Chapter 2
OVERVIEW OF MYANMAR'S DIVERSITY

The 2019 GAD Township Reports identify over two dozen ethnic groups (see Table 1.1). Among these groups, the Bamar population is the largest, estimated to be 69 per cent of the country's population. Each of the other groups represent less than 10 per cent of the country's population (see Table 2.1). The Karen population is the largest ethnic minority group, representing nearly 7 per cent of the population. The Shan represent almost 5 per cent, while the Rakhine/Arakan represent 4.3 per cent. Each of the remaining ethnic minorities is estimated to represent 2 per cent of the population or less.

Regarding ethnic minorities' population share, a notable takeaway from Table 2.1 is that many non-titular ethnic minority groups are similar to some of the titular ethnic minority groups in terms of population size. For example, the Pa-O population, according to the GAD Township Reports' data at least, is larger than the Kayah and Kachin populations. It should also be noted that, based on the GAD Township Reports' data, the Rohingya are estimated to account for at least 1.2 per cent of the country's population.[19]

Interestingly, the population share of most of the ethnic minority groups has remained relatively stable since the 1973 Census. A notable exception is the decrease in the Shan population, which is attributable to the disaggregation of subgroups from the Shan category in the 2019 GAD Township Reports.

The proportion of the Bamar population jumped to 68 per cent in 1973, from 61 per cent in the 1931 British Burma Census. The natural growth of the

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[19]   A short note on the Rohingya population is in order. The GAD Township Reports for Rakhine State report around 570,000 people as a 'foreign' ethnicity labelled 'Bangladeshi'. Of these, around 250,000 are from the three northern townships. According to UNHCR estimates, over 700,000 Rohingya people were displaced during the 2016–2017 military crackdowns in northern Rakhine State. Based on the estimates from the GAD for northern Rakhine State and the UNHCR displacement estimates, we can deduce that the total Rohingya population in northern Rakhine State prior to the massive displacement was around 1 million. This population combined with the Rohingya population in other parts of Rakhine State (outside of the three northern townships) totals an estimated 1.3 million Rohingya people in Rakhine State prior to the displacement. This estimate falls within the range of the Rohingya population size based on other sources. See UNHCR (n.d.a, n.d.b).

group's population cannot explain such a difference. Similarly, a change in the administrative capacity of the state administration is unlikely to have caused such discrepancies given the relative stability of the proportions of the other group. While it is difficult to assert specific reasons, historical contextualization of the 1973 Census can provide some lines of explanation.[20]

The regime change in 1962, from a parliamentary democracy to Ne Win's socialist regime (formally known as the Burmese Socialist Programme Party, or BSPP), was accompanied by politics of nationalization that affected all areas of policymaking, including so-called Burmanization and the isolation of the country from the international community (Holmes 1967). Ne Win's regime also focused on nation-building. It is likely that the administration forced an ethnic identification on certain citizens to promote the regime's national ideology—though the extent to which this was the case remains a black hole in Myanmar scholarship.[21] It is also likely that many non-Bamar individuals—especially those of mixed ancestry—strategically changed their ethnic identification in order to protect themselves or to obtain certain services, especially alongside urbanization and access to higher education.[22] In other words, some non-*taingyinthar* who remained in Myanmar possibly developed strategies to outmanoeuvre the limitations put on their access to certain professional or educational opportunities by changing their official ethnic identification.[23]

Table 2.1. **Myanmar's ethnic distribution**

	GAD Township Reports	CIA Factbook	Census report		
	2019	n/a	1983	1973	1931
Bamar	68.5%	68%	69.0%	68.0%	61.2%
Chin	2.1%		2.2%	2.3%	2.4%
Danu	0.6%				
Kachin	1.5%		1.4%	1.5%	1.0%
Kayah/Karenni	0.4%		0.4%	0.4%	
Kayin/Karen	6.6%	7%	6.2%	6.6%	9.5%
Kokang	0.4%				
Lahu	0.5%				
Mon	2.1%	2%	2.4%	2.3%	2.4%
Palaung/Ta'ang	0.8%				
Pa-O	1.7%				
Rakhine/Arakan	4.3%	4%	4.5%	4.4%	3.7%
Shan	4.7%	9%	8.5%	8.9%	8.3%
Subtotal	*94.2%*	*90.0%*	*94.6%*	*94.4%*	*88.5%*

Note: The Shan population is disaggregated in the 2019 GAD Township Reports. The population not included in the indicated subtotal is listed as 'other' or various types of 'foreign' ethnicities.

Source: Data retrieved from the 2019 GAD Township Reports, the CIA Factbook and the 1931, 1973 and 1983 Censuses; table compiled by the authors.

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[20]   Additional research, beyond the scope of this report, is needed to better explain this jump in the proportion of the Bamar population.

ETHNO-LINGUISTIC FRACTIONALIZATION

Three types of statistics are referenced throughout this report: (a) ethnic groups' population share in various subnational administrative units; (b) the proportion of a given ethnic group residing in various subnational administrative units; and (c) the ethno-linguistic fractionalization (ELF) index. The first indicates the percentage of the township, district or state/region population a given ethnic group represents. The second indicates the percentage of an ethnic group's total population that lives in a given township, district or state/region. The ELF index indicates the level of ethnic heterogeneity in a given township, district or state/region.

The ELF index is based on an ethnic group's population share derived from the GAD Township Reports' ethnic data. Measured using the Herfindahl concentration index (HCI) it corresponds to the probability that two randomly selected individuals within a territory share the same ethnic background. The formula is as follows:

$$\text{ELF} = 1 - \sum_{i=1}^{n} S_i^2$$

Where the ELF index indicates the level of ethnic fractionalization of a territory, 'n' represents the total number of ethnic groups, 'i' represents the indexes of a given ethnic group, and 'S' represents the proportion of the ethnic group 'i' within the territory. In other words, the ELF index is equal to 1 minus the sum of the squared proportions of the ethnic groups. The index ranges from 0 to 1, where 0 means an absence of fractionalization (complete homogeneity, or no diversity), and 1 means a maximum level of fractionalization (complete heterogeneity). In this report, ELF values between 0 and 0.33 are considered 'low' diversity; 0.33 to 0.66, 'medium' diversity; and 0.66 to 1, 'high' diversity.

Based on the ELF formula and the 2019 GAD Township Reports, Myanmar's overall diversity score is 0.52. Relying on the Composition of Religious and Ethnic Groups (CREG) project, Drazanova (2020) estimates Myanmar's ELF at 0.59. Drazanova's data set allows for a comparison between Southeast Asian countries. As shown in Table 2.2, countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines are more diverse, while Cambodia, Singapore and Thailand are less diverse than Myanmar. Myanmar, according to this data, would have an ethnic diversity similar to that of Laos or Malaysia.

Figure 2.1 illustrates the difference in ethnic diversity that exists at different levels (state/region, district and township). The maps presented show that, with the exception of Chin State, states are more diverse than regions. Shan

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[21]   For a discussion of the intentions of the BSPP and the adverse effect of Ne Win's policy, see Taylor (2005: 278–79).

[22]   This phenomenon is referred to as a rational choice model—based on an understanding of ethnic identification. See Laitin (1995).

[23]   During the socialist period in Myanmar, individuals of 'foreign' ethnicities could not enrol in professional (e.g. medical, engineering) schools. See Lwin (2000).

State, Mon State and Kachin State are Myanmar's most diverse administrative units. Within these entities, however, strong differences exist between districts and between townships.

Figure 2.1. **Ethnic diversity at state, district and township level**

Ethnic diversity

- Low
- Medium
- High
- Missing
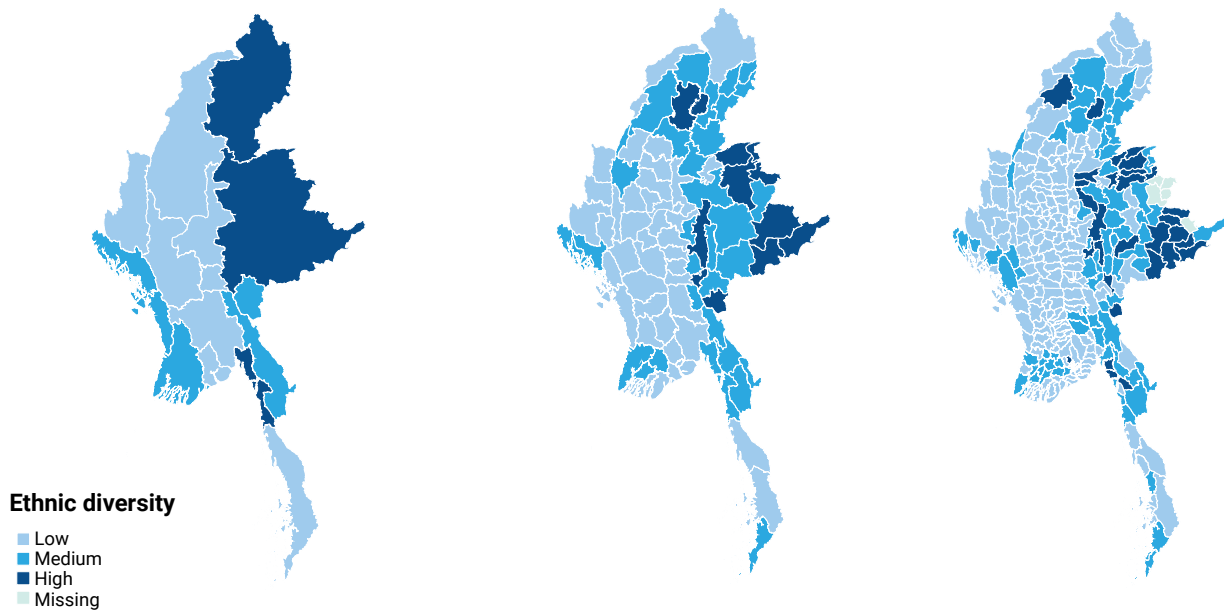
Note: Ethnic diversity is calculated using the ELF index (*see p. 19*), where 'low' corresponds to values between 0 and 0.33; 'medium', to values between 0.33 and 0.66; and 'high', to values between 0.66 and 1.

Source: Data retrieved from the 2019 GAD Township Reports; maps drawn by the authors based on contemporary subnational boundaries. ELF calculations are our own.

Table 2.2. **Myanmar's ELF score in comparison with that of other Southeast Asian countries**

Country	ELF score in 2013	Ethnic diversity bracket
Cambodia	0.158	Low
Indonesia	0.803	High
Laos	0.634	Medium
Malaysia	0.57	Medium
Myanmar	0.59 (0.52)	Medium
Philippines	0.807	High
Singapore	0.395	Medium
Thailand	0.352	Medium

Note: The difference between Drazanova's ELF score (0.59) and our ELF score (0.52) is mainly attributable to the more precise data provided by the 2019 GAD Township Reports.

Source: Data retrieved from Drazanova (2020) and 2019 GAD Township Reports; table compiled by the authors.