

# DECIPHERING MYANMAR'S ETHNIC LANDSCAPE

A Brief Historical and Ethnic Description of  
Myanmar's Administrative Units



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# Acronyms and abbreviations

<b>BSPP</b>	Burmese Socialist Programme Party
<b>CRPH</b>	Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw
<b>DOP</b>	Department of Population
<b>ELF</b>	Ethno-linguistic fractionalization
<b>FCDCC</b>	Federal Constitution Drafting and Coordinating Committee
<b>FDC</b>	Federal Democratic Charter
<b>GAD</b>	General Administration Department
<b>HCI</b>	Herfindahl concentration index
<b>KNU</b>	Karen National Union
<b>MIMU</b>	Myanmar Information Management Unit
<b>MOHA</b>	Ministry of Home Affairs
<b>NRAM</b>	National race affairs minister
<b>NUG</b>	National Unity Government
<b>OCR</b>	Optical character recognition
<b>SAC</b>	State Administration Council
<b>SAD</b>	Self-administered division
<b>SAZ</b>	Self-administered zone
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>W/VT</b>	Ward/village tract

# INTRODUCTION

Myanmar is home to immense ethnic diversity, which has been at the core of questions relating to national identity, governance arrangements and constitutional design. The concepts of a majority and minorities in themselves are highly contested, and the relationship between the Bamar, which is the numerical majority and politically dominant ethnic group, and other groups as well as between some of these groups has been a key question in long-standing conflicts in Myanmar politics. The recent countrywide resistance against the 2021 military coup has provided new opportunities to rethink and redefine some of the established categories and assumptions about ethnicity and ethnic politics in Myanmar.

Despite the centrality of questions related to ethnicity in Myanmar's history and politics, basic demographic information about ethnic groups in Myanmar has not been examined systematically. It is generally assumed that ethnic minorities are the dominant population in the subnational administrative units called states—which are named after the titular nationalities—while the ethnic majority, the Bamar, is the dominant population in the country's regions. Beyond this broad stroke, there is very little information on the subnational geographic distribution of ethnic groups in Myanmar.

Indeed, detailed and reliable ethnic data at the subnational level has long been a missing piece in the puzzle of ethnic politics in Myanmar. While ethnicity and ethnic politics in Myanmar have been studied extensively, statistics related to ethnicity in Myanmar have long been omitted—at least in part because of political sensitivities and contradictory visions, not to mention that a more complete picture of Myanmar's ethnic make-up could challenge the dominance of certain narratives and interests of certain groups—and thus remained largely speculative (though country-level population-share estimates may be based on outdated censuses, which are also referenced throughout this report).

With the aim of filling in part of the information gap in our understanding of ethnic diversity in Myanmar, the analysis presented in this report

draws on information compiled by Myanmar's General Administration Department (GAD) before the 2021 coup and conducts a statistical exercise which is contextualized with historical and qualitative data. To that end, the report (a) quantitatively examines subnational-level ethnic diversity; (b) identifies where the major ethnic groups are located; and (c) contextualizes the geographic distribution of ethnic groups by discussing the historical evolution of the country's administrative boundaries.

Given the controversial nature of the GAD's work, there are important concerns regarding data quality (see Chapter 1). Another caveat is that this report is based on pre-coup population data—specifically the GAD Township Reports compiled between October 2018 and September 2019 and made publicly available in 2020. As such, the report should be understood as an analysis of the ethnic landscape in pre-coup Myanmar.

The period in which the GAD Township Reports were compiled and released was a unique time in the GAD's history. The GAD, formally established by the State Law and Order Restoration Committee in the aftermath of the 1988 uprisings, had been part of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA), a ministry led by military personnel (Saw and Arnold 2014; Arnold 2019). In December 2018, however, it was transferred to the Ministry of the Office of the Union Government, a ministry overseen by the civilian government led by the National League for Democracy (McDonald 2020). Since the coup on 1 February 2021, there have been significant changes to<sup>1</sup> and limitations on the functioning of the GAD itself—due to the Civil Disobedience Movement and widespread violence across Myanmar (Special Advisory Council for Myanmar 2022). Additionally, there have also been massive internal displacements and population movements.<sup>2</sup> These important changes are not captured in the data analysed in this report.

Despite shortcomings and limitations, the information the GAD provides is perhaps the sole source of subnational ethnic data in Myanmar available at this time. Furthermore, to our knowledge, the general public, stakeholder organizations and policymakers alike are largely unaware of the existence of the data, and the data has yet to be scrutinized. Therefore, we do not know the extent to which the data supports or deviates from speculation regarding the subnational ethnic landscape. This report is intended to serve as a constructive step in seriously engaging with existing data and to generate conversations about ways to improve the quality of ethnicity data from Myanmar: these discussions are especially important given that Myanmar is currently at a crossroad and the transitional constitutional process is underway.

Furthermore, the substance of the report—the subnational administrative units and ethnic landscape in Myanmar (see Chapter 3)—is crucial information with important implications for envisioning, crafting and negotiating the

<sup>1</sup> After the coup in February 2021, the military-installed State Administration Council formally transferred the GAD back to the MOHA.

<sup>2</sup> According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), close to 986,500 people have been displaced internally since 1 February 2021. A further 47,200 people (mostly from Chin State) have been displaced into a neighbouring country. See UNHCR (2022).

institutions that will undergird the new Myanmar. As such, the report is also intended to inform policymakers and relevant stakeholders, including the National Unity Government (NUG), the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) and the National Unity Consultative Council, as they navigate the ongoing transitional constitutional process.

The report proceeds as follows. Chapter 1 highlights the paucity of ethnicity data from Myanmar and discusses background information on the GAD Township Reports and limitations of the ethnicity data generated from these reports. Chapter 2 provides an overview of ethnic diversity in Myanmar and presents ethnic distribution estimates based on the 1931, 1973 and 1983 censuses along with the 2019 GAD Township Reports. Chapter 2 also introduces the ethno-linguistic fractionalization (ELF) index, an index commonly utilized in social science, as a way to conceptualize and compare ethnic diversity at various levels of subnational administrative units in Myanmar. Then, Chapter 3 explains the origins of Myanmar's subnational administrative boundaries and provides an overview of how each state was created. It also examines the ethnic diversity of each state and where the titular ethnic groups are concentrated.

Finally, the report concludes with discussions of three policy issues. First, we recommend that emerging post-coup institutions, with the support of international stakeholders, invest resources in gathering and producing population and other administrative data. This process should be geared towards unifying ethnic categorization and ensuring data quality and accessibility. Second, we highlight the possibility of thinking beyond the status quo territorial organization when designing federal units and other subnational units. In the ongoing discourse on federalism in Myanmar, there is an acute tendency to maintain existing subnational administrative units to a large extent, especially the existing seven states. An examination of changes in subnational borders indicates that existing states are not historically fixed entities but that, rather, their boundaries are products of political negotiation. As such, the federal units in a future Myanmar could be collectively imagined and reimagined so that they facilitate equality between ethnic groups. Finally, regarding inclusive political institutions, we emphasize the importance of creating such institutions down to the lowest level of administrative units, including in the bureaucracy, because much of Myanmar is ethnically diverse down to the local level.

## Chapter 1

# DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The analysis presented in this report draws mainly on two primary sources: the British Burma District Gazetteers and the 2019 GAD Township Reports. The first source, the District Gazetteers, were produced by the British authorities in two series—the 1912 series and the 1924 series. They cover detailed historical information at the district level (e.g. historical background, boundaries, state administration, ethnic composition). Given the enormous influence colonial district borders had on present-day administrative borders, the District Gazetteers serve as an important primary source. The second source, the GAD Township Reports, provides township-level ethnicity data.

This chapter elaborates on the GAD Township Reports with two objectives—(1) to provide an overview of background information on the GAD Township Reports and how they are utilized in the analysis, and (2) to identify the limitations of this primary source and discuss their implications.

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### DEARTH OF ETHNICITY DATA IN MYANMAR

Data is essential for evidence-based policymaking, and ethnicity data is crucial for crafting policies and strategies, including making constitutional arrangements, in order to mitigate problems associated with ethnic diversity, exclusion and discrimination based on ethnic identity. Information on where groups are concentrated could help address issues related to political representation. Additionally, ethnicity data can help us better understand the extent of differences and inequality between minority and majority groups as well as among minority groups.

However, such data is almost non-existent in Myanmar. The 2014 Census, the first census in three decades, could help address this information gap, but the

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**‘The lack of disaggregated and reliable data remains a fundamental challenge to political participation in Myanmar, which has made it difficult to track and monitor the levels of participation and representation of disadvantaged groups’ (Ebead and Hirakawa 2022: 8).**

ethnicity data in the census has been withheld indefinitely.<sup>3</sup> To our knowledge, the only source of fine-grain ethnicity data is the GAD Township Reports.

One reason for the lack of ethnicity data is that, prior to the 2014 Census, no census had been taken for three decades. The only post-independence censuses were conducted in 1973 and 1983.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, while these censuses included ethnicity data at the country and state/region levels, the more fine-grain township-level data did not appear in the released census reports.

Another reason for the omission of ethnic data at large, and at the township level in particular, is the general sensitivity to ethnicity data in Myanmar. There is also a related aversion to publishing details, on the part of the authorities as well as members of minority communities, academics and human rights activists. Several factors contribute to this aversion. One is the concern that ethnicity statistics might be confusing or invalid because officially recorded ethnicity may differ from how individuals self-identify and/or ethnic groups tend to be miscategorized. As such, the resulting numbers may not accurately capture the population size of the ethnic groups. Another is the concern that ethnicity statistics, however accurate or inaccurate, might exacerbate ethnic tensions on the ground. Mary Callahan discusses this concern as follows: 'When the numbers are released, many *lmyo* (ethnic) groups are going to be disappointed with their absolute and relative statistical representations, while viewing the statistics for other groups as suspiciously large, and perhaps artificially inflated by design' (Callahan 2017: 453). Such disappointment, combined with the knowledge of a 'rival' ethnic group with which one's ethnic group shares a township, might result in vulnerable minority groups being targeted with more violence and discrimination.

These are, of course, valid and significant concerns. At the same time, it is important to not conflate data generation with data accessibility. It is also important to note that policymaking and institution-building without any data, based only on speculative information, could lead to adverse effects as well. Furthermore, given the continued centrality of ethnicity in the context of the constitution-building debate (i.e. the Federal Democracy Charter (FDC) and the policies of the NUG), it is essential to draw from all available sources to better understand the ethnic landscape in Myanmar.

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## GAD TOWNSHIP REPORTS

The GAD had been the backbone of public administration in Myanmar since 1988. One of the GAD's primary roles had been to support coordination and

<sup>3</sup> Many Myanmar observers, commentators and scholars have written on the census controversy. See, for example, Palatino (2014).

<sup>4</sup> During the parliamentary period (1948–1962), there was an attempt to take the first post-independence census in 1953. The plan was to conduct the enumeration in stages, stretching from 1953 to 1955. However, the plan was not completed due to political instability in the country. In the aftermath of the coup in 1962, the socialist government was established and took up the first post-independence census in 1973. See Myanmar (n.d.a).



communication among the Union Government's ministries and to connect them to every level of subnational administrative units all the way down to the wards and village tracts (W/VT) (Saw and Arnold 2014). The GAD has been unique in that it is the only government department that operates at the W/VT level.<sup>5</sup> Given its expansive coordination role, the GAD collected and stored vital population information obtained by relevant government agencies, including data on population movement and basic demography (Saw and Arnold 2014).

Using the aforementioned information, the GAD compiled annual reports for each township.<sup>6</sup> The reports, each totalling each totaling about 90 pages on average, include data disaggregated at the township level concerning the population's characteristics as well as economic and social indicators. The ethnicity data utilized in this report is based on a section of the GAD Township Reports indicating the population size of each ethnic group residing in the respective township.<sup>7</sup>

Every GAD Township Report begins with an introduction stating that the report is based on data collected by various departments which is then sent to the GAD. Beyond this brief statement, there is no additional information about the data source. Presumably, the number of schools, the attendance rate and the matriculation exam pass rate came from the Department of Basic Education. Likewise, information on population size, including ethnic headcount, came from the Department of Population (DOP). However, the process through which each department arrived at the numbers reported to the GAD is not discussed.

Since the GAD Township Reports are available in PDF only, it was necessary to extract the tables indicating the township-level ethnic composition data, and then recompile those tables into a usable format (i.e. Excel files). To do so, we utilized a publicly available optical character recognition (OCR) tool.<sup>8</sup> With this tool, we automated the process of identifying tables and keywords, which enabled the extraction of the ethnic composition tables. These tables (labels and numbers in Burmese) were then manually translated into English in Excel format.

Next, a team of research assistants manually cross-checked the information in the Excel files against the original GAD Township Reports (PDF files). Half of the townships in each state/region (totalling 162 townships) were randomly

<sup>5</sup> Below the W/VT GAD administrators, there are 100-household heads and 10-household heads, who informally serve as the point persons between the W/VT administrators and the local residents. Under the previous junta (1990–2010), the local GAD personnel served as the government's surveillance officials as well. Today, in post-coup Myanmar, local residents are required to report guest registrations to their local GAD offices.

<sup>6</sup> However, no report can be found for five townships in Shan State—Mongla, Mongmao, Narphan, Pangsang and Pangwaun.

<sup>7</sup> It is unclear when the GAD began producing these township reports. We first came across these reports on the Myanmar Information Management Unit (MIMU) website (<https://themimu.info>) in 2018. A Myanmar expert who studies the GAD indicated that she had seen these reports as early as 2013. It is possible that these reports have existed for decades but became accessible to the public only in the early 2010s. Today, these reports are available on the MIMU website as well as on the GAD's website in Burmese (<http://www.gad.gov.mm/my>).

<sup>8</sup> OCR enables character extraction from PDF files, making them analysable using statistical software. In the case of the GAD 2019 files, two limitations complicated the process. First, OCR tools have not been optimized for Burmese fonts. Second, the quality of the GAD files varied, causing additional errors in the transcription process. That is why, though the extraction process was mostly automated, there was extensive manual oversight from the beginning.

selected for cross-checking.<sup>9</sup> In this process, we found and corrected just 13 inaccuracies. Given such a low rate of inaccuracy, we are fairly confident that the data analysed mirrors the information indicated in the GAD Township Reports, though we do not claim that the data is an accurate reflection of reality.

### Data quality and limitations

Though we are certain that the data was extracted with very little clerical error, concerns over data quality remain—that is, information presented in the GAD Township Reports may not present sound estimates of the real ethnic landscape. In discussing data quality, it is important to acknowledge that data based on the GAD Township Reports, like other statistical undertakings, is not the truth; it is rather an estimate of the truth. To assess the limitations of the data, we consider, in this section, potential sources of data inaccuracy. We conclude that, while the population size indicated in the GAD Township Reports is likely outdated and/or flawed to a certain extent, the estimated population proportion remains a useful approximation of the ethnic landscape.

### Ethnic identification

The ethnic headcount indicated in the GAD Township Reports is not based on self-identified ethnicity. As we discuss below, the information on ethnicity in the GAD Township Reports is most likely based on various government records, including national registration cards (also known as citizenship scrutiny cards) and white cards—the latter being temporary identification documents issued to those without a national registration card.<sup>10</sup> These government-issued documents state the holder's ethnicity (*lumyo*), among other personal information. An individual's stated ethnicity may not match their self-identified ethnicity.

The process through which an individual's stated ethnicity was derived was highly opaque. The stated ethnicity is presumably based on the government-issued identification documents of the individual's parents. However, there are anecdotal cases in which an individual's ethnicity differs from that of their parents. Moreover, the parents' ethnicity stated on their identification documents could also differ from their self-identified ethnicity. Furthermore, media reports and NGO reports indicate cases in which bureaucrats ignored individuals' requests to state their self-identified ethnicity on their documents, resulting in a Muslim of Bamar ethnicity being recorded as 'Pakistani Islam', a Shanni being recorded as 'Bamar', a Ta'ang being recorded as 'Shan' and so on (Norwegian Refugee Council and Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion 2018; Consult-Myanmar 2019).

Despite the limitations of the available data, it is difficult to assess the extent of the discrepancy between it (data based on the GAD Township Reports) and data based on self-identified ethnic information as well as the corresponding

<sup>9</sup> The research assistants were asked to check and correct whether the population size of a particular ethnic group in a given township was accurate.

<sup>10</sup> Holders of white cards were able to vote in Myanmar's 2010 election, but their voting right was revoked in early 2015. The majority of holders of white cards were Rohingya. See Tun (2019).

implication for estimating the ethnic landscape. Consider the Chin ethnic group, for example. It is possible that some percentage of the population reported as 'Chin' in the GAD Township Reports self-identify not as Chin but rather as part of their regional and/or linguistic group, such as Asho or Zomi. If that percentage is fairly small, the discrepancy between the current ethnic data and the self-identified ethnic data would not shift the overall trends in the population share of Chin or other ethnic groups. If that percentage is fairly large, however, then the corresponding discrepancy could be substantial, resulting in largely inaccurate estimates of the ethnic landscape.

### *Ethnic categorization*

As in many countries with a diverse population, a major concern in producing ethnic data in Myanmar is ethnic categorization. Since the creation of the citizenship hierarchy, per the 1982 Citizenship Law,<sup>11</sup> the Myanmar Government has recognized 135 'national races' (*taingyintha*) (136 since 2015 [Thawnhmung and Yadana 2017]). These groups are categorized into eight 'major national races': Bamar, Chin, Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Mon, Rakhine and Shan. This controversial list and the categorization were developed by the socialist one-party regime before the 1983 Census was conducted (Myint 2013).

The list of recognized ethnic groups has caused a long-standing controversy for several reasons. First, determining which groups are recognized effectively provides the grounds for denying citizenship rights to groups that are unrecognized. As such, some have argued that an ethnic hierarchy effectively undermines ethnic equality (Ko and Ford 2022). Second, categorization into eight major groups has also been controversial because most categories are meaningless (Wansai 2017). Some subgroups disagree that they belong to the larger group they are assigned to, on the basis of ethno-cultural differences as well as historical grievances. Furthermore, other subgroups are neither politically nor culturally salient.

Interestingly, the term *taingyintha* appears in the FDC—'a document written as a precursor for a new constitution to replace the military-drafted 2008 constitution' (Chan and Ford 2021)—though the term is left undefined. The NUG has stated that the Rohingya people would have full citizenship in Myanmar (The Irrawaddy 2022). However, given the use of the term *taingyintha* when attributing rights in the FDC, it remains unclear what the status of the Rohingya people and other unrecognized ethnic groups would be in relation to the *taingyintha*.

Given the controversial nature of ethnic categorization in Myanmar, adopting either of the existing paradigms (8 or 135 groups) could be problematic. Interestingly, just over two dozen ethnic groups appear in the GAD Township Reports (see Table 1.1).<sup>12</sup> This proliferation of listed ethnic groups resulted

<sup>11</sup> The 1982 Citizenship Law does not actually list the ethnic groups.

<sup>12</sup> The section on ethnicity information in the GAD Township Reports is titled 'Residing Taingyintha in the Township'. It is important to note that the list provided almost mirrors what could be considered 'politically relevant' in Myanmar. Politically relevant groups are the cultural cleavages that matter for political competition and social conflict (Posner 2005: xv). The list of such groups is often different from, and much

from the disaggregation of the Shan subgroups from the Shan.<sup>13</sup> As expected, all eight major groups are on the list. Additionally, about two dozen subgroups that are generally understood to be distinct from the eight main groups also appear on the list.<sup>14</sup> For example, the Danu, Kokang, Pa-O, Palaung<sup>15</sup> and Wa are listed separately from the Shan—that is, these groups are not included in the Shan population size. Similarly, the Naga also appear separately from the Chin.

**Table 1.1. Ethnic groups mentioned in the GAD Township Reports**

Akha	Kadu	Lahu	Mone Wong	Salong (Moken)
Bamar	Kanan	Lishaw	Myaung Zi (Hmong)	Shan
Chin	Kayah	Lisu	Naga	Taung Yoe
Danu	Kayan	Loi	Pa-O	Wa
Innthal	Kayin	Loila	Palaung	Ying
Kachin	Kokang	Mon	Rakhine	

*Note:* The Dawei people and the Hta Naut people are also mentioned in the report for Taunggyi Township; they are, however, not recorded in any other township in Myanmar.

*Source:* Information retrieved from the 2019 GAD Township Reports; table compiled by the authors.

While successive pre-coup governments insisted on recognizing 135 groups, they actually utilized a paradigm consisting of just a few dozen groups. This discrepancy is remarkable. It suggests an implicit recognition of the fact that the past regimes' ideological narrative regarding the official list of ethnic groups was very detached from reality—or at least impracticable.

The list of ethnic groups mentioned in the GAD Township Reports may not be agreeable to members of all ethnic communities in Myanmar. This list could certainly be further refined to create a more accurate depiction of the ethnic landscape in Myanmar. At the same time, most ethnic minorities are likely to find this list more acceptable than a list of just eight major groups or a list of 135 groups. Given its deviation from the existing paradigm, the ethnic categorization utilized in the GAD Township Reports is arguably less

shorter than, the list of cultural groups in a given country, because not all cultural cleavages matter for people's political behaviour and attitudes. In the context of Myanmar, politically relevant ethnic groups refer to any ethnic group, whether or not it is officially recognized by the government, that has mobilized a political party or a rebel organization.

<sup>13</sup> The disaggregation of some of the main groups in the 2019 GAD Township Reports, resulting in more than eight groups, is a notable deviation from the 1983 and 1974 Census reports. The extent to which the disaggregation is selective, however, is unclear. Some groups (e.g. Pa-O) appear in the GAD Township Reports separately from Shan in reports from Shan State and other parts of the country. However, the disaggregation of other groups from the main group is selective. For example, the Lisu are disaggregated from the Kachin in reports from Shan State but not in reports from Kachin State. In a similar vein, the Kayan are disaggregated from the Kayah in reports from Shan State but not in reports from Kayah State. The reason for such selectivity is also not apparent.

<sup>14</sup> The categories 'mixed-Chinese' and 'mixed-Indian' (presumably mixed with one of the *taingyintha* groups) also appeared in the table, labelled *taingyintha* for Mudon Township, Mon State.

<sup>15</sup> The Ta'ang population is referred to as 'Palaung' in the GAD Township Reports and in the 2008 Constitution. However, the ethnic group generally prefers 'Ta'ang'.

controversial than what country observers and ethnic stakeholders would expect.

Beyond ethnic categorization, it is unclear how persons of mixed ancestry were recorded in the data. In addition to the recognized groups, the township reports also listed several ‘foreign’ ethnicities (*naing ngan char tar lumyo myar*). And only a few townships also included a category labelled ‘other’, which presumably includes persons of mixed ancestry.<sup>16</sup> This omission raises questions about data sources and data quality because government-issued identification cards in Myanmar record ancestry rather than a single ethnicity. For example, an individual with a mother of Kayin ancestry and a father of Bamar ancestry would be designated as ‘Bamar–Kayin’. Given that the GAD Township Reports list single ethnic categories, it is possible that such individuals are counted as Bamar or Kayin only. This phenomenon could result in an inflated population share of certain ethnic groups, particularly the Bamar.

#### *Bureaucratic capacity and data quality*

The source of the population data, including the ethnic headcount, in the GAD Township Reports cannot be ascertained. Nevertheless, those familiar with the GAD and DOP have suggested that the data likely came from either of the following: the ward/village GAD offices or the GAD Township Reports from the previous year.<sup>17</sup> If the population data is deduced from the former, then the GAD township staff presumably tallied the numbers. If it is deduced from the latter, the numbers from the preceding years are presumably adjusted to account for new data on birth and death records, the issuance of national registration cards, population movement and other relevant information. As such, data quality could be highly dependent on the extent of bureaucratic reach and bureaucratic capacity.

While the bureaucracy in Myanmar was pervasive, extending down to the villages and wards through the GAD, the bureaucratic reach over the population was incomplete. Government registration and other apparatuses the government utilized to record and administer the population were not accessible to many average Myanmar families, especially in remote areas. Additionally, in conflict-affected areas government offices might not have been fully functional, and many ethnic minorities in such areas might also have feared visiting government offices. Consequently, government records are likely to undercount the population, particularly in conflict-affected areas.

Undercounting is evident when comparing the population data from the GAD Township Reports, which again is most likely based on government administrative records, to those from the 2014 Census report, which was

<sup>16</sup> Mudon Township stands out as an anomaly given its mention of ‘Chinese hybrid’ and ‘Indian hybrid’ in the categorization of the table ‘Residing Taingyintha in the Township’ in the GAD Township Report.

<sup>17</sup> It is necessary to interview civil servants staffing the GAD and DOP in order to better understand the process through which the ethnic headcount was obtained. However, given that this project began after the 2021 coup, we are unable to contact such individuals, who are either in hiding due to their participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement or currently still employed. We have, however, discussed the origins of the GAD Township Reports with an independent researcher who contributed an extensive report on the GAD, a consultant who contributed to the 2014 Census and a minor clerk at the township office of the DOP in 2019. Our understanding of the ethnic headcount process is based on their speculations.

based on enumeration (see Table 1.2). As expected, there was some level of population growth between the 2014 Census report and the 2019 GAD Township Reports in most states/regions. The places with significant undercounting were Kachin (-19.6 per cent), Shan (-14.4 per cent) and Rakhine (-10.5 per cent) states. The population in the Yangon Region appears to have been undercounted; this was most likely due to constant population movement in search of economic opportunities rather than bureaucratic capacity to reach the population (the last column in Table 1.2 suggests that the Yangon Region had the best bureaucratic capacity among all the states/regions).

Second, bureaucratic capacity is a concern because the process of compiling statistics based on government records requires that bureaucrats have some level of clerical and mathematical competence. While we do not have a measure of bureaucratic competence in Myanmar, we examined the extent of age heaping as a proxy. Measuring age heaping indexes (Myer's Index, Whipple's Index and the like), with the aim of assessing census quality, has been a common practice in demographic studies. Demographers use such indexes to capture the extent to which certain numbers are 'preferred' by the population surveyed. Those preferences are captured through peaks in the age distribution, often around numbers that end in 0 or 5. They serve as a signal to demographers about a problem with the data generation process which can be the result of a lack of age awareness or difficulties in collecting information from the population living in hard-to-reach places. Political scientists have only recently employed these indexes to assess the bureaucratic capacity of a state (Lee and Zhang 2017).

The last column in Table 1.2 shows the age heaping index (calculated with Whipple's formula) based on census data.<sup>18</sup> While the index we calculated does not directly indicate the quality of GAD data, it speaks to the bureaucratic capacity at the state/region level, which affects the quality of GAD data. Whipple's Index theoretically provides a number between 100 and 500, where the higher values indicate lower accuracy. Overall, Myanmar's Whipple's Index value tells us that the census data is approximate (between 110 and 125). However, there is a notable difference between ethnic minority areas (i.e. states) and regions.

The places with the lowest Whipple's Index score, suggesting the best bureaucratic capacity, are the Yangon (lowest), Ayeyarwady, Bago and Magway regions. The places with the highest Whipple's Index, suggesting the worst bureaucratic capacity, are Shan (highest), Rakhine, Kachin and Kayin states. While this information does not discard intentional undercounting, it does provide some evidence that undercounting in the GAD Township Reports is partly caused by weak bureaucratic capacities in the ethnic minority areas affected by conflict compared with Bamar-dominated regions. This analysis suggests that data from the ethnic minority areas is likely to be of poorer quality compared with data from elsewhere.

<sup>18</sup> Whipple's Index cannot be calculated based on the 2019 GAD Township Reports because township populations are not disaggregated by age. Calculating Whipple's Index requires knowledge of the proportion of the population whose age ends in 0 or 5.

**Table 1.2. 2014 Census, 2019 GAD Township Reports and age heaping**

State/Region	2014 Census <sup>a</sup>	GAD 2019 Township Reports	Difference in numbers	Difference in percentage	Age heaping <sup>b</sup>
Chin	478,801	532,727	53,926	10.1%	114.7
Kachin	1,689,441	1,412,157	-277,284	-19.6%	118.3
Kayah	286,627	282,697	-3,930	-1.4%	115.6
Kayin	1,574,079	1,595,210	21,131	1.3%	118.2
Mon	2,054,393	2,149,501	95,108	4.4%	111.2
Rakhine	3,188,807	2,885,835	-302,972	-10.5%	120.5
Shan <sup>c</sup>	5,824,432	5,090,862	-733,570	-14.4%	148.6
<i>Total state</i>	<i>13,890,227</i>	<i>13,948,989</i>	<i>58,762</i>	<i>0.4%</i>	<i>121</i>
Ayeyarwady	6,184,829	6,354,312	169,483	2.7%	108
Bago	4,867,373	4,963,294	95,921	1.9%	108.3
Magway	3,917,055	4,230,048	312,993	7.4%	109.1
Mandalay	6,165,723	5,951,666	-214,057	-3.6%	113.4
Nay Pyi Taw	1,160,242	1,118,989	-41,253	-3.7%	111.4
Sagaing	5,325,347	5,542,269	216,922	3.9%	116.2
Tanintharyi	1,408,401	1,505,161	96,760	6.4%	111
Yangon	7,360,703	6,579,444	-781,259	-11.9%	103.1
<i>Total region</i>	<i>36,389,673</i>	<i>36,245,183</i>	<i>-144,490</i>	<i>-0.4%</i>	<i>110.1</i>
<b>Total Myanmar<sup>d</sup></b>	<b>51,486,253</b>	<b>50,194,172</b>	<b>- 1,292,081</b>	<b>-2.6%</b>	<b>115.5</b>

**Notes:**

- The numbers reflect the combined total of the enumerated and estimated population. Due to conflicts in Kachin State and Kayin State and the situation of the Rohingya people in Rakhine State, 46,600, 69,753 and 1,090,000 people, respectively, are estimated to have not been counted in those areas.
- Whipple's Index of age heaping is typically interpreted as follows: <105, highly accurate; 105–109.9, fairly accurate; 110–124.9, approximate; 125–174.9, rough; and >175, very rough.
- The GAD Township Reports do not include four townships in Shan State—Mongmao, Namphan, Pangsang and Pangwaun. The population in these townships is estimated to be 388,289, according to the 2014 Census.
- The World Bank's estimates of Myanmar's population are 52.3 million for 2014 and 54 million for 2019. World Bank data are publicly available at: <<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=MM>>.

Source: Data retrieved from the 2014 Myanmar Census and the 2019 GAD Township Reports; table compiled by the authors. Differences and age heaping are authors' own.

Given the discrepancies and concerns discussed above, the absolute numbers indicated in the GAD Township Reports should not be taken at face value. At the same time, the estimated population proportion (percentages) still provides a sound approximation of the actual population figures. As discussed above, factors affecting data quality are more likely due to local bureaucratic capacity than an ethnic phenomenon. In other words, low bureaucratic capacity in a given township affects the entire population living there rather than select groups. Take Kyaikmaraw Township, in Mon State, for example (see Table 1.3). The numbers in the second column (population size) for all groups are most likely lower than the actual numbers, but the percentages in the third column

(proportion) would likely be within a small margin of error if the population size were adjusted to the true values. Each ethnic group's population share, or proportion, is the basis for the analysis presented in the remainder of this report.

**Table 1.3. Ethnic landscape in Kyaikmaraw Township, Mon State (GAD 2019 Township Reports)**

	Population size	Proportion
Bamar	29,047	13%
Karen	47,230	21%
Mon	109,426	48%
Other	41,522	18%

Source: Data retrieved from the 2019 Kyaikmaraw Township GAD Township Report.



## 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.<sup>19</sup>

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

<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup>

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.<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup> In other words, some non-*taingyintha* 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.<sup>23</sup>

**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%
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>94.2%</i>	<i>90.0%</i>	<i>94.6%</i>	<i>94.4%</i>	<i>88.5%</i>

*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.

<sup>20</sup> 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:

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

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

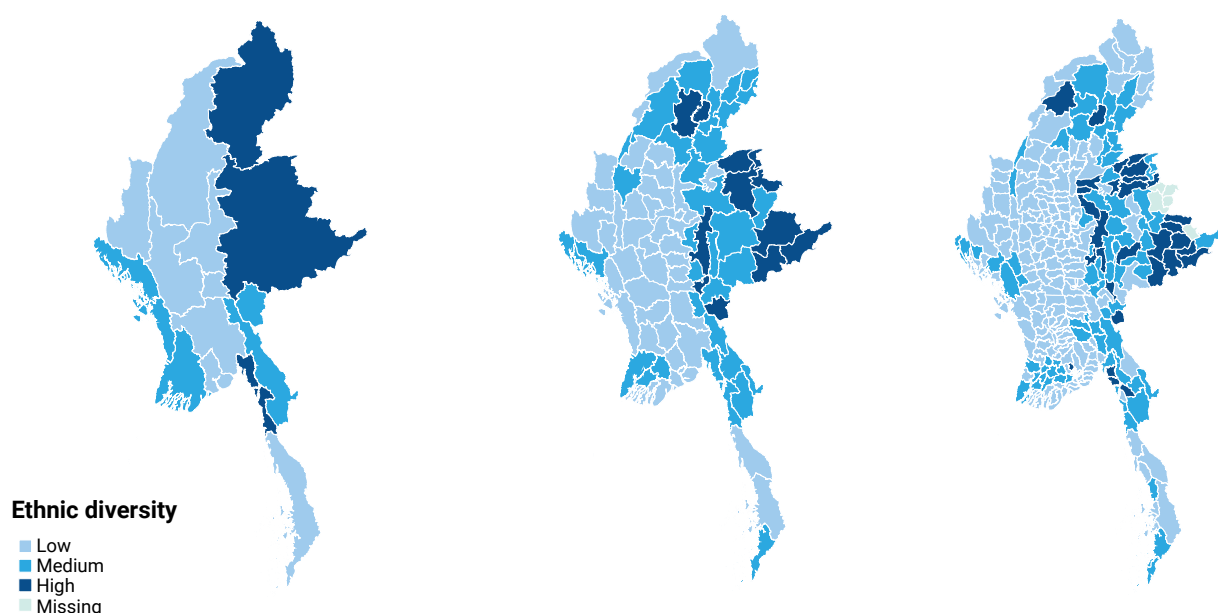
<sup>21</sup> For a discussion of the intentions of the BSPP and the adverse effect of Ne Win's policy, see Taylor (2005: 278–79).

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

<sup>23</sup> 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**



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.

## Chapter 3

# ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS AND ETHNIC DISTRIBUTION

Myanmar's constituent units—the subnational administrative units (i.e. state/region, district and township)—served as the basis for public administration and electoral units since independence. They thus had important implications for governance, the provision of public services and political representation. As such, imagining a future Myanmar and designing institutions that can facilitate inclusion and equality require an examination of how these units came to be and their ethnic landscape.

Historically, parts of present-day Myanmar had been ruled by Arakanese-speaking kings in the west (e.g. the Mrauk-U Kingdom), Bamar-speaking kings in the central dry zone (e.g. the Pagan Kingdom) and Mon-speaking kings in the south (e.g. the Hanthawaddy Kingdom). The eastern plateau was ruled by *saophas*—a royal title for hereditary rulers—and princes speaking various languages including Shan. In contrast to these parts of Myanmar, early state formation did not emerge in the mountainous areas of the country where the local chiefs ruled.<sup>24</sup>

Prior to independence, British Burma consisted of 39 districts, grouped into 7 divisions, and the Federated Shan States. The divisions were Arakan, Irrawaddy, Magwe, Mandalay, Pegu, Sagaing and Tenasserim (Tinker 1959). Parts of some divisions were the so-called Frontier Areas—parts of the Magwe and Sagaing divisions along with Shan and Karenni states. These areas were annexed after 'Burma proper'<sup>25</sup> had been incorporated under British rule, and they were ruled indirectly per the hill tribes regulations (to be discussed later). When Myanmar became an independent nation in 1948, the country was restructured into states and divisions. While the country was reconstituted in this way, the current subnational administrative units, particularly the district boundaries,

<sup>24</sup> Scholars consider the mountainous areas of Myanmar to be part of Zomia, or the highlands of Southeast Asia. For more information about Zomia, see Scott (2009).

<sup>25</sup> Areas directly administered by the British Administration were collectively referred to as 'Burma proper' or Ministerial Burma. It comprised Tenasserim, Arakan, Pegu and Irrawaddy divisions.

largely mirror the colonial district boundaries, which have remained relatively stable.

States in Myanmar were created in two waves. The first wave was when Burma became independent from Britain, and the Constitution of the Union of Burma, drafted and adopted in 1947, entered into force. This Constitution established Myanmar's first three states: Kachin State, Karenni State and Shan State. The creation of these states was the culmination of discussions and political compromises in the Panglong Agreement (1947), the Frontier Areas Committee of Enquiry (1947) and the Constituent Assembly (1947). These administrative units were not mere divisions but rather states, in recognition of their autonomous status—i.e. 'autonomy in internal administration', per the Panglong Agreement. The 1947 Constitution also created the Special Division of the Chins and guaranteed a Karen State, though Karen State's boundaries were not demarcated until 1951. The residual territories—areas in the colonial districts that were not reconstituted as the newly created states—remained part of the divisions.

The second wave was when the 1974 Constitution of the Union of Burma, drafted by the socialist regime led by General Ne Win, entered into force. This Constitution reconstituted the Special Division of the Chins as Chin State and reconstituted a few districts as Mon State and Rakhine State. As a result, there were seven states and seven divisions at the time. The 2008 Constitution renamed the seven divisions as regions and reconstituted the southern part of the Mandalay Region as the Nay Pyi Taw Union Territory. Thus, Myanmar consisted of 15 tier-1 administrative units at the time of the 2021 coup.

It is uncertain to what extent the previous territorial organization has remained in place since the coup. In April 2022 the State Administration Council (SAC) announced the creation of 46 new districts across the country (MITV 2022).<sup>26</sup> At the same time, the FDC, released by the CRPH soon after the coup and adopted by the People's Assembly in January 2022, provides a series of principles as well as a road map for the establishment of democratic post-coup institutions. The FDC identifies states as constituent subnational units and indicates that states are the 'original owners of the sovereignty' (CRPH 2021); however, it does not specify the nature of the states at this stage (International IDEA 2022: 13). While the nature of territorial organization in the new constitutional framework may change, for the purposes of the current report and all existing statistics, the pre-coup administrative structure is assumed in the analysis presented. Table 3.1 presents the estimated population size of each state/region as indicated in the three most recent censuses and the corresponding population growth estimates. (Factors contributing to state-/region-level population growth are beyond the scope of this report.)

<sup>26</sup> On 30 April 2022 the SAC's Ministry of Home Affairs announced a new district in the Tanintharyi Region; 2 each in the Nay Pyi Taw Council Area, Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Chin, Mon and Rakhine states, and the Sagaing, Bago, Magway, and Ayeyarwady regions; 4 in the Mandalay Region; 9 in Shan State; and 10 in the Yangon Region. This change effectively increased the number of districts in Myanmar from 75 to 121.

The remainder of this section is organized according to the chronological order of state creation in Myanmar. Each subsection provides an overview of how the state was created and its present-day ethnic diversity as well as how the titular group is distributed within and beyond the state boundary.

**Table 3.1. Population by state/region**

	1973 Census	1983 Census	2014 Census	Percentage growth (1973–2014)
Kachin State	737,939	904,794	1,689,441	128.9
Chin State	323,295	368,949	478,801	48.1
Kayah State	126,574	168,429	286,627	126.5
Kayin State	858,429	1,055,359	1,574,079	83.4
Mon State	1,314,224	1,680,157	2,054,393	56.3
Rakhine State	1,712,838	2,045,559	3,188,807	86.2
Shan State	3,179,546	3,716,841	5,824,432	83.2
Ayeyarwady Region	4,156,673	4,994,061	6,184,829	48.8
Bago Region	3,179,604	3,799,791	4,867,373	53.1
Mandalay Region (and Nay Pyi Taw)	3,668,493	4,577,762	7,325,966	99.7
Magway Region	2,634,757	3,243,166	3,917,055	48.7
Sagaing Region	3,119,054	3,862,172	5,325,347	70.7
Tanintharyi Region	719,917	917,247	1,408,401	95.6
Yangon Region	3,190,359	3,973,626	7,360,703	130.7

*Note:* The 2014 Census included both an enumerated and an estimated population. The present-day Nay Pyi Taw was part of the Mandalay Division in the previous censuses; the area was carved out of the Mandalay Region in the 2008 Constitution. The population of Nay Pyi Taw in the 2014 Census was 1,160,242.

*Source:* Data retrieved from the 1973, 1983 and 2014 Censuses; table compiled by the authors. Calculations are our own.

## KACHIN STATE

Kachin State, the northernmost administrative unit in Myanmar, shares a border with China and India. The northern half of the state is mountainous, while the southern half generally consists of plains. The territories covered by the state, particularly the northern half, remained at arm's length from the Konbaung kings for much of its pre-colonial history and was a site of persistent resistance against the encroaching colonial authority.

### Historical evolution of Kachin State administrative units

Kachin State, which was established in the 1947 Constitution, consists of territories previously known as the Myitkyina and Bhamo districts in British Burma, along with parts of the Upper Chindwin District (specifically, the eastern parts of Hukawng Valley or Tanai Township today). The Myitkyina District



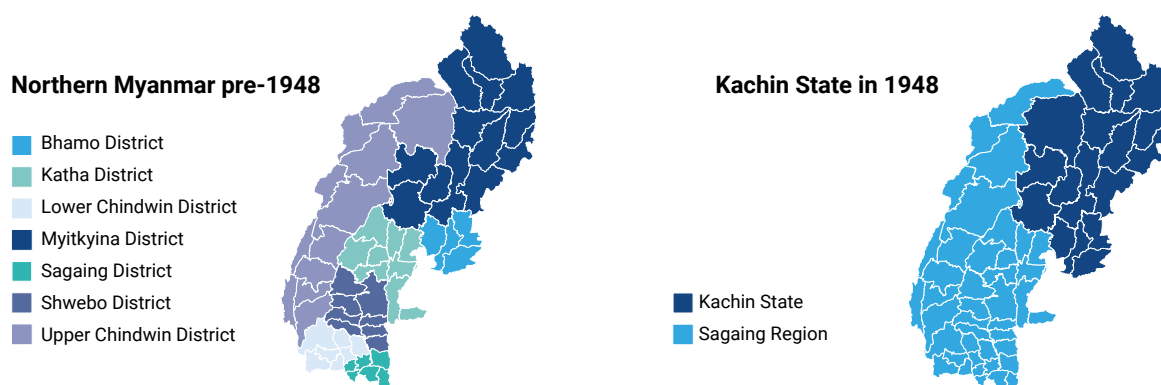
included the vast majority of the territories in the state, including the Kachin Hills and the Hukawng Valley, while the Bhamo District covered the southern tip of the state, including Shwegu Township.

After the third Anglo-Burmese War (1885), which resulted in the abdication of King Thibaw and the end of Konbaung dynasty (1752–1885), the British occupation of Bhamo began in December of 1885. Soon after the British arrival, the Kachin resistance against British rule became a regular phenomenon particularly in the Kachin Hills area of the Myitkyina District. The resistance finally calmed down in 1895 with the introduction of the Kachin Hill Tribes Regulation, which allowed the tribal chiefs in the north of the Mali Hka-Nmai Hka confluence to rule without British interference (Government of Burma 1947).

According to the colonial records, the Bamar, Kachin and Shan coexisted especially in the Bhamo District—though it was noted that the Kachin population was undercounted.<sup>27</sup> While the Kachin constituted the majority in the Myitkyina District and the largest group in the Bhamo District, the Shan population was substantial in both districts. Such ethnic heterogeneity had implications for how Kachin State was established.

Although the Kachin chiefs agreed, at the 1947 Panglong Conference, to the establishment of a separate Kachin State, which would be part of the Union of Burma, the non-Kachin population of the Bhamo District appeared hesitant to become part of the soon-to-be Kachin State (Government of Burma 1947). During the negotiations in the Constituent Assembly in 1947, the Kachin leaders agreed to forgo the right to the secession of Kachin State in exchange for the inclusion of the Bhamo District in the state (Smith 1991). In contrast, Karenni State and Shan State both retained the right to secession from the Union of Burma, per the 1947 Constitution.

**Figure 3.1. Evolution of Kachin State's administrative boundaries before and after 1948**



Source: Information retrieved from the Census of India 1931, Volume XI: Burma and the Constitution of Burma 1948; maps drawn by the authors.

<sup>27</sup> The Report of the Frontier Areas Committee of Enquiry indicates that census enumeration was never completed in the Kachin Hills due to physical difficulties.



### Ethnic landscape

There is a significant township-level variation in terms of ethnic diversity in Kachin State. Generally speaking, the state's northern townships, which constituted the Kachin Hills in the Frontier Area in British Burma, are relatively homogeneous (see Figure 3.2). In contrast, the southern and western townships are significantly more diverse and are home to large Bamar and Shan populations.

The largest ethnic groups in Kachin State are the Kachin<sup>28</sup> (40 per cent of the state's population), the Bamar (33 per cent) and the Shan (23 per cent). Kachin State is home to 13 per cent of the total Shan population in the country, making it the second-largest concentration of Shan in Myanmar (the largest concentration being in Shan State). As we discuss below, while the Kachin population is spread throughout the state, the Bamar and Shan populations are concentrated in the southern and western parts of the state.

### Kachin population

The Kachin are geographically concentrated in their home state. In fact, 73 per cent of the ethnic group resides in Kachin State; the remaining quarter can be found in northern Shan State (17 per cent), the Mandalay Region (7 per cent) and the Yangon Region (0.9 per cent). Within Kachin State, the Kachin are concentrated in the central and northern parts of the state, specifically the present-day Myitkyina and Puta-O districts. The Kachin population also constitutes a supermajority in these districts.

At the township level, the Kachin population is the largest group in 13 out of 18 townships in Kachin State (see Figure 3.2). Not surprisingly, the Puta-O District, the northernmost district in Myanmar, covering the Kachin Hills, is overwhelmingly populated by Kachin: they represent more than 90 per cent of the population in all five of the district's townships (including 99 per cent in Khaunglanhpu Township).

**Table 3.2. Kachin State's ethnic distribution**

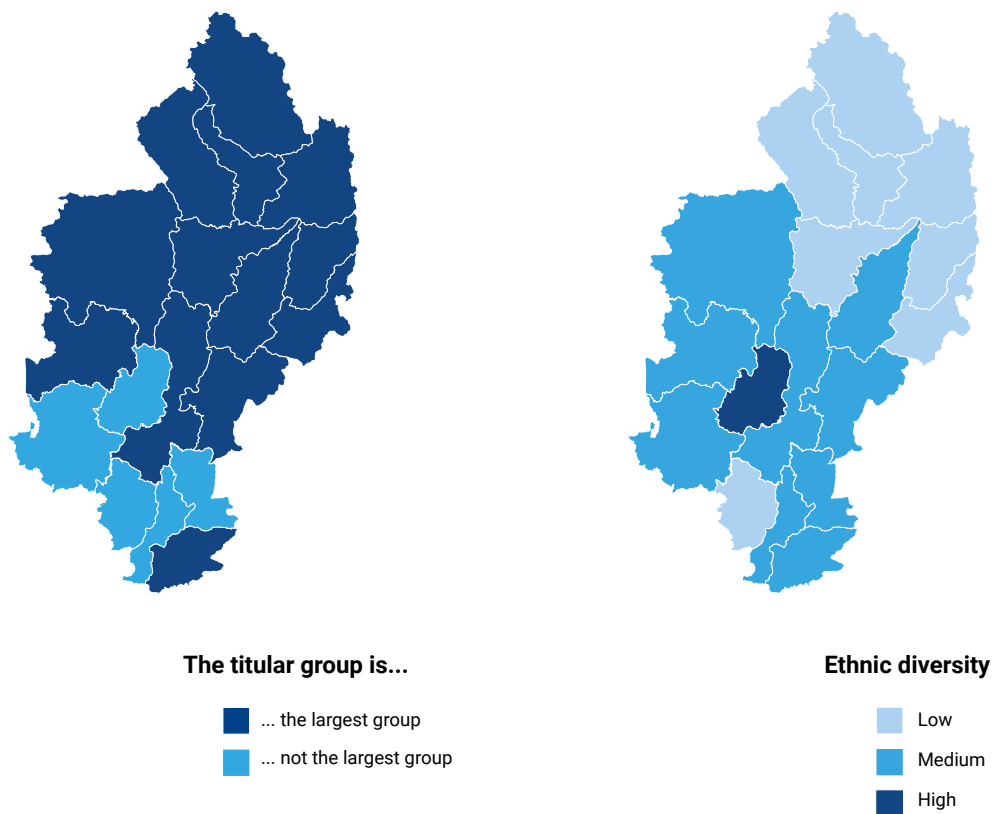
	2019 GAD Township Reports (%)	1983 Census (%)	1973 Census (%)
Kachin	39.6	38.1	39.1
Bamar	32.6	29.3	24.2
Chin	0.2	0.7	0.8
Kayin/Karen	0.3	0.3	0.3
Rakhine/Arakan	0.4	0.2	0.1
Shan	22.6	24.2	26.6
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>95.7</i>	<i>92.8</i>	<i>91.1</i>

*Note:* The remaining portion of the state population includes other *taingyintha*, people of mixed ethnicity and non-*taingyintha* (e.g. Indians, Chinese).

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

<sup>28</sup> The category 'Kachin' in the GAD Township Reports from Kachin State is presumed to include all Kachin subgroups, as none are listed separately. Note that the category 'Lisu' appears separately from 'Kachin' in the reports covering Shan State. For information on the Kachin–Lisu relationship, see Fishbein (2019) and Pelletier (2021).

**Figure 3.2. Kachin State's largest group and ethnic diversity at the township level**



*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.

### Summary

- The Kachin, the largest ethnic group in the state, are spread throughout Kachin State and constitute the largest ethnic group in 13 out of 18 townships.
- The Shan are mostly concentrated in the townships bordering the Sagaing Region—forming a distinct demographic area spanning Kachin State and the Sagaing Region.
- The Shan and Bamar coexist in the southern part of Kachin State, which borders Shan North.

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## KAYAH STATE

Kayah State covers the northern end of the Karen Hills, bordered by Shan State in the north and by Karen State and the Bago Region in the west and south. It is bordered by Thailand in the east. The state's rugged geography meant it was out of reach from the surrounding kingdoms for most of its pre-colonial history, although it experienced attempts for control by the Bamar, Shan and Siamese kingdoms.

### Historical evolution of Kayah State administrative units

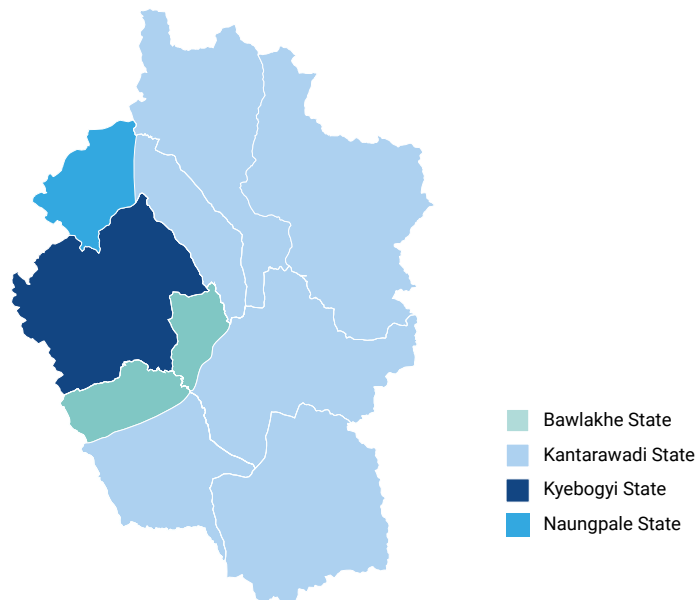
Historically, the Western Karenni States consisted of four Karenni states (Bawlakhe, Kyebogyi, Namekan, and Naungpale), while the Eastern Karenni State was Kantarawadi—with a large extension into the Federated Shan States and Siam. The distinction between Western and Eastern Karenni was made based on their position relative to the Salween River, which flows through the present-day Kayah State.

As threats from the Konbaung kings to curb the autonomy of the Karenni states grew, Karenni rulers started to reach out to the British authorities for protection. In 1875 the British India Government signed a treaty with King Mindon that recognized the independence of all the Karenni states (Renard 1987). 'Disturbances', as the author of the *Gazetteer* puts it, in part of Kantarawadi State in 1888 and a claim of territorial rights from Siam prompted the organization of the Anglo-Siamese Boundary Commission of 1892–1893, during which the four Western Karenni States were incorporated as a protectorate into British Burma. While Kantarawadi State was made to pay a fine, it is unclear what its status was. In 1922 the Karenni states were brought under the Federated Shan States to be administered by a single British administrator.

In summary, for most of colonial history, the Karenni states were not incorporated as part of British Burma but were rather a tributary state paying for protection; this arrangement differs from that experienced by the remaining territories in present-day Myanmar. At the same time, the colonial government maintained a military and administrative presence throughout the territory.

After the Panglong conferences and independence, a new Karenni State was created based on the preceding protectorate borders. A 1951 constitutional amendment renamed the state Kayah State.



**Figure 3.3. Kayah State prior to 1948**

*Note:* The indicated boundaries are approximate. The borders of four of the Karenni states are estimated based on the 1931 Imperial Gazetteer of India.

*Source:* Information retrieved from The Imperial Gazetteer of India, volume 26: Atlas and Maule (1993) based on an original idea from Linn Atlas; maps are drawn by the authors.

### Ethnic landscape

Kayah State is the smallest among Myanmar's 14 states and regions in terms of population and territorial size. The biggest ethnic groups in Kayah State are the Karenni<sup>29</sup> (61 per cent of the state's population), the Bamar (15 per cent) and the Shan (14 per cent). The Karenni, the state's titular and largest group, are heavily concentrated in the northern half of the state, the Loikaw District. The Bamar population in the state is also concentrated in the Loikaw District. In the southern half of the state, the Bawlakhe District, which borders Kayin State, there is a sizable Karen population.<sup>30</sup>

### Kayah/Karenni population

The Karenni population is highly concentrated in their home state. About 90 per cent of the total Karenni population in Myanmar reside in the state; this means that only about 10 per cent of the Karenni are spread out in other parts of Myanmar. Among the 10 per cent of the Karenni who live outside of Kayah State, a significant number live only a few kilometres away to the north—in Shan State's Pekon Township. There, they account for 76 per cent of the township's population. Inside Kayah State, the Karenni constitute the largest ethnic group in all but two townships.

<sup>29</sup> The category 'Kayah' in the GAD Township Reports from Kayah State is presumed to include all Kayah subgroups, as none are listed separately. Note that the category 'Kayan' appears separately from 'Kayah' in the reports covering Shan State.

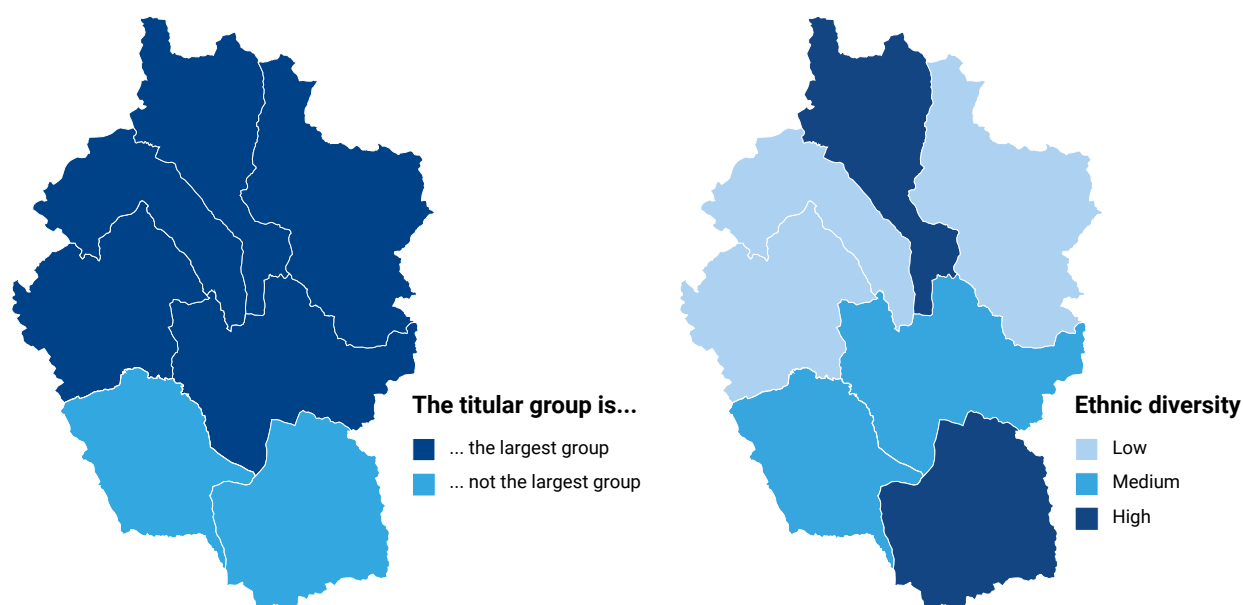
<sup>30</sup> While the Karen are not one of the three largest ethnic groups in Kayah State, they are concentrated in Hpasawng Township, where they constitute over half of the township's population.

**Table 3.3. Kayah State's ethnic distribution**

	2019 GAD Township Reports (%)	1983 Census (%)	1973 Census (%)
Kayah/Karenni	61.3	55.9	57.4
Bamar	14.8	17.5	13.9
Kayin/Karen	7.8	6.4	5.9
Mon	0.1	0.4	0.4
Shan	14.3	16.6	18.5
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>98.3</i>	<i>96.8</i>	<i>96.1</i>

*Note:* The remaining portion of the state population includes other *taingyintha*, people of mixed ethnicity and non-*taingyintha* (e.g. Indians, Chinese).

*Source:* Data retrieved from the 1973 and 1983 Census and the 2019 GAD Township Reports; table compiled by the authors.

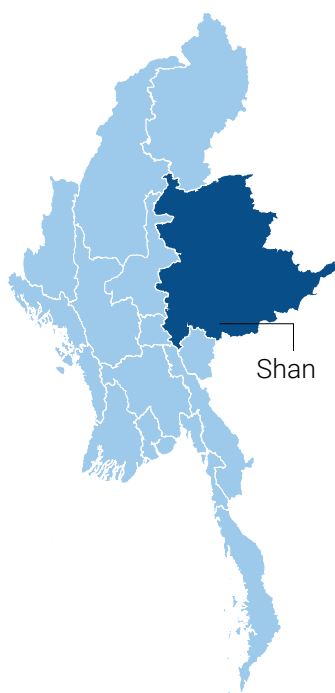
**Figure 3.4. Kayah State's largest group and ethnic diversity at the township level**

*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 are drawn by the authors.

## Summary

- Ethnic Kayah are mostly concentrated in the Loikaw District, with more than 86 per cent of the total Kayah population living in the district, and in Pekon Township (Shan South).
- The Bawlakhe District is the most diverse, with the Karen and Kayah, and Shan representing a majority in one of the district's three townships.



## SHAN STATE

The largest administrative unit in the country by area, Shan State is both the most politically fragmented and the most ethnically diverse area in Myanmar. Geographically, the state covers most of the Shan Plateau, with Kachin Hills in the northwest, the Burmese-majority central plains in the west and Kayah State in the southwest. Shan State also shares borders with China, Laos and Thailand.

Shan State is commonly divided into three regional units for statistical and administrative purposes: Shan North, Shan East and Shan South, with Lashio, Kengtung and Taunggyi as the main urban hubs, respectively. Geographically, the highest ethnic diversity is found in Shan East, while Shan South is the least diverse of the three regional units.

Shan State is also home to five of Myanmar's six self-administered zones (SAZs) established by the 2008 Constitution, namely the Danu SAZ, the Kokang SAZ, the Palaung SAZ, the Pa-O SAZ and the Wa SAD.<sup>31</sup> These areas comprise 15 out of 55 townships in Shan State.

### Historical evolution of Shan State administrative units

The majority the Shan population trace their roots to the waves of Tai migration sweeping throughout the territory since the sixth century (Aung Tun 2009). Since then, many politically fragmented kingdoms, mostly led by chief-kings known as *saophas*, have existed. These kingdoms frequently interacted with the different kingdoms located in the plains of the Irrawaddy River—either violently through wars or cooperatively through the payment of tribute.

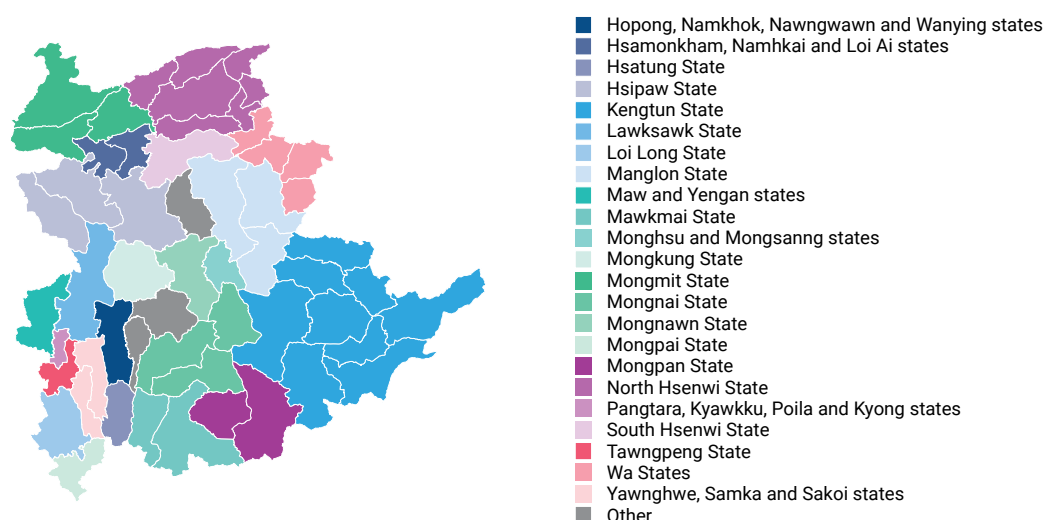
The Shan states formally came under British colonial rule in 1885, although violent resistance throughout the territory characterized the following decade (Aung-Thwin 1985). With the incorporation of Burma into British India, the colonial authorities indirectly administered the many Shan states through the *saophas*. In 1922 the British administrators formed the Federated Shan States in order to centralize their colonial authority over the fragmented states. This led to a fundamental change in the relationship between the colonial government and the *saophas*. Before the formation of the Federated Shan States, some *saophas* enjoyed relatively high levels of autonomy over internal matters, depending on the relationship with colonial bureaucrats; after the arrangement was made, however, the new act collected 50 per cent of their revenues for the central budget and placed all the common departments, from public works to education, under the authority of the Governor of Burma (Tzang Yawngkhwe 1987: 76–77).

Following the Panglong negotiations (1946–1947) and the Constituent Assembly (1947)—during which it acquired a right to secession after 10 years

<sup>31</sup> There are a total of six SAZs in the country. One of the SAZ—the Wa SAD—is composed of two districts and thus referred to as a self-administered division (SAD). They are designed to allow an ethnic group with a substantial population in a given state/region administrative autonomy, though the extent of administrative autonomy in practice is up to debate.

in the Union of Burma—Shan State became one of the four states established in the 1947 Constitution. After a decade of the union experiment, calls for secession and armed rebellion began brewing in Shan State. Since then, Shan State has been a site of civil war in Myanmar.

**Figure 3.5. Shan State prior to 1948—approximate boundaries and location of the Shan states**



Source: Information retrieved from The Imperial Gazetteer of India, volume 26: Atlas and Maule (1993) based on an original idea from Linn Atlas; maps are drawn by the authors.

### Ethnic landscape

As noted already, Shan East is the most ethnically diverse area of Shan State, while Shan South is comparatively more homogeneous. Nonetheless, as Figure 3.6 shows, the diversity of Shan State is evident at the township level, with significant variations among the townships.

Shan is the titular group and is by far the largest ethnic group in the state, accounting for approximately 30 per cent of the population. The second- and third-largest groups are the Pa-O (13 per cent) and the Bamar (12 per cent). Other groups such as the Danu, Innthar, Ta'ang, Kachin, Kayah, Kokang, Wa, and many more are scattered throughout the state.

### Shan population

The Shan population is spread out across northern and eastern Myanmar, but they are primarily concentrated in Shan State, which is home to approximately 66 per cent of the total Shan population in the country. The Shan are the largest group in 33 out of the 55 townships of Shan State (see Figure 3.6).

Outside of Shan State, large concentrations of Shan (those who identify as Shanni) can also be found in Kachin State (13 per cent of the total Shan population) and in the Sagaing Region (11 per cent).<sup>32</sup> Within Kachin State,

<sup>32</sup> Much of the Shan population in Kachin State and the Sagaing Region identify as Shanni. See, for example, Tun (2019).

the Shan population is concentrated in the southwestern parts, bordering the Sagaing Region. In the Mohnyin District, they account for nearly a third (30 per cent) of the district's total population. Within the Sagaing Region, the Shan population is concentrated in the townships bordering Kachin State. Homalin Township, in the Sagaing Region, is home to the largest concentration of Shan in Myanmar—larger than the populations even in the townships in Shan State; about 7 per cent of the total Shan population reside in Homalin Township alone, and the Shan also constitute about 80 per cent of the township's population there. Similarly, the Shan make up a sizable proportion of the township population in the adjacent townships, Banmauk (70 per cent) and Hkamti (20 per cent).

### Self-administered zones

Five ethnic groups residing in Shan State (Pa-O, Danu, Ta'ang, Wa and Kokang) have been granted SAZs, according to the 2008 Constitution. In this section, we elaborate on the township-level concentration of the Pa-O, Danu and Ta'ang. A similar elaboration for the Wa and Kokang is not included in this section because the GAD data for four of six townships constituting the Wa SAD are missing,<sup>33</sup> and the Kokang population data in the Kokang SAZ could not be determined, as they are lumped together with 'others' in Laukkaing Township.

#### Pa-O population

The Pa-O are the second-largest group in Shan State and are largely concentrated in Shan South, which is home to 82 per cent of the total Pa-O population in Myanmar. The remaining 18 per cent of the Pa-O mostly live outside of Shan State, in Kayin and Mon states. Within Shan State, they are the largest ethnic group in six townships.<sup>34</sup> The Pa-O SAZ was established from just three of these townships—Hopong, Hsihseng and Pinlaung.

Surprisingly, there are more Pa-O living outside the SAZ than inside it. The SAZ is home to just 37 per cent of the Pa-O, while the other townships in Shan South are home to 43 per cent of them—mostly concentrated around Loilen and Taunggyi townships (~30 per cent). Nonetheless, the Pa-O represent 70 per cent of the population of the Pa-O SAZ. Outside of the SAZ, the Pa-O constitute a sizable proportion of the population in townships adjacent to it, including the majority of the population in Mawkaik Township.

#### Danu population

The Danu are the third-largest non-Bamar group in Shan State and are largely concentrated in Shan South, in the townships bordering the Mandalay Region. Less than 1 per cent of the Danu population live outside Shan State.

<sup>33</sup> Those townships are Mongmao and Pangwaun (Hopang District) and Namphan and Pangsang (Matman District). According to existing policy briefs, the United Wa State Party (and its armed wing, the United Wa State Army, which by various accounts is the largest ethnic armed organization in Myanmar) maintains strong political, economic and military control over most of the areas in the Wa SAD. For more information about the Wa SAD, see Lintner (2019).

<sup>34</sup> Those townships are Hopong, Hsihseng and Pinlaung (Pa-O SAZ); Loilen and Mawkaik (Loilen District, Shan South); and Taunggyi, Shan State's capital.



The largest concentration of Danu is located in the Danu SAZ: 46 per cent of the Danu live in one of the SAZ's two townships—Pindaya and Ywangan. A sizable proportion of the Danu live in the townships adjacent to the SAZ, in either Shan South or Shan North: 37 per cent of the Danu live in Shan South, and 16 per cent live in Shan North. In Shan South, the largest concentration of Danu is located in Kalaw and Lawksawk townships (Taunggyi and Langkho districts, respectively), while in Shan North, the Danu people mostly live around Nawngkhio Township (Kyaukme District).

The Danu are the largest group in the Danu SAZ, where they represent close to 80 per cent of the population. The Danu also represent the largest population in Kalaw and Nawngkhio townships.

#### *Palaung/Ta'ang population*

Nearly all the Ta'ang in Myanmar (99 per cent) live in Shan State. They also represent a large majority in the Palaung SAZ. However, there are more Ta'ang living outside their SAZ than inside it. While 22 per cent of the Ta'ang population live in the SAZ, 77 per cent of them live in other areas of Shan State—especially in Kutkai, Kyaukme, Lashio and Tangyan townships. Nonetheless, while they are a large group in those townships, they are not the largest one. In Kutkai Township, for example, the Ta'ang represent 25 per cent of the population, but the Mone Wong constitute 29 per cent (and the Kachin, 24 per cent).

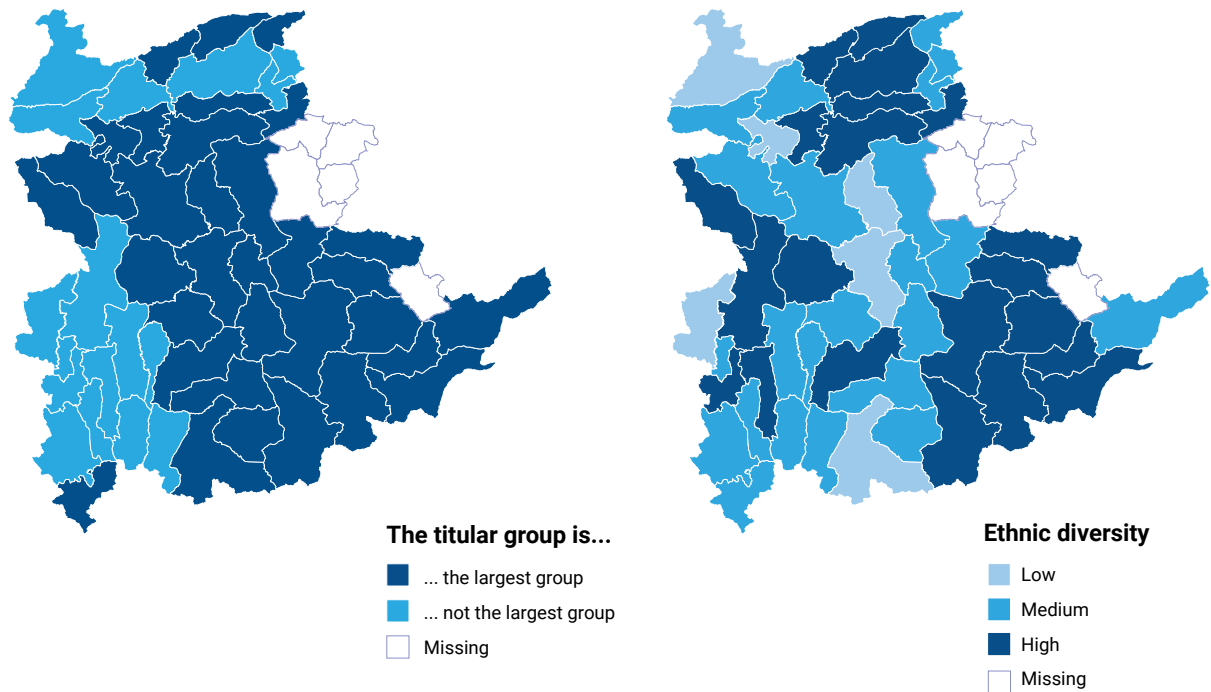
**Table 3.4. Shan State's ethnic distribution**

	2019 GAD Township Reports (%)	1983 Census (%)	1973 Census (%)
Shan	30.1	76.4	77.0
Akha	2.0		
Bamar	12.2	11.1	9.5
Danu	5.7		
Innthal	2.7		
Kachin	2.6	3.8	5.3
Kayah/Karenni	0.2	1.2	1.3
Kayan	1.7		
Kokang	3.6		
Lahu	5.0		
Mone Wong	1.5		
Pa-O	13.4		
Palaung/Ta'ang	8.2		
Taung Yoe	1.0		
Wa	2.1		
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>92.0</i>	<i>92.5</i>	<i>93.1</i>

*Note:* The decrease in the proportion of the Shan population between the 1983 Census and the 2019 GAD Township Reports was primarily due to the disaggregation of subgroups from the Shan. The remaining portion of the state population includes other *taingyintha*, people of mixed ethnicity and non-*taingyintha* (e.g. Indians, Chinese).

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

**Figure 3.6. Shan State's largest group and ethnic diversity at the township level**



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 are drawn by the authors.

### Summary

- Shan State is the most diverse of Myanmar's subnational administrative units.
- The largest concentration of Shan is in Shan State's heartland—eastern Shan South and southern Shan North.
- While only 2 per cent of the Bamar live in Shan State, they represent a majority in the Mongmit District.
- 17 per cent of the Kachin population live in Shan State, mostly concentrated in Shan North's Lashio and Muse districts.
- Groups that have been granted an SAZ are mostly—but not solely—concentrated in their SAZ.

## KAYIN STATE

Kayin State is located in the eastern part of Myanmar. It shares a long border with Thailand—with its famous Myawaddy border crossing—while in the west it shares a border with the Bago Region and Mon State. In the south of Kayin State lies the Tanintharyi Region. In the north, Kayin State shares a boundary with Nay Pyi Taw, Kayah State and Shan State. Internationally, Kayin State and its titular group, the Karen, are known for an uprising that started as early as independence. The conflict between the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Myanmar military has been called the ‘longest civil war’ (South 2011).

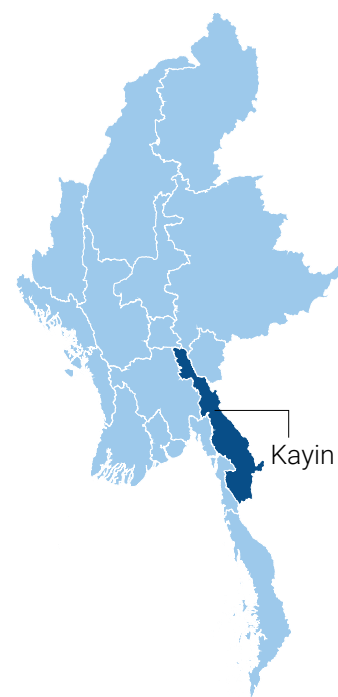
The overall geography of Kayin State is hilly, especially in the northern part as well as at the border with Thailand. Those areas can be difficult to access except through certain passes—Myawaddy being one of them.

### Historical evolution of Kayin State administrative units

Territories in present-day Kayin State were, at different points, under the influence of the state’s Bamar, Siamese and Shan neighbours (Rogers 1910). Given the challenging geography, however, this corner of Myanmar was largely autonomous before British rule. This area came under British rule in two waves. First, after the end of the first Anglo-Burmese War in 1826, the southern end (now the Kawkaireik and Kya-in districts) was ceded to the British East India Company, while the rest was annexed in 1852.

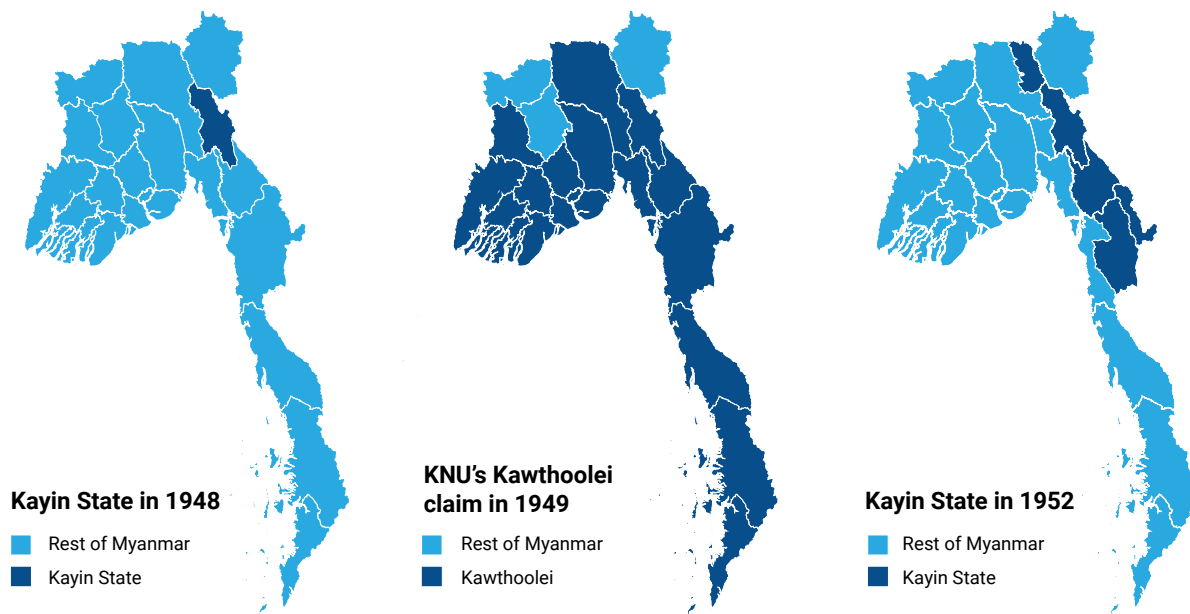
Kayin State was originally established in 1952 as Karen State (Thawngmung 2012). Prior to that, the 1947 Constitution stated that ‘the territory hitherto known as the Salween District shall form a constituent unit of the Union of Burma and be hereafter known as “The Karen State”’ (Constituent Assembly of Burma 1947). And the inclusion of adjacent territories was left to further discussions in the parliament. However, the Salween District alone was much smaller than the Karen State the Karen had hoped for.

Pursuant to parliamentary acts in 1951 (No. 62) and 1952 (No.14), Karen State was created with parts of four districts in British Burma’s Tenasserim Division: the northeastern corner of the Taungoo District, the Salween District, the eastern half of the Thaton District and the eastern half of the Amherst District (Constituent Assembly of Burma 1947: 32). While the newly established Karen State extended beyond the Salween District the discontent on the part of the Karen leadership had already materialized into an open revolution between 1947 and 1952. The idea of a Kawthoolei<sup>35</sup> as envisioned by the Karen leadership included not only the Karen in the nearby Tenasserim Division but also the ‘key delta Karen’ (Fong 2008) population in the Irrawaddy Division. Interestingly, after the 1962 coup, Ne Win’s government renamed Karen State Kawthoolei in 1964—an obvious attempt to appease the Karen in rebellion. The name reverted back to Karen State in 1974.



<sup>35</sup> Thawngmung (2012) defines Kawthoolei as ‘the Karen name for the state that the KNU has attempted to establish since the late 1940s’.

**Figure 3.7. Kayin State's administrative boundaries in 1948 and 1952 contrasted with the KNU's Kawthoolei claims**



*Notes:* The borders represented here are the colonial-era district boundaries. The Kawthoolei map represents the political area claimed by 'maximalists' factions within the Karen leadership, but it has never materialized.

*Source:* Information retrieved from the Census of India 1931, Volume XI: Burma, Cady (1958) and the Constitution of Myanmar 2008; maps are drawn by the authors.

### Ethnic landscape

Kayin State is one of the most diverse states in the country. After Mon and Shan states, it has the highest ELF score. The largest ethnic groups in Kayin State are the Karen (63 per cent), the Bamar (14 per cent) and the Mon (11 per cent). The remaining population are primarily Pa-O and Shan.

Clear differences exist in the ethnic distribution in the northern and southern parts of the state. The northern parts (Hpa-An and Hpapun and districts) are more homogeneous than the southern parts (Kawkareik and Myawaddy districts), which are home to large Bamar and Mon populations.

### Karen population

The Karen are the second-largest ethnic group in Myanmar and are spread out over southern and southeastern states/regions. At the state/region level, the largest concentrations of Karen are in the Ayeyarwady Region (41 per cent of the total Karen population), Kayin State (30 per cent), Mon State (9 per cent), the Yangon Region (8 per cent) and the Bago Region (7 per cent). Indeed, there are more Karen in the Ayeyarwady Region than in Kayin State.

Within Kayin State, the Karen account for more than half of the township population in all but one township. They are also the largest group in all townships in Kayin State. Outside of Kayin State, the Karen are mostly concentrated around Kyaukkyi and Kyauktaga townships (eastern Bago

Region) and Einme, Pantanaw and Wakema townships (Ayeyarwady Region), where they are also the largest group. These areas in the Bago and Ayeyarwady regions are also the territories that the Karen leaders, in the 1940s, argued should be included in Karen State.

**Figure 3.8. Kayin State's largest group and ethnic diversity at the township level**



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 are drawn by the authors.

**Table 3.5. Kayin State's ethnic distribution**

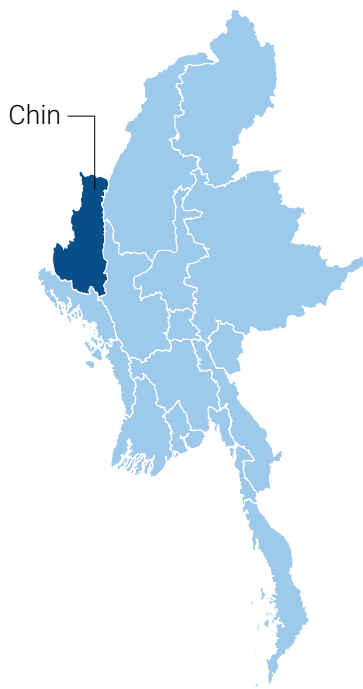
	2019 GAD Township Reports (%)	1983 Census (%)	1973 Census (%)
Karen	62.8	57.1	65.8
Bamar	13.6	14.1	10.5
Karenni	0.01	1.4	0.1
Mon	11.2	17.7	14.1
Pa-O	4.8		
Shan	2.9	3.0	4.1
<i>Subtotal</i>	95.3	93.3	94.6

Note: The remaining portion of the state's population includes other *taingyintha*, people of mixed ethnicity and non-*taingyintha* (e.g. Indians, Chinese).

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

## Summary

- 30 per cent of the Karen live in Kayin State, while 70 per cent live elsewhere.
- 20 per cent of the Karen live in the Hpa-An and Hpapun districts—areas also home to 7 per cent of the Pa-O.
- The Bamar, Mon and Shan mostly live in the southern districts of Kayin State.



## CHIN STATE

Located in the west of the country and sharing a long border with India's states of Mizoram and Manipur, Chin State is an extremely hilly area. The state is difficult to access from most parts of the country, rendering communication and economic exchanges challenging. Chin State is also one of the least developed areas in Myanmar.

### Historical evolution of Chin State administrative units

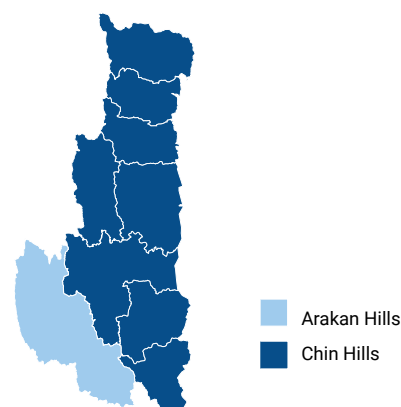
The Chin Hills were controlled by the British Army only 10 years after the third Anglo-Burmese War. The challenging terrain and local resistance against the new rulers led the colonial government to enact the 1886 Chin Hills Act, which established that the territories would be indirectly ruled through tribal chiefs, separate from the rest of British Burma. This measure was insufficient to quell resistance, leading to major events of repression throughout the last decade of the 19th century; the British Government, however, was able to disarm most of the tribes by 1900.

The Chin leaders were present at the Panglong conferences but notably did not ask for a state. At independence, the Chin Hills and the Arakan Hill Tracts (present-day Paletwa District) were combined as the Special Division of the Chins. Present-day Chin State was established only in 1974.

### Ethnic landscape

Chin State is populated nearly exclusively by the Chin, with the Chin constituting almost 96 per cent of the state's population.<sup>36</sup> This homogeneity is primarily a function of the fact that Chin State was formed exclusively based on the Chin Hills of British Burma's Frontier Areas. There is also a significant Rakhine presence in Paletwa Township, which is a southern township bordering Rakhine State. This township is more easily accessible from Rakhine State than from the upper hills of Chin State. A Rakhine presence in this part of Chin State is to be expected, as what is southern Chin State today was the Arakan Hills District during the colonial period. Nevertheless, the Chin still constitute a solid majority in Paletwa Township.

<sup>36</sup> The category 'Chin' in the GAD Township Reports is presumed to include all Chin subgroups, as none are listed separately.

**Figure 3.9. Special Division of the Chins prior to 1948**

Source: Information retrieved from Census of India 1931, Volume XI: Burma and contemporary administrative boundaries; maps are drawn by the authors.

### Chin population

The Chin are relatively dispersed throughout western and central Myanmar. In fact, Chin State is home to just half of the total Chin population in the country. At the state/region level, there are four major concentrations of Chin: Chin State (50 per cent of the total Chin population), the Sagaing Region (22 per cent), the Magway Region (11 per cent) and Rakhine State (11 per cent). In Kale and Tamu townships, in the Sagaing Region, and Sidoktaya Township, in the Magway Region—the townships bordering Chin State—the Chin constitute about half of the township population. Despite large concentrations of Chin, these territories were not included in Chin State.

**Table 3.6. Chin State's ethnic distribution**

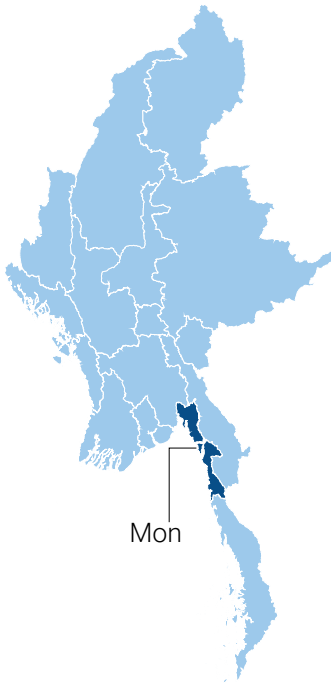
	2019 GAD Township Reports (%)	1983 Census (%)	1973 Census (%)
Chin	95.7	94.6	93.8
Bamar	0.8	0.8	1.0
Rakhine	3.4	4.4	4.8
<i>Subtotal</i>	99.9	99.8	99.6

Note: The remaining portion of the state's population includes other *taingyintha*, people of mixed ethnicity and non-*taingyintha* (e.g. Indians, Chinese).

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

### Summary

- The Chin represent an overwhelming majority of the state's population, but only half of the Chin population live in Chin State.
- Most of the Rakhine living in Chin State are located in Paletwa Township, where they represent 17 per cent of the township's population.



## MON STATE

Situated along the Gulf of Martaban's coastline, Mon State is home to the Mon people (also recorded as the Talaing people in colonial documents). While the area had been the centre of historical Mon-speaking kingdoms, present-day Mon State was established under the 1974 Constitution.

### Historical evolution of Mon State administrative units

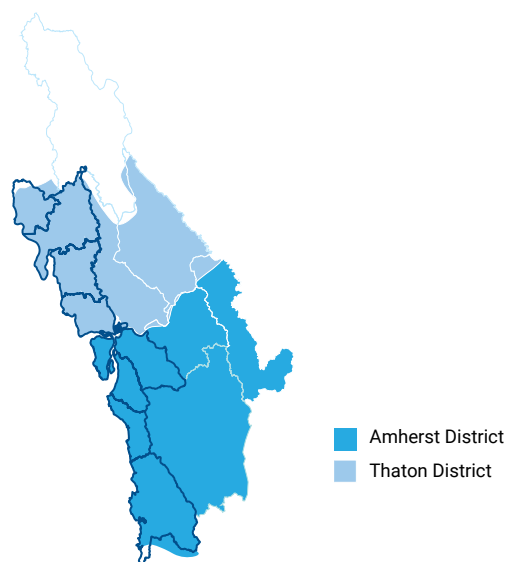
The state's present-day territories were the most contentious area between historical kingdoms in the area. Several kingdoms that emerged in the territories were later attacked and annexed by the kingdoms based in the dry zone of central Myanmar (also known as Upper Burma). The earliest conquest dates back to 1010, during the height of the Pagan Kingdom. After the fall of the Pagan in the 13th century, the Mon-speaking Hanthawaddy Kingdom, which was based at Pegu and generally covered most of what is now southern Myanmar (also known as Lower Burma), including the Bago and Yangon regions, emerged as a Siamese vassal state.<sup>37</sup> Later, it became independent, until the mid-15th century, when it was annexed by the Toungoo dynasty (South 2003). The majority of mythologies integral to the Mon identity also appeared during the Hanthawaddy period (Aung-Thwin 2005).

Different parts of the current state came under British colonial rule at different points. The southern part (now the Mawlamyine District) was colonized after the first Anglo-Burmese War (1826): the Konbaung ruler ceded the territories to the British East India Company according to the Treaty of Yandabo. The northern part (now the Thaton District) was colonized after the end of the second Anglo-Burmese War (1852). These territories were then administered as part of the Amherst and Thaton districts, respectively. Under a 1952 parliamentary act, the non-coastal townships of the Amherst and Thaton districts became part of the newly established Karen State. The western coastal townships (along with the non-coastal Kyaikmaraw Township) became Tenasserim Division No. 1, which in 1974 was reconstituted as Mon State.

<sup>37</sup> For more information about the relationship between the dry-zone kingdoms of Upper Burma, which were Bamar-speaking, and the coastal kingdoms of Lower Burma, which were Mon-speaking, see Aung-Thwin (2005).



**Figure 3.10. Mon State's borders in 1974 relative to colonial districts**



Source: Information retrieved from Census of India 1931, Volume XI: Burma and contemporary administrative boundaries; maps are drawn by the authors.

### Ethnic landscape

Mon State is a diverse state, with the second-highest ethnic fractionalization score in Myanmar (0.51). It is home to three major groups: the Mon (39 per cent of the state's population), the Bamar (36 per cent) and the Karen (14 per cent). Given the historical background discussed above, the coexistence of these ethnic groups in present-day Mon State is not surprising. Generally speaking, the Bamar population is spread throughout Mon State, while the Mon population is more concentrated in the southern part; and the Karen population, primarily in the northern part.

### Mon population

The Mon population is geographically concentrated in the coastal area of southeastern Myanmar: approximately 77 per cent reside in Mon State and 17 per cent in Kayin State. The Mon are the largest ethnic group in 5 of 10 townships in Mon State—Chaungzon, Kyaikmaraw, Mudon, Thanbyuzayat, and Ye.

While the Mon-speaking kingdoms were historically based in Pegu, the Mon population in the Bago and Yangon regions today is rather sparse—estimated to be just 0.16 per cent and 0.36 per cent of the region's population, respectively. Scholars of Myanmar offer two different explanations for this significant decrease in the Mon's population size in these regions. According to Thant Myint-U, after the Konbaung conquest of Lower Burma, there was a linguistic homogenization campaign against Mon speakers. As a result, the Mon population likely either (a) migrated to Tennasserim, where they are concentrated today in Myanmar, or to Siam; or (b) adopted the Bamar language, dress and hairstyles, and names; in essence, they became Bamar (Myint-U 2001: 85). According to Ashley South, the dramatic change in

population did not happen until well after the British annexation, when a large population of Bamar from Upper Burma moved into Lower Burma, overtaking local Mon communities (South 2003: 21).

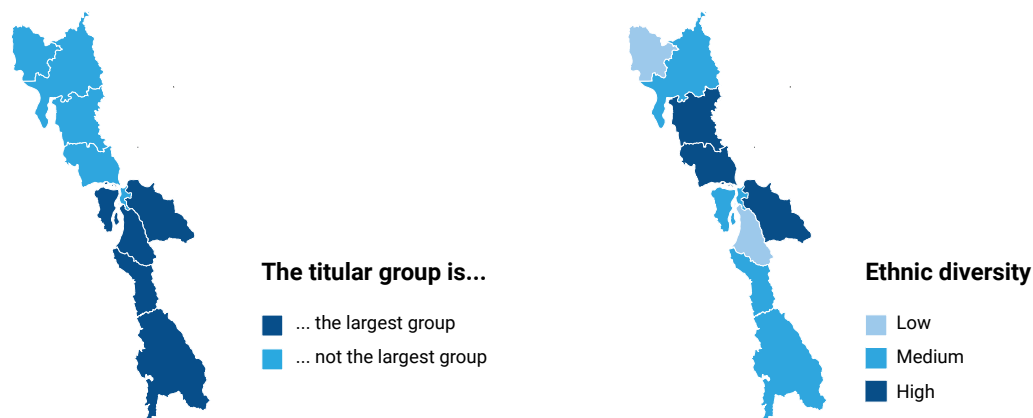
**Table 3.7. Mon State's ethnic distribution**

	2019 GAD Township Reports (%)	1983 Census (%)	1973 Census (%)
Mon	38.7	38.2	38.7
Bamar	36.4	37.2	36.6
Kayin/Karen	14.2	15.7	15.3
Pa-O	3.1		
Shan	0.2	0.6	1.1
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>92.6</i>	<i>91.7</i>	<i>91.7</i>

Note: The remaining portion of the state's population includes other *taingyintha*, people of mixed ethnicity and non-*taingyintha* (e.g. Indians, Chinese).

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

**Figure 3.11. Mon State's largest group and ethnic diversity at the township level**



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 are drawn by the authors.

## Summary

- Mon State's southern district is home to most of the Mon in the state, where they represent a large majority.
- Mon State's northern district is diverse, with Bamar, Karen and Mon populations, each representing sizable groups.

## RAKHINE STATE

Rakhine State is the westernmost administrative area of Myanmar, spanning the coast of the Bay of Bengal. It shares a border with Bangladesh's Chittagong District, separated only by the Naf River. It also shares a border with Chin State and the Magway, Bago and Ayeyarwady regions. The Rakhine Yoma mountains separate the state from the rest of Myanmar, limiting the area's accessibility.

Northern Rakhine—the area from Sittwe, which is the state's current capital city, to the Bangladesh border, and home to the Rohingya people—has experienced unrest since Burma became independent. Since the BSPP era, which effectively began after the coup in 1962, discriminatory policies and exclusion against the Rohingya people have intensified, depriving them of their Myanmar citizenship. Since 2012 the people in that area have experienced further hardship: a significant portion of the Rohingya population live in camps scattered throughout the state, and travel to and from the three northernmost townships of Buthidaung, Maungdaw, and Rathedaung has been severely limited.

### Historical evolution of Rakhine State administrative units

Given its relative geographic isolation, pre-colonial kingdoms established in the area of present-day Rakhine State were largely autonomous from the kingdoms in central Myanmar. The last independent kingdom in the area before the invasion of the Konbaung kings was the Kingdom of Mrauk-U (1429–1785) (Myint-U 2001: 13–14).

The Mrauk-U Kingdom's independence came to an end in 1784, when Bodawpaya, then the Konbaung king, took advantage of an internal political crisis to invade and annex the kingdom. During the invasion and afterward, many locals fled to Chittagong. In 1824 the British took control of the former kingdom's territories. The Konbaung Kingdom formally ceded these territories to the British East India Company following the Treaty of Yandabo, signed at the end of the first Anglo-Burmese War, in 1826. Under British rule, these territories were divided into three districts—Akyab, Kyaukpyu and Sandoway.

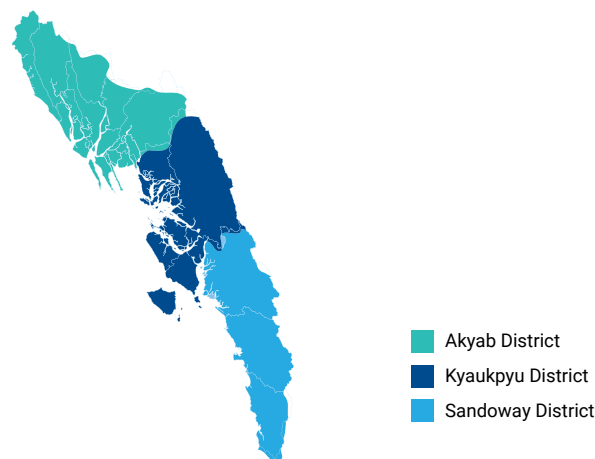
In 1865 a new district named the Northern Arakan District (also referred to as the Arakan Hills District) was created from the hilly northern regions of the Akyab District (Spearman 1880: 7). This change was made in order to better establish British rule in the places where colonial officials found it impossible to administer. The new district was mainly ruled in cooperation with local chiefs.

When British rule came to an end, the Arakan Division of British Burma was effectively split into two divisions, per the 1947 Constitution. The Arakan Hill Tracts (the present-day Paletwa District) became part of the Special Division of the Chins. The remaining districts—Akyab, Kyaukpyu and Sandoway—were reconstituted as the Arakan Division; this was later established as Rakhine State in the 1974 Constitution. Of note, for a short period of time (1961–1964), a special division was created for the areas north of the Kaladan River (roughly the present-day Buthidaung, Maungdaw and Rathedaung townships)—the Mayu Frontier District, which is the area with the highest concentration of Rohingya people in present-day Myanmar.



Rakhine State's present-day district borders largely follow the colonial district borders. The Akyab District has been divided into the Maungdaw, Mrauk-U and Sittwe districts. The Kyaukpyu District has been divided into the Ann and Kyaukpyu districts. The Sandoway District (now known as the Thandwe District) maintained its colonial boundaries.

**Figure 3.12. Rakhine State prior to 1948**



Source: Information retrieved from Census of India 1931, Volume XI: Burma and contemporary administrative boundaries; maps are drawn by the authors.

### Ethnic landscape

Rakhine State is the second most homogeneous state in Myanmar. Rakhine State also stands out from other states in one important aspect: in most of Myanmar's states, the total population of recognized groups (*taingyintha*) makes up more than 90 per cent of the population. In Rakhine State, however, the *taingyintha* population accounts for only roughly 74 per cent. This is because Rakhine State is home to two main ethnic groups—the Rakhine/Arakan, who account for nearly 70 per cent of the state's population, and the Rohingya people,<sup>38</sup> who account for about 26 per cent of the state's population.<sup>39</sup> The latter make up a large majority in the state's northern townships, while the former are the dominant population elsewhere in the state. There is a significant Chin presence in central Rakhine State—Ann, Minbya and Myebon townships (accounting for 29 per cent, 14 per cent and 13 per cent of the township population, respectively), as well as in townships bordering Chin State and the Magway Region. The presence of other ethnic groups in Rakhine State is generally negligible.

<sup>38</sup> The latter appear in the GAD Township Reports as a type of 'foreign' ethnicity labelled as 'Bangladeshi'. Foreigners are usually designated in relation to the country with which their descent is (thought to be) associated. See [footnote 19](#) for a discussion of Rohingya population estimates.

<sup>39</sup> It is generally assumed that there is a sizable Bamar population in southern Rakhine State, which borders the Bago and Ayeyarwady regions. This assumption is consistent with the colonial records (i.e. the 1931 Census), which estimated the proportion of the Bamar population in the northern townships (formerly the Akyab District) at 0.4 per cent; in the central townships (formerly the Kyaukpyu District) at 0.47 per cent; and in the southern townships (formerly the Sandoway District) at 56.11 per cent. However, post-colonial records, including the 1973 and 1983 Census reports and the 2019 GAD Township Reports, indicate a rather sparse Bamar population in southern Rakhine State. Explaining this shift in the proportion of the Bamar population requires additional research.

**Table 3.8. Rakhine State's ethnic distribution**

	2019 GAD Township Reports (%)	1983 Census (%)	1973 Census (%)
Rakhine	69.6	67.8	67.2
Bamar	0.4	0.7	0.9
Chin	3.8	3.2	3.2
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>73.8</i>	<i>71.7</i>	<i>71.3</i>
Foreign	25.9	27.8	27.8

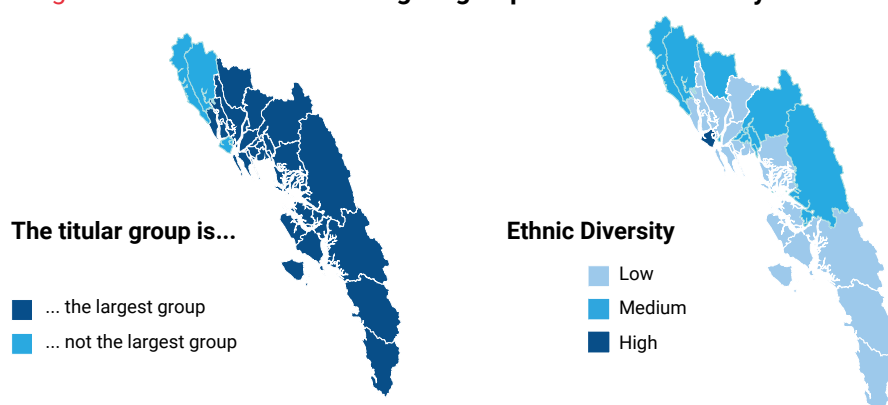
Note: Other *taingyintha* account for less than 1 per cent of Rakhine State's population.

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

### Arakan/Rakhine population

The Rakhine are one of the most geographically concentrated ethnic groups in Myanmar, with 92 per cent of the group's population residing in their home state. The remaining Rakhine population is scattered in the Ayeyarwady and Yangon regions.

In Rakhine State, with the notable exception of Buthidaung, Maungdaw, Rathedaung and Sittwe, the state's capital, the Rakhine population represents an overwhelming majority in all townships. In Munang and Ponnagyun townships, for example, they account for more than 98 per cent of the population.

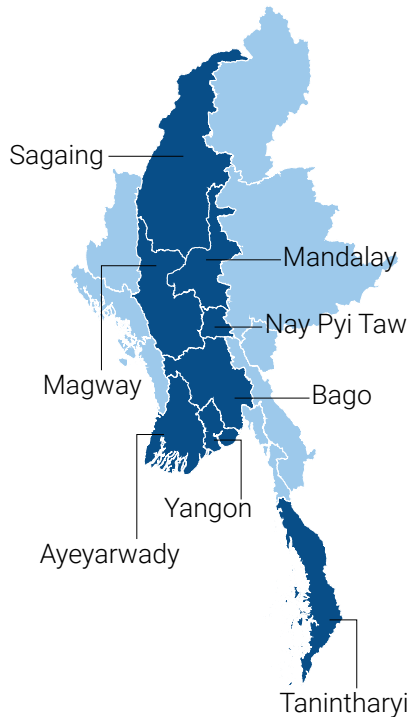
**Figure 3.13. Rakhine State's largest group and ethnic diversity at the township level**

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 are drawn by the authors.

### Summary

- Rakhine State's northern townships—Buthidaung, Maungdaw and Rathedaung—are home to a sizable Rohingya population, who make up a majority of the population.
- The central and southern townships are mostly inhabited by the Rakhine people, though a sizable Chin population lives in Ann, Minbya and Myebon townships.



## REGIONS

Regions constitute half of Myanmar's tier-1 subnational administrative units. In total, 207 townships (out of 330) are located in the central plains, mostly around the Irrawaddy River. While the central regions form the dry zone, the southern regions comprise the humid, rice-producing Ayeyarwady Region and the Bago and Yangon regions (the Yangon Region was carved out from Bago in 1964) as well as the remote coastline of the Tanintharyi Region.

### Historical evolution of Myanmar's regions

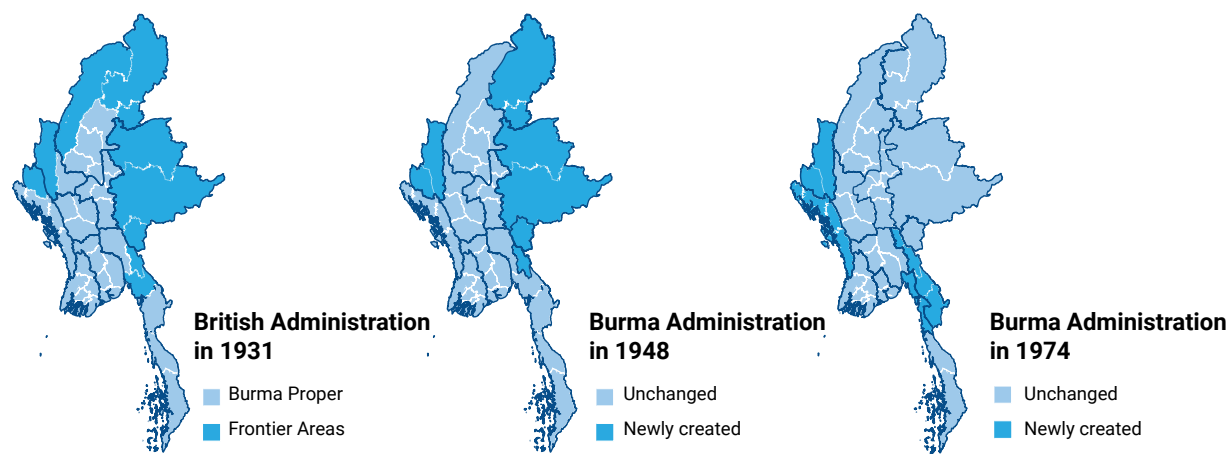
Myanmar's regions are generally associated with the Bamar population. These administrative units include areas ruled by successive kingdoms that emerged in the dry zone (e.g. Pagan, Toungoo, Konbaung). However, they also include areas beyond the kings' reach but that were left out of the states created in post-independence Burma (e.g. the Naga Hills).

Prior to the arrival of the British, different kingdoms mostly ruled over the country's central plains. From the Pyu city of Sri Ksetra to the Toungoo Kingdom (16th–18th centuries), the present-day regions have been the cradle of many kingdoms. The Irrawaddy River and the fertile lands in the surrounding plains allowed for the constitution of kingdoms that would dominate most of the area.

Territories ruled by the last Konbaung king were gradually incorporated into British Burma. First, the British took hold of the coastal areas (roughly present-day Mon State, Rakhine State and the Tanintharyi Region). At the conclusion of the first Anglo-Burmese War (1824–1826), the British Army installed settlements in those areas. The present-day Ayeyarwady, Bago and Yangon regions were occupied following the second Anglo-Burmese War (1852–1853). Then, following the third and final Anglo-Burmese War (1885), the cradle of these historical kingdoms (roughly the present-day Magway, Mandalay and Sagaing regions) were incorporated into British Burma.

While the British directly administered much of the new territories under their control, they instituted indirect rule in the Frontier Areas. The former were referred to as Ministerial Burma (or Burma Proper) and the latter as the Frontier Areas. The first panel in Figure 3.14 shows the areas that constituted Ministerial Burma and those that formed the Frontier Areas.

**Figure 3.14. Changes in administrative boundaries in 1931, 1948 and 1974**



Note: The blue lines denote the first tier of Myanmar's territorial units (divisions in 1931 and states and divisions/regions since 1947). The white lines denote the districts in all three panels.

Source: Information from Callahan (2005) and Constitution of Burma 1948, 1974; maps are drawn by the authors.

### Ethnic landscape

Regions are homogeneously Bamar. In fact, the Bamar account for well over 80 per cent of the local population in all regions except Ayeyarwady. Among the regions, the Magway and Mandalay regions are the most homogeneous, with the Bamar making up 97 and 96 per cent of their population, respectively. Such a high concentration of Bamar is to be expected, as both regions are the cradle of famous Bamar-speaking kingdoms.

There are, however, pockets where ethnic minorities are concentrated in the regions, particularly in the townships bordering the states—the Karen in the Ayeyarwady Delta and the eastern Bago Region, the Naga and the Shan in the northern Sagaing Region, and the Chin mostly in the southern Sagaing Region and western Magway. Though the proportion of ethnic minorities at the regional level is fairly small, various minority groups are the largest group in several townships.

### Bamar population

The Bamar, the ethnic majority and the politically dominant ethnic group in Myanmar, account for about 70 per cent of the country's population (since the 1973 Census, the Bamar have consistently accounted for 68–69 per cent of the country's population). This massive population is geographically concentrated in central to lower Myanmar, with 94 per cent of the total Bamar population living in the regions (and Nay Pyi Taw). At the township level, the Bamar are the majority in all but 15 townships across the regions (see Figure 3.15). They make up more than 99 per cent of the population in 57 out of the 202 townships in the regions.

Only 6 per cent of the Bamar live outside the regions and Nay Pyi Taw. The largest concentrations of Bamar are in Kachin, Mon and Shan states. Given the overall size of the Bamar population, however, the Bamar's presence in some states is not negligible.

#### Naga population

The Naga population in Myanmar is heavily concentrated in the northern tip of the Sagaing Region, nestled between Kachin State and India's Nagaland. Within the Sagaing Region, the Naga make up a substantial population in four townships—Lahe (99 per cent of the township's population), Nanyun (97 per cent), Layshi (87 per cent) and Hkamti (46 per cent). In 2010 the first three townships were established as self-administered zones. Small communities of Naga also live in Tanai Township, in Kachin State, and Homalin Township, in the Sagaing Region.

**Table 3.9. Regions' ethnic distribution**

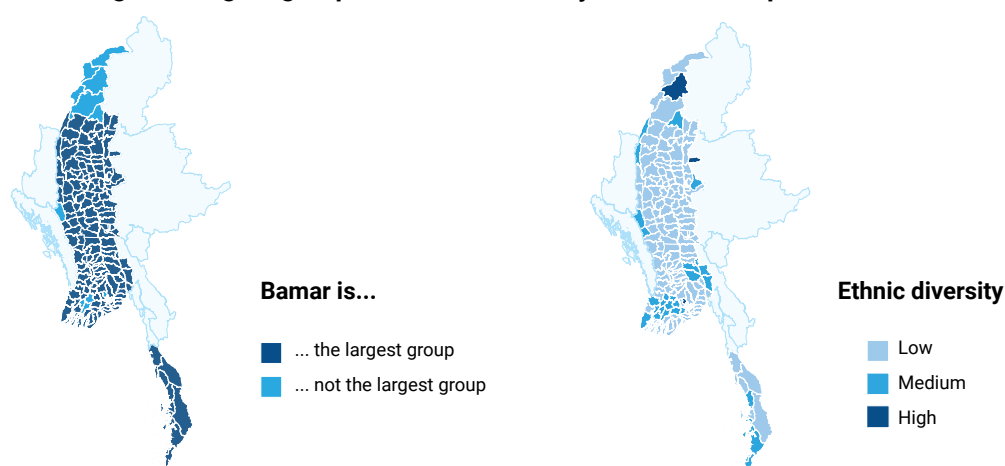
	2019 GAD Township Reports (%)	1983 Census (%)	1973 Census (%)
<b>Ayeyarwady Region</b>			
Bamar	76.7	75.8	76.4
Karen	21.5	20.4	19.6
<i>Subtotal</i>	98.2	96.2	96
<b>Bago Region</b>			
Bamar	89.9	88.9	88.7
Karen	4.6	4.8	5.0
Shan	0.9	1.2	1.0
<i>Subtotal</i>	95.4	94.9	94.7
<b>Magway Region</b>			
Bamar	97.1	96.7	96.4
Chin	2.6	2.4	2.5
<i>Subtotal</i>	99.7	99.1	98.9
<b>Mandalay Region</b>			
Bamar	95.8	95.2	95.5
Shan	1.0	1.1	1.2
Kachin	0.9	0.5	0.3
<i>Subtotal</i>	97.7	96.8	97.0
<b>Sagaing Region</b>			
Bamar	87.5	90.1	89.1
Chin	4.0	4.8	5.5
Naga	2.6		
Shan	4.8	4.0	4.4
<i>Subtotal</i>	98.9	98.9	99.0



**Table 3.9. Regions' ethnic distribution (cont.)**

	2019 GAD Township Reports (%)	1983 Census (%)	1973 Census (%)
<b>Tanintharyi Region</b>			
Bamar	86.5	83.5	83.5
Karen	7.5	6.5	6.8
Mon	1.8	2.6	2.3
<i>Subtotal</i>	95.8	92.6	92.6
<b>Yangon Region</b>			
Bamar	89.0	83.6	81.7
Karen	3.9	4.8	2.8
Rakhine	1.3	1.2	1.4
<i>Subtotal</i>	94.2	89.6	85.9

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

**Figure 3.15. Regions' largest group and ethnic diversity at the township level**

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 from the 2019 GAD Township Reports; maps are drawn by the authors.

## Summary

- The Bamar are spread throughout the regions, where they represent the majority of the population. They are also the predominant population in Myanmar's largest cities, such as Bago, Mandalay, Patheingyi and Yangon.
- Non-Bamar populations in the regions tend to live in townships bordering their home state or in the Yangon Region.
- Either the Chin, Karen, Naga or Shan constitute the largest group in 15 out of the 205 townships in the regions.

## Chapter 4

# CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

A few notable points emerge from an examination of how Myanmar's states were formed and of the more fine-grained ethnic landscape within each subnational administrative unit.

- Historians sometimes note the arbitrariness of the boundary demarcation by the colonial authorities. In Myanmar, like elsewhere, these boundaries outlived the colonial period, and the state/region boundaries in present-day Myanmar were demarcated more or less along the colonial district boundaries.
- While seven ethnic groups have titular status in seven states, the titular groups do not neatly fit into their home states. A substantial portion of some of the titular groups have resided in the territories demarcated as regions as well as in other states since the colonial period (and most likely since pre-colonial times).
- Several titular groups do not constitute the numerical majority in their home states because the post-independence state boundaries were not drawn with the aim of creating ethnically homogeneous administrative units. Instead, many states are products of political negotiations and recognition of a unique territorial status in the colonial state.
- While the regions are generally thought to be Bamar areas, the Bamar are the numerical minority in several townships in the regions, particularly in the townships bordering the states.
- Ethnic diversity in Myanmar is apparent down to the township level. Aside from the central and western parts of Myanmar, where townships are highly homogeneous (ethnically), two or more ethnic groups coexist in most townships elsewhere.

Myanmar is currently at a critical juncture, and these key takeaways are essential to how we imagine a new Myanmar. In this chapter, we discuss ways in which these takeaways could inform how we think about (a) infrastructure to generate better administrative data; (b) administrative and electoral units; and (c) inclusive institutions.

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## BETTER ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

One of the biggest changes in Myanmar during the last decade was the sheer production of quantitative data, ranging from public opinion surveys to administrative records. However, data quality is sometimes questionable, data sources are often inaccessible, and the accessible data is not utilized to the full extent.

Currently, the census reports and GAD Township Reports offer the most comprehensive and easily accessible data (Myanmar n.d.b). However, while the 2014 Census offers relatively extensive and enumerated data, it remains—as Whipple’s Index shows—approximate. In a similar vein, while the GAD Township Reports are more comprehensive and vaster than the 2014 Census, as noted in Chapter 1 of this report, the data sources and quality are questionable.

A variety of data also exists at the mezzo and micro levels, produced by non-governmental organizations—domestic and international—and international institutions. A lot of this data is publicly available through the Myanmar Information Management Unit (MIMU), which remains the key resource for practitioners, analysts and scholars.<sup>40</sup> However, the data is sometimes of poor quality and limited in scope. The methods behind the data collection often lack transparency, and available information remains in the hands of a limited number of people.

Since the 2021 coup, numerous initiatives have emerged that have been compiling existing resources or collecting new ones, with the objective of making sense of the current situation and helping address the needs of the people of Myanmar (e.g. Data for Myanmar, Open Development Myanmar and Myanmar Spring Revolution [n.d.]). Such initiatives should not only be supported; they should also be promoted and connected with relevant data users. Furthermore, domestic and international organizations contributing to progress in Myanmar should invest more resources in generating better-quality data, and they should promote data sharing across organizations and among relevant stakeholders, practitioners and academic circles.

Such an investment is a task for emerging national institutions and the Government of Myanmar itself as well. Something akin to a central statistical office, and a related central cartography office, should also be considered in tandem with ongoing discussions over the institutional design for the new Myanmar. Furthermore, there should also be strategic plans for all ministries and departments down to the township level to systematically collect data and coordinate with the central statistical office. As local population characteristics change over time, good-quality statistical data, along with cartographical data, will serve as crucial information that will help the government determine how and where to direct resources. The legacy of the GAD structures could serve as the basis for quality data collection—granted that, under a new democratic

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<sup>40</sup> Established in late 2007, MIMU is a service of the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator and is overseen by the United Nations Development Programme. Over the years, Myanmar has relied on MIMU not only to produce and manage data but also to create related (official) maps.

government, it is reformed and provided with the necessary resources. It is also paramount to create a unified set of ethnic categorizations in the new data collection infrastructure.

In a highly decentralized future federal Myanmar, it may be challenging to create a national institutional grid to organize and coordinate data collection. Nevertheless, it is necessary to reach out to all stakeholders that have been involved with Myanmar on a programmatic level to have access to data that could be of importance.

During the interim period, it is also crucial to closely examine and analyse available administrative data (e.g. data based on the 2014 Census and the 2019 GAD Township Reports) in order to better prepare for the new Myanmar. As mentioned already, the analysis presented in this report is one of the first, if not the first, systematic examinations of ethnicity data in the GAD Township Reports. There is much more data, related to public service provision, education, health, development and so on, buried in these reports that has yet to be examined. These resources should be explored and exhausted to the full extent so that we can better understand patterns of challenges and inequalities in the old Myanmar and identify ways to address them in the new Myanmar. Additionally, more engagement with existing administrative data may also reveal ways to improve data quality.

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## REIMAGINING SUBNATIONAL UNITS

### Federal units

Following the 1962 coup in Myanmar, discussions of federalism were sidelined from the mainstream political discourse, though it continued to be an important topic in ethnic minority circles. In the aftermath of the 2021 coup, however, federalism came to be at the very centre of how the pro-democracy movement and the people of Myanmar envision their country. In fact, Myanmar's current juncture is thought to offer 'the closest approximation since the 1947 Panglong Conference of the idea that a federal union should emerge out of agreements among sovereign states' (South 2021). As such, the discussion of a federal design for Myanmar is both timely and crucial.

There are several important questions to consider regarding the nature of Myanmar's emerging federalism. First, to what extent should federalism be based on ethnic affiliation? Second, which ethnic group should be titular? Third, should the titular groups be given preferential rights in their respective units? Fourth, should boundaries be redrawn to create more homogenous units?

Perhaps one of the most basic questions in the mix is the following: what are the constituent parts of the federal union? As noted above, while the FDC identifies states as the federal units, it does not define the nature of the states. A few arrangements have been formally or informally proposed, however.

In some proposals, there seems to be an implicit assumption that the federal units would be the existing seven states and seven regions, plus Nay Pyi Taw as a federal territory. However, several ethnic minority activists and community members have noted that this arrangement would undermine ethnic equality because it would allow the Bamar ethnic group to have more political influence (more constituent units) relative to other ethnic groups. Thus, there have been proposals to create eight constituent states—one each for the existing seven titular groups and a single one for the Bamar.<sup>41</sup> This was, for instance, the arrangement laid out in the 2008 Federal Constitution Drafting and Coordinating Committee (FCDCC) worked out by ethnic group representatives and academics (Weng 2016).<sup>42</sup> Under this arrangement, eight ethnic groups should theoretically have equal access to power, but other ethnic groups, some of which are quite substantial in population size, would need to negotiate with the titular groups for their political rights and representation. Yet another alternative is to retain the existing seven states and create additional states from the regions. One such proposal calls for 10 so-called national states, with the possibility to create more.<sup>43</sup>

Despite the subtle variations in these proposals, they share an important common denominator—the acute tendency to maintain the existing seven states. This tendency suggests that the existing states are perceived as fixed—at least by those involved in the constitutional discussions thus far. However, the historical evolution of how state/region boundaries were demarcated suggests the possibility of imagining Myanmar's federal units beyond the status quo. The federal units could be collectively imagined and reimagined in a way that they would provide the basis for a greater degree of equality between ethnic groups in Myanmar. Furthermore, federating Myanmar should facilitate not only minority–majority equality but also minority–minority equality.

### Electoral units

Other important subnational units integral to the functioning of a federal democratic union are the electoral units. In the past, the most basic electoral unit had been the townships, and the ongoing discourse, including the FDC, assumes townships to be the electoral unit in future Myanmar elections. Given the importance of the electoral unit in facilitating representation, it should be noted that, like district and other administrative units in Myanmar, existing township boundaries are relics of the colonial era and have not been significantly altered since independence (Ostwald and Courtin 2020). As such, it may be worthwhile to evaluate the extent to which existing electoral units facilitate equality and minority representation. Like the state boundaries, electoral units could be perceived as amenable to the nature of the future Myanmar. Many democracies around the world, including Australia, Germany

<sup>41</sup> According to Aung Htoo, the principle of eight states was adopted at the Taunggyi Constitutional Conference in 1961. See Weng (2016).

<sup>42</sup> Also note that the draft constitution produced by the United Nationalities Federal Council in 2016 was based on this proposal by the FCDCC. See Bulmer (2022: 71).

<sup>43</sup> The indicated states are as follows: Arakan National State, Bama National State, Chin National State, Irrawaddy Nationalities State, Kachin National State, Karen National State, Karenni National State, Mon National State, Shan National State and Tenasserim Nationalities State.

and the United States, regularly redraw their electoral units. Such tools could also be utilized in Myanmar to increase political opportunities for ethnic minorities, including ethnic and regional political parties (Ebead and Hirakawa 2022).

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## INCLUSIVE INSTITUTIONS

Throughout most of its recent history, Myanmar not only was a highly centralized state, but it also had very limited inclusive institutions. During the reform period under the 2008 Constitution (2011–2021), national race affairs ministers (NRAMs) and special administrative areas (i.e. self-administered zones) were perhaps the sole institutions that were intended to help facilitate the political inclusion of various ethnic groups. While the institution of NRAMs has not been examined extensively, a few existing studies have raised concerns about the ambiguity of the role of these ministers and their effectiveness in promoting minority rights and inclusion (Thawnhmung and Yadana 2017).

An examination of fine-grain demographic data raises another concern about NRAMs and future inclusive institutions similar to them. As Chapters 2 and 3 of this report indicate, there is ethnic heterogeneity at every level of subnational administrative units. Yet, institutions such as the NRAMs existed at the state/region level of government until 2021, but no such institution existed at the lower levels of government. It is imperative that the township level administrative apparatuses (i.e. street-level bureaucracy), which are the primary interface between the government and ordinary citizens, be inclusive and reflective of the diverse population they serve.

When thinking about inclusion, it is important to consider how ethnic minorities are included, not just whether they are included. In the past, the inclusion of ethnic minorities in the government was specifically for the purposes of so-called ethnic affairs (*taingyintha yeyar*).<sup>44</sup> However, seemingly non-ethnic affairs (e.g. defence, education, immigration and population, labour and many more) are issue areas that concern ethnic minorities, not just ethnic majorities. Thus, ethnic minorities included in cabinet positions should not be limited to ethnic affairs portfolios. To that end, it is reassuring to see that, in the NUG, many ethnic minorities are assigned to portfolios beyond those directly related to ethnic affairs.

Furthermore, the discourse on inclusion should extend beyond the ethnic dimension. Ethnicity is highly salient and politicized in Myanmar and thus takes up much of the space in our discussion of inclusion. However, other

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<sup>44</sup> It should be noted that several ethnic minority politicians, such as Sama Duwa Sinwa Nawng (Kachin), U Aung Zan Wai (Rakhine) and U Rashid (Muslim of Indian descent), were appointed as ministers of home affairs and defence, social services, and housing and labour in the national cabinet during the parliamentary period. See People's Literature Committee and House (1961).

social identities, including religion and gender, have been the grounds for discrimination in Myanmar. And exclusion based on these identities should be addressed at the same time as the ethnic dimension.

Finally, the focus on inclusive institutions should not be discarded and left aside under the pretext of a broader conversation around the federal nature of a future Myanmar state. It is crucial to think of the question of inclusive institutions alongside questions about the nature of federalism and federal units in Myanmar. Especially given that there cannot be inclusive institutions in a country as diverse as Myanmar without decentralization, discussions around inclusive institutions should animate the discussions about federalism.

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