group answered the same questions without reading any vignette text. This group's survey responses are expected to capture the "baseline" attitudes among Myanmar youth. Since the primary objective of this study is to evaluate the effect of post-coup experiences on interethnic relations, the ideal baseline measure would capture pre-coup attitudes. However, this study was implemented in post-coup Myanmar, and thus, the baseline measure already comprises the effect of post-coup experiences. As such, the differences between the control group and the treatment groups in our study underestimates the true effect of post-coup experiences.

Aside from underestimation, it is also important to note whether the nature of our sample (limitations discussed in the methodology section) is expected to bias the experimental results. A study comparing results from probability versus nonprobability samples indicates that coefficients resulting from the samples tend to be in the same direction, though not of the same magnitude.[58] Another study also finds that treatment effects derived from a convenience online sample are similar to the effects based on nationally representative samples.[59] This means that our study can reveal whether the post-coup experience made a difference with respect to outgroup attitudes, but it cannot indicate the extent of the difference. Thus, the magnitude of the change we report should be interpreted with caution. At the same time, the baseline in the sample is not truly the baseline. As such, the real magnitude of changes is likely larger than those documented in this study.

Experimental Results

How did the post-coup experiences affect conceptions of the national identity and outgroup attitudes in Myanmar? Our experiment yielded mixed findings. While we did not find evidence that those who were primed with the placebo, shared threat, or collective efforts vignettes expressed

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[58] Andrew J. Thompson and Justin T. Pickett, "Are Relational Inferences from Crowdsourced and Opt-In Samples Generalizable? Comparing Criminal Justice Attitudes in the GSS and Five Online Samples," *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 36 (4) (2020): 907–32.

[59] Alexander Coppock, "Generalizing from Survey Experiments Conducted on Mechanical Turk: A Replication Approach," *Political Science Research and Methods* 7 (3) (2019): 613–28.

systematically different responses for most outcomes compared to the control group, there are three notable patterns.

First, framing the post-coup experience as "collective effort" has the most potential to foster positive attitudes among the Bamar (we did not find a similar effect among non-Bamar). Second, framing the post-coup experience as "shared threat" could sour outgroup attitudes for both Bamar and non-Bamar—specifically, the Bamar's attitudes toward *taingyintar* minorities and non-Bamar's attitudes toward Bamar and Rohingya. Third, the effect of the placebo vignette on out-group attitudes is ambiguous. The placebo vignette does not involve any framing, so we do not know how respondents interpret the post-coup experience. The potentially varied nature of individual interpretations may have led to the mixed results when it comes to the placebo vignette. This highlights the importance of framing. Our findings are summarized in Tables 5 and 6; the positive and negative signs indicate the direction of change and the statistically significant changes appear in blue.

Greater Inclusion among Bamar Youths

Priming on the collective effort of the anti-coup resistance had a positive and statistically significant result for the Bamar youths when it came to the inclusion of Rohingya within the national community.

First, Bamar youths exposed to the collective effort prime are more likely to agree that the Rohingya are an important part of Myanmar society compared to their counterparts in the control group. In fact, their average scores were 10 percent higher (or 0.2 points higher on a scale of 1–4) than control group respondents (see Figure 26).

This expanded conception of who belongs to the national community also translates into a greater degree of support for Rohingya citizenship rights (see Figure 27). When asked about their opinion toward Rohingyas' citizenship rights, Bamar youths who were primed with the collective effort treatment are more supportive of complete citizenship rights for the Rohingyas as opposed to those in the control group. While the control group respondents have an average score of 2.2 (on a scale of 1–3), those in the collective effort treatment group have a higher average score of 2.3—a 7 percent increase from those in the control.

Table 5. Attitudes toward Rohingya

The reference category is the control group.	Placebo		Shared threat		Collective effort	
	Non-Bamar	Bamar	Non-Bamar	Bamar	Non-Bamar	Bamar
Support for Rohingya citizenship rights	–**	–	–	–	+	+**
Rohingya important part of Myanmar society	–	+	+	+	+	+**
Commonality with Rohingya	+	–	+*	–	+	+
Empathy for Rohingya	+	+	+	–	+*	+
Trust Rohingya	–	–	–**	–	+	+
Donate to Rohingya aid organization	–	–	–	–	+	–
Do not want Rohingya neighbor	+	+*	+	+	–	+

Note: Statistically significant results appear in blue. * denotes statistical significance at 0.1 level, ** at 0.05 level, and *** at 0.01 level.

Table 6. Outgroup Attitudes between Bamar and Non-Bamar

The reference category is the control group.	Placebo		Shared threat		Collective effort	
	Non-Bamar	Bamar	Non-Bamar	Bamar	Non-Bamar	Bamar
Support for federalism		–		–		–
Commonality with outgroup	+	–	+	+	–	–
Empathy for outgroup	–	+**	+	+	+	+
Trust outgroup	–	+	–**	+	–	+
Support development budget for outgroup	+	–	–	–*	–	–
Do not want outgroup neighbor	+**	+	+	+	+**	+

Note: Statistically significant results appear in blue. * denotes statistical significance at 0.1 level, ** at 0.05 level, and *** at 0.01 level. In the survey questions, outgroup for those who self-identified as Bamar is specified as "*taingyintar* minorities." Outgroup for those self-identified as non-Bamar is specified as "Bamar."

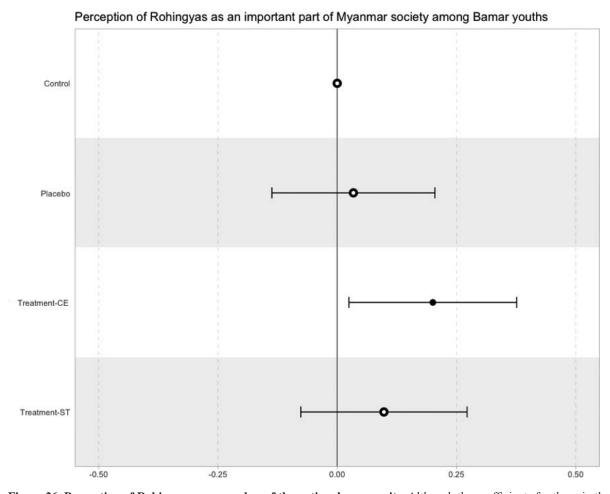Perception of Rohingyas as an important part of Myanmar society among Bamar youths

Figure 26. Perception of Rohingyas as a member of the national community. Although the coefficients for those in the placebo and shared threat treatment groups are slightly positive compared to that of the control group, they are not statistically significant. CE, Collective Effort; ST, Shared Threat.

While we do not see similar findings for ethnic minorities, it is also important to note that this may be because ethnic minorities possess a higher baseline when it comes to solidarity with the Rohingya, given that the two share a marginalized status within Myanmar society.[60] Nevertheless, we find that the collective effort prime increases ethnic minorities' empathy for the sufferings experienced by the Rohingya, although this relationship is only significant at the 0.1 level.

Although we find evidence that the collective effort arising from the resistance movement to the coup expands conceptions of the national community, outgroup and policy attitudes by and large

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[60] Because Rohingyas are a more highly salient outgroup for the Rakhine ethnic minorities, we disaggregated the results for Rakhine youth to see if Rakhine youths were possibly driving the results. However, we continued to obtain null findings.
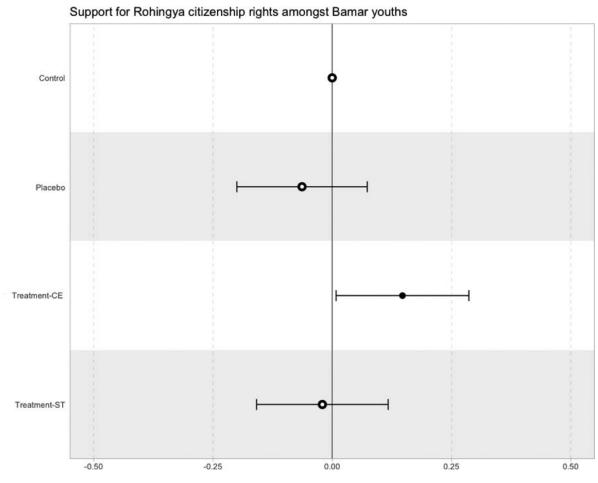
Support for Rohingya citizenship rights amongst Bamar youths

Figure 27. Support for Rohingya citizenship rights. The coefficients for respondents in the placebo and shared threat treatment groups are slightly negative, but they are also not statistically significant. CE, Collective Effort; ST, Shared Threat.

did not improve. There are a couple of potential reasons for this. First, Bamar's and ethnic minorities' outgroup attitudes toward one another are largely positive. Consequently, there may be a ceiling effect in terms of how much *more* outgroup attitudes can improve. Second, it is possible that our baseline measurements already account for the effects of the coup. For instance, it is likely that a much lower proportion of Bamar youths would have supported a policy of federalism had we conducted a survey prior to the coup. Our baseline measurements, then, may already capture the effects of the post-coup events. Third, it may simply be that prejudice is a difficult bias to ameliorate (e.g., outgroup trust toward the Rohingya) even when policy attitudes (e.g., support for Rohingya citizenship rights) do change.[61]

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[61] Other empirical studies based on societies with deep divisions suggest that prejudice is difficult to ameliorate. For example, see Elizabeth Levy Paluck, "Reducing Intergroup Prejudice and Conflict Using the Media: A Field

Finally, it is also possible that there are moderating variables that influence how the treatments affect the outcomes. Prior exposure to diversity and violence are two important moderating variables. For example, when primed on the collective effort framing, Bamar youths from the states are more likely to support federalism than those from the regions. Given the cultural, social, and economic differences between the states and the regions, it is unsurprising that Bamar youths residing in the states would be more open to the idea of a federal union.

Similarly, Bamar youths from the states have lower levels of prejudice toward the Rohingya compared to Bamar living in the regions when they were primed on both the collective effort and shared threat framings. This may be because those from the states have higher prior exposure to ethnic outgroups, which makes them more amenable to the bias reduction effects of the frames. Youths from the states are also more likely to perceive that they share common experiences with the Rohingya when primed on the shared threat frame, compared to their counterparts in the regions. This may be due to the higher exposure to (and knowledge of) violence and conflict that communities in the states have experienced, making it easier to decrease the perceived distance between their ingroup and the Rohingya outgroup.

The Adverse Effects of Emphasizing Shared Threat

Our experiment also highlights how priming on shared threat can actually worsen outgroup attitudes, especially if the ingroup perceives themselves as "victims" or view their group as disadvantaged within the wider society. For instance, ethnic minorities who were given the shared threat prime have lower levels of outgroup trust toward *both* the Bamar majority and the Rohingya minority. This set of results is statistically significant at the 0.05 level (see Figure 28).

In the case of outgroup trust toward the Bamar, this finding is perhaps not surprising, given the popular narrative of Bamar domination within ethnic minority circles. Having suffered at the hands of "the enemy"—the Bamar majority—for over half a century, ethnic minorities' hostility toward the Bamar may be sharpened when the former's sufferings are given the same weight as those of their

Experiment in Rwanda," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 96 (3) (2009): 574–87; Alexandra Scacco and Shana S. Warren, "Can Social Contact Reduce Prejudice and Discrimination? Evidence from a Field Experiment in Nigeria," *American Political Science Review* 112 (3) (2018): 654–77.
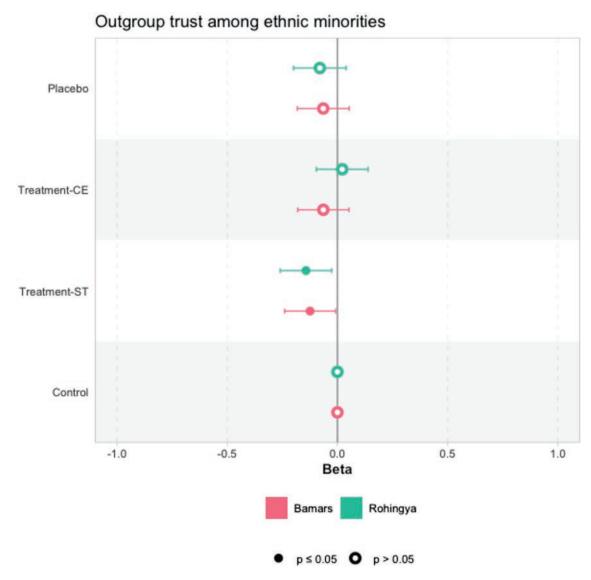
Figure 28. Outgroup trust among ethnic minorities. The coefficients for outgroup trust toward both Rohingya and Bamar are both negative and statistically significant when ethnic minority youths were primed on the shared threat treatment. CE, Collective Effort; ST, Shared Threat.

ingroup. When it comes to attitudes toward the Rohingya, however, the social psychology literature has identified the phenomenon of "competitive victimhood," which is especially salient when the perpetrator is the same.[62] The acknowledgment of the outgroup's victimhood threatens the distinctiveness of the ingroup, and this effect worsens if the ingroup's distinct suffering is not recognized.[63]

[62] Johanna Ray Vollhardt, "Inclusive Victim Consciousness in Advocacy, Social Movements, and Intergroup Relations: Promises and Pitfalls," *Social Issues and Policy Review* 9 (1) (2015): 89–120.
[63] Johanna Ray Vollhardt, "'Crime against Humanity' or 'Crime against Jews?' Acknowledgment in Construals of the Holocaust and Its Importance for Intergroup Relations," *Journal of Social Issues* 69 (1) (2013): 144–61.

We see some indication of a similar effect among the Bamar youths as well. Although only significant at the 0.1 level, we find that the probability of selecting citizenship criteria based on the exclusionary 1982 Citizenship Law increases by 4 percent when Bamar respondents are exposed to the shared threat prime.

QUALITATIVE EVIDENCE

To obtain a more complete understanding of how the post-coup experiences affected intergroup relations in Myanmar, it is important to take into consideration how respondents reflect on their own experiences from the past year in their own words. To that end, we invited participants to give an open-ended response at the end of the survey.[64] We received over 1,188 responses.[65] These qualitative data are fairly consistent with findings from our experimental study, but they also reveal new insights that add further nuance to the implications of post-coup experiences in Myanmar.

First, comments referencing shared experiences of violence in post-coup Myanmar are pervasive. Many respondents, especially the Bamar, indicate that widespread repression was an impetus for an unprecedented exercise in perspective taking.

"In the past when Myanmar was not developed, I used to believe the news they [the military] broadcasted. So I could not empathize with the *taingyintar*. But thanks to development, I was able to see and hear that the *taingyintar* are not able to live in peace and are suffering because of them [the military]. And now, all I can say is, I am sorry." (Bamar, Minbu Township, Magway Region)

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[64] The survey question asked: "We have come to the conclusion of the survey. Is there anything you would like to share with us about how the post-coup experience has affected how you view other ethnic groups in Myanmar? If you would like to share your view, please type it out in the text box. If not, click next."
[65] There were 749 responses to the question "Is there anything you would like to share with us about how the post-coup experience has affected how you view other ethnic groups in Myanmar?" and 439 responses for the question "Do you have any other comments?"

"In the past, we were aware of their [minorities'] plight, but we did not pay much attention to it. Now I understand their plight and feel sorry for them." (Bamar, Salingyi Township, Sagaing Region)

"In the past, I didn't have much sympathy for the *taingyintar*. Why? Because I didn't experience military oppression myself. But after the coup, after everyone, including Bamar, experienced violent oppression and killing, I came to better understand the lives of the *taingyintar* and feel more sympathy for them." (Bamar, Shwetaung Township, Bago Region)

"After the military coup, the junta set fire to the towns and villages, killed civilians, and seized homes belonging to protesters, not only in the *taingyintar* areas, also in the mainland areas where the Bamar predominantly live, such as Sagaing, Magway, and Mandalay. That's why I now sympathize with the *taingyintar* who suffered the lawless actions of the military in their areas." (Bamar, Pakokku Township, Magway Region)

Minorities also acknowledge violence in the predominantly Bamar areas and express the expectation that experiences of atrocities committed by the same perpetrator would change Bamar's attitudes toward outgroup members.

"We Kayin have suffered atrocities committed by the military for a long time now . . . it was only after the military coup in 2021 that Bamar came to sympathize with us *taingyintar*. They now understand the reason for the armed revolution. Prior to the coup, Bamar believed in the military's propaganda and mistakenly labeled the *taingyintar* armed groups as destructive rebels. This is also why they discriminated against *taingyintar*. . . . But now, I hope they are able to trust and understand us *taingyintar*. We all want to build a new democratic country in unity." (Kayin, Wakema, Ayeyarwaddy)

"A silver lining to the coup is that those in the mainland now go through the same thing that the *taingyintar* have been going through. I feel some satisfaction in that. After they get hurt, then they understand the pain." (Mon, Mudon, Mon State)

"Bamar apologized after realizing the suffering of *taingyintar*, and I welcome that. I think there is an openness to accepting more diversity." (Mro, Mrauk-U Township, Rakhine State)

"As Bamar suffered, they came to understand more about the lives of the *taingyintar*, and most Bamar people do not know much about federalism even though they're advocating for federalism." (Shan, Lashio Township, Shan State)

Furthermore, several minority respondents indicated that the shared experience of violence in Myanmar softened their views of the Bamar.

"My views on the Bamar have become more positive, and I am deeply saddened by the recent effects of the war." (Shan, Bhamo Township, Kachin State)

"I feel sorry for the Bamar and I am equally saddened with them." (Rakhine, Ann Township, Rakhine State)

"In the period after the coup, I feel that there is more unity not only among *taingyintar*, but also with the brothers and sisters from the lowland areas. In other words, it is a good outcome out of bad." (Chin, Saw township, Magway Region)

"After the military coup, my view on Bamar from the mainland has changed. I sympathize with the Bamar who oppose the coup and are resisting it." (Shan, Lashio Township, Shan State)

Regarding the experiences of shared threat, participants also express a sense of "competitive victimhood."

"We Karen people have been subjected to atrocities by the Bamar military in the past. And one-third of the population from the village where I live has been brutally murdered. There was no justice, no one to turn to, and people fled to the nearby forest and ended up living in the border areas. When we went up to the city to live there, we faced racial and religion

discrimination. After the military coup, the people from the mainland experienced the oppression of the military, but it is nothing compared to what we have suffered for the past 40 years."

While none of our survey questions asked or mentioned EAOs, a number of respondents reported that they now see the EAOs in a more positive light.[66]

"Before the coup, I thought EAOs were insurgents, but after the coup, I understand that many EAOs are resisting because they could no longer stand the repression." (Bamar, Mingyan Township, Mandalay Region)

"Before the coup, we used to think highly of the military and misunderstood the armed *taingyintar* as the rebels." (Bamar, Tatnatpin Township, Bago Region)

"In the past, I did not understand why *taingyintar* were armed. Now I am able to empathize." (Bamar, Hinthada, Ayeyarwaddy)

"My views on organizations that were once seen as rebel groups have now changed to Ethnic Armed Organizations."[67] (Bamar, Hlegu Township, Yangon)

"I feel a lot of compassion toward the *taingyintar*. If they had not taken up arms, our lives would be like a puppet dancing to the pull of the strings. When Myanmar becomes peaceful, there should be more consideration for their causes, because the *taingyintar* have suffered so much. Please give them equal rights." (Bamar, Township unknown, Mon State)

Finally, several respondents—both Bamar and ethnic minorities—highlight a 180 degree change in attitudes toward the Rohingyas, with many expressing remorse for their past attitudes and inaction toward the Rohingyas.

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[66] According to a nationally representative survey conducted by the People's Alliance for Credible Elections (PACE) in March 2019, 44 percent of the respondents reported "confidence" in Tatmadaw, while only 21 percent reported "confidence" in the EAOs. For more information, see www.pacemyanmar.org.
[67] The term *ethnic armed organization* is thought to confer the organizations with a certain level of recognition and thus is the preferred designation by the EAOs.

"There is a growing sympathy for all *taingyintar*. I think Rohingya should be granted citizenship rights. (However, I am not yet ready to give them *taingyintar* designation.)" (Rakhine, Patheingyi Township, Mandalay Region)

"In the past, I thought that the Rohingya people faced oppression in Rakhine State because they were not Myanmar citizens, but now I clearly see that it was not the case. Let the military dictatorship fall quickly." (Chin, Kalay Township, Sagaing Region)

"As there is a saying that human beings are able to empathize only after they themselves experience the same suffering, I admit that most of us were aware but did not pay attention to the Rohingya's and *taingyintar*'s experiences of bloody oppression by the military dictatorship for 70 years. Therefore, I want to urge people to open their eyes and ears to the oppression and inhumane actions of the military dictator suffered by the Rohingya and *taingyintar*, and join in the fight to root out military dictatorship and build the new federal country together." (Chin, Kyauktaw Township, Rakhine State)

"Before the military coup, during the Rohingya crisis, when the images of the military burning villages and torturing the Rohingya surfaced in the news media, I made fun of the Rohingya and thought those were fabricated stories. Now that I have suffered myself, I feel very sorry and sympathize with the Rohingya people. We, the Bamar people, will be apologizing to the Rohingya at every opportunity for being obnoxious to them in the past." (Bamar, Pyigyi Tagon Township, Mandalay Region)

"At first, I hated the Rohingya a little bit, I hated them because of what my parents told me. But now that I've learned the truth, I have come to realize the Rohingya are also human beings." (Shan, Lashio Township, Shan State)

Discussion

The post-coup experience includes both shared threat at the hands of the military and collective effort to end dictatorship in Myanmar. However, qualitative comments suggest that for those who shared their thoughts and perspectives, shared threat is the more salient characterization of their

experience—references to shared threat are made more frequently than to collective effort. In fact, there was only one comment that explicitly refers to collective effort:

"I used to treat those from different religion with discrimination. Like the Indians, for example. But now, I see them participating in the protests, and I am thankful to them for their contribution to the effort. I no longer think of them as the other, and simply consider them to be fellow citizens." (Bamar, Shwepyithar Township, Yangon)

This discrepancy may help explain the null finding in our experimental study with regard to the shared threat prime and the significant finding with regard to the collective effort prime. Because collective suffering is already highly salient in respondents' minds, treating them with the shared threat prime did not provide new information. This may be why we do not detect a difference in most outcomes between the control group (baseline) and the group treated with the shared threat prime. In contrast, the collective effort prime may have provided new information, or at least reminded the participants, about the participation of outgroup members in the collective effort for democracy in Myanmar, which resonated with the primed recipients in a powerful way; this in turn resulted in attitudinal shifts. The anti-coup resistance itself is led by a number of non-*taingyintar* protest leaders, including a Muslim youth, Wai Moe Naing, who was instrumental to the protests in Monywa.[68]

Moreover, preexisting salience of shared threat among the Myanmar population also points to a high possibility that the shared threat experience of post-coup Myanmar may have facilitated inclusionary and more positive outgroup attitudes. In this case, our experimental study would not be able to detect the change precisely because it has already occurred. It is also important to note that some comments concur with our experimental finding that shared threat may have shifted outgroup attitudes in the negative direction. Exposure to threat may prompt people to think about their own group's suffering and downplay similar experiences of outgroup members. Overall, our study suggests that

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[68] "Wai Moe Naing, Prominent Leader of Anti-Coup Movement, Detained in Monywa," *Myanmar Now*, April 15, 2021, www.myanmar-now.org/en/news/wai-moe-naing-prominent-leader-of-anti-coup-movement-detained-in-monywa.

depending on the lived experiences and existing biases of individuals, experiences of shared threat and violence may be a double-edged sword for interethnic relations in Myanmar. It may prompt perspective taking and empathy among some, allowing them to develop more inclusionary views, but it may also incline others to retreat to their own ingroup and adopt more exclusionary views.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The history of Myanmar has been characterized and understood predominantly through the lens of ethnic conflict by scholars and country observers alike. While this is an important area of study, it tends to limit the analysis to national-level interactions between the elites, be they state actors or ethnic minority organizations, such as the EAOs. Less is known about intercommunal relations and interactions at the grassroots level.[69] Consequently, the salience of ethnic identity or intercommunal tensions in everyday life may be overstated, or more nuanced than the way it is currently presented.[70] This study suggests the need to reevaluate the conventional view with regard to the communal relationship between Bamar and *taingyintar* minorities.[71] While there is certainly latitude for improvement in this relationship, our study does not indicate that it is worse than interethnic relationships elsewhere (i.e., countries without protracted violent conflict).

Our study, conducted in the wake of a momentous event among the Myanmar youth, also suggests opportunities for laying the groundwork for a more inclusive Myanmar. Although the situation remains dynamic and future developments may undo the unifying effect of the post-coup experience, there are two conclusions we can draw from our findings: First, nation-building is still a work in progress. As youths take up the mantle of leading the pro-democracy movement, there is the potential for a more inclusive conception of the national community to emerge. Second, even as the struggle for democracy continues, the movement's leaders can and should seize the opportunities for

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[69] Thawnghmung's *The "Other" Karen in Myanmar* is a notable exception.
[70] Such overstatement has led country observers to expect that ethnic parties would perform well in Myanmar elections. However, ethnic parties' poor performance pointed to malleability of ethnic identity salience.
[71] This study also suggests that ethnic conflict in Myanmar is primarily a fracture in the minority–state (vertical) relationship, and less so about minority–majority (horizontal) relationship.

intergroup reconciliation and solidarity. The international community, including aid organizations and researchers, should facilitate this endeavor. Our study lays out four broad recommendations, each targeted at a different group of stakeholders.

First, Myanmar youths may be more inclusive and progressive than their older counterparts, but pro-democracy actors, as well as other community organizations, need to ensure that the ongoing nation-building project remains deliberate and thoughtful. What does it mean to be a Myanmar citizen? What does it mean to belong to Myanmar? Notions of indigeneity as defined by the 1982 Citizenship Law need to be revisited, and its institutional framework dismantled. Inclusivity cannot be found by adding more groups to the list of 135 national races. Instead, removing this exclusive device of categorization while celebrating the ethnic and religious diversity that has long characterized Myanmar society may be the way to go.

Second, our findings indicate the importance of how momentous national events are framed. Specifically, this study highlights the value of emphasizing shared experiences in improving outgroup attitudes, with implications for peace building, and interethnic solidarity and advocacy work. In particular, care needs to be taken when highlighting similarities in terms of victimhood. In line with the existing literature on inclusive victim consciousness,[72] peace building efforts have to acknowledge the asymmetrical relations that sometimes underpin shared suffering. In the case of Myanmar, this entails taking into consideration the geographical and historical divergences in experiences, and recognizing the nuances involved. At the same time, however, peace building advocates can also highlight collaborative efforts toward a common goal when trying to build bridges across ethnic and religious groups. This aligns with the extensive literature on contact theory that emphasizes the role of shared goals in alleviating prejudice.[73]

In a similar vein, our findings on the potential negative consequences of emphasizing shared threat reinforce the importance of the "do no harm" principle of international aid. Especially in societies with deep divisions, international aid targeted at marginalized groups can generate

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[72] Vollhardt, "Inclusive Victim Consciousness."
[73] G. W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1955).

unintended consequences toward the very population it is trying to help.[74] In Myanmar, the perception that the Rohingya have received disproportionately more aid (and sympathy) from the international community has sparked backlash and resentment toward the Rohingya from Rakhine communities in Rakhine State—itself the second poorest state within the country.[75] International aid organizations, then, should not only identify potential unintended consequences of targeted aid, but also work to broaden the inclusivity of their programs to encompass the poor and vulnerable members of host/adjacent communities.

Finally, our paper represents one of the few large-scale and nationwide surveys conducted in Myanmar.[76] It reveals a reading of the population that in some aspects runs counter to the prevailing view of communal relations in Myanmar. The prevailing view is perhaps a function of two interfacing trends in Myanmar studies, particularly as it has been undertaken by international scholars and country observers. The first is the nearly singular focus on conflict studies, while the second is the heavy reliance on key informant interviews. The latter, especially when used in isolation, may end up amplifying certain voices that are taken as representative of entire ethnic groups, despite the heterogeneity that characterizes such groups.[77] Consequently, we recommend, whenever appropriate, the use of surveys whose results can be generalizable as a complement to qualitative research methods. The methodology and findings of these surveys should be released to stakeholders. This improved data transparency will help researchers and stakeholders obtain a better pulse on a broader spectrum of society and develop, in turn, more targeted and suitable policy recommendations. We hope that our paper can lead the way.

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[74] Abu Faisal Md. Khaled, "Do No Harm in Refugee Humanitarian Aid: The Case of the Rohingya Humanitarian Response," *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 6 (7) (2021), https://doi.org/10.1186/s41018-021-00093-9.
[75] Joe Freeman, "Buddhist Aid Workers Face Backlash for Helping Myanmar's Rohingya Muslims," *The New Humanitarian*, November 15, 2016, www.thenewhumanitarian.org/fr/node/259154.
[76] Several organizations have conducted large-scale public opinion surveys in Myanmar: Asian Barometer Survey (2015 and 2019); World Values Survey (2020); People's Alliance for Credible Elections (2016 to 2019); and the International Republic Institute (2014, 2017, and 2019). This is not an exhaustive list. Stakeholders should utilize these existing sources of data to better understand a snapshot of public opinion in Myanmar. It is important to note that these surveys by and large aim to construct a nationally representative sample, and thus do not obtain a meaningful sample of ethnic and religious minorities. As a result, they are limited in allowing for a more in-depth understanding of interethnic relations in Myanmar.
[77] Within-group heterogeneity among Kayin has been highlighted in Thawnghmung's *The "Other" Karen in Myanmar*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

APPENDIX

Table A1. Townships Targeted through Facebook Advertising

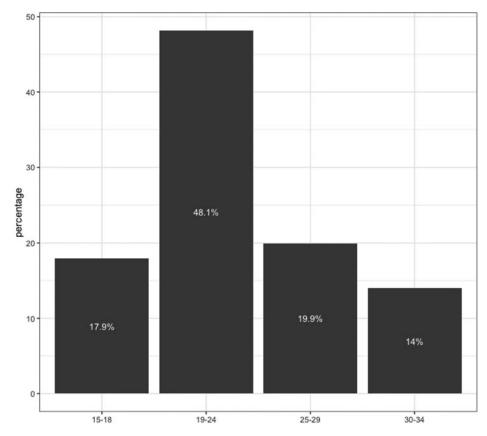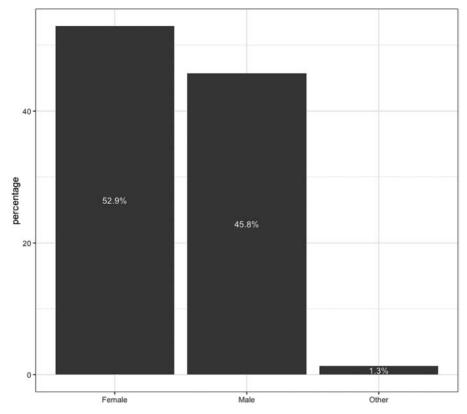| Start date	State/region	Townships
March 5, 2022	Chin	Falam, Mindat, and Teddim
	Kachin	Bhamo, Hpakant, Myitkyina, and Putao
	Kayah	Loikaw and Bawlakhe
	Karen	Hpa-an, Kawkareik, and Kyainseikgyi
	Mon	Mawlamyine, Thaton, and Ye
	Rakhine	An, Sittwe, and Thandwe
	Shan	Kentung, Lashio, Pinlong, and Taunggyi
	Ayeyarwaddy	Pantanaw and Pathein
	Bago	Bago, Kyaukgyi, and Pyay
	Magway	Magway
	Mandalayh	Mogok
	Sagaing	Kalay Myo
	Tanintaryi	Dawei
March 6, 2022	Chin	Mindat, Hakha, and Teddim
	Kachin	Momauk, Myitkyina, and Putao
	Kayah	Same as above
	Karen	Same as above
	Mon	Kyaikto, Mawlamyine, and Ye
	Rakhine	Same as above
	Shan	Kentung, Lashio, and Taunggyi
March 16, 2022	Entire country.	

Figure A1. Age (youth only)
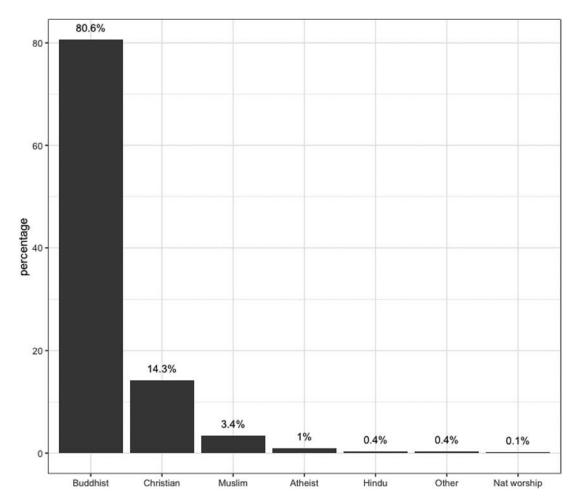

Figure A2. Gender (youth only)

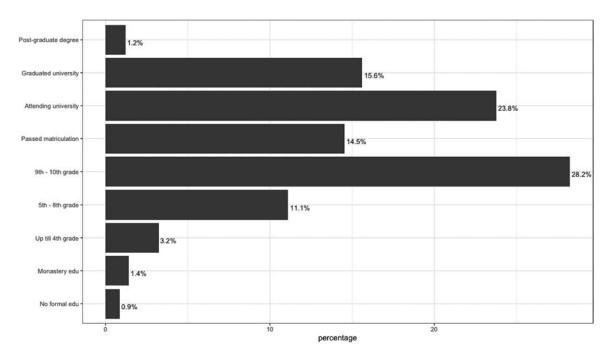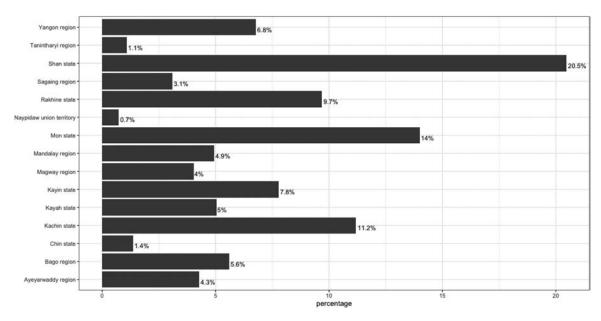**Figure A3. Religion (youth only)**

Figure A4. Education (youth only)

Figure A5. States and regions (youth only)