



Ethnic Parties in New Democracies: The Case of Myanmar 2015

Jangai Jap^a, Adam Ziegfeld^{b,*}

^a Department of Political Science, George Washington University, Washington, DC, USA

^b Department of Political Science, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA, USA

When are ethnic political parties successful in new democracies? We answer this question in the context of Myanmar's 2015 legislative election. This historic election marked the re-introduction of democracy to Myanmar after a decades' long hiatus during which a host of insurgencies simmered among the country's many ethnic minorities. The election also resulted in the country's first democratic transfer of power. The performance of ethnic political parties in the context of insurgency-prone countries like Myanmar matters because these parties seek to mobilize ethnic minorities through peaceful, rather than violent, means. These parties' success or failure in providing ethnic minorities with representation and access to power can have long-term implications for peace and stability.

On the whole, ethnic parties performed poorly in Myanmar's 2015 election. Their lackluster performance is, in many ways, puzzling. New democracies are often low-information environments (Birnie, 2007; Lupu and Riedl, 2013). Voters have little sense of parties' policy platforms, which are often underdeveloped or nonexistent, and parties know little about voters' preferences. In such contexts, informational short-cuts can be particularly useful to voters. Because ethnic parties can potentially provide co-ethnics with informational shortcuts about the party's policy preferences (Birnie, 2007) and likely patterns of discretionary distribution (Chandra, 2004), ethnic parties should plausibly have had a major advantage in areas where their target voters were numerous. Furthermore, thanks to a history of ethnic conflict that has plagued Myanmar since its independence in 1948, ethnic identity is very politically salient (South, 2008; South and Lall, 2018). Not surprisingly, therefore, many journalists writing prior to the election predicted that "assuming the election is a fair fight, the ethnic parties will prevail in the ethnic areas" (Belford, 2015). However, ethnic parties fared far worse than expected (MacGregor, 2015), winning just over 11% of the elected

seats in Myanmar's lower legislative house.¹ Even in Myanmar's seven states—administrative divisions where ethnic minorities are numerically preponderant—ethnic parties won just 37 of 116, or about a third of, legislative seats.

Nevertheless, ethnic parties' generally poor performance masks considerable variation across parties and states. In Rakhine state, situated along Myanmar's western coast, the Arakan National Party won twelve of the state's seventeen seats, and ethnic parties combined to win more than half of the vote. Meanwhile, in Kayah, Karen, and Mon states, all located near Myanmar's eastern border with Thailand, ethnic parties failed to win a single seat among the 24 up for grabs and won between 13% (in Kayah) and 21% (in Karen) of the vote.

We exploit variation in ethnic parties' success in Myanmar's states to better understand the conditions under which ethnic parties are successful in new democracies. We define an ethnic party as "a party that is the champion of the particular interests of one ethnic category or set of ethnic categories" (Chandra, 2011: 155). In Myanmar, virtually all ethnic parties are explicitly associated with ethnic-minority groups.² Throughout, we therefore use the term "ethnic-minority parties" (EMPs) to refer to Myanmar's ethnic parties. To explain spatial variation in the success of Myanmar's EMPs and address the broader question of EMP success, we identify and test five hypotheses related to party system fragmentation, candidate selection, ethnic demography, conflict, and party history. We find evidence that ethnic parties performed best when fewer EMPs were competing, ethnic minorities constituted a higher percentage of the population, there was on-going ethnic conflict, and the main EMPs had long histories that pre-date Myanmar's last democratization attempt in 1990. In particular, conflict and party history exhibit especially strong associations with EMP success. We find no evidence that EMPs fared better when competing against ethnic-majority (i.e.,

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: jangaijap@gwu.edu (J. Jap), awz@temple.edu (A. Ziegfeld).

¹ The lower chamber of the national legislature is supposed to have 330 elected seats and 110 appointed by the military. However, for security reasons, elections were cancelled in seven constituencies in Shan state.

² There is one exception, the Dawei Nationalities Party. The party was registered in 2013 and claims to represent the Dawei people, which is enumerated as a subgroup of the Bamar ethnic group, which constitutes a majority of Myanmar. The party competed in only a few constituencies in Taninthary region including in Dawei Township (formerly known as Tavoy).

Bamar) candidates.

From a theoretical perspective, arguably the most interesting finding concerns the explanation rooted in Myanmar's history of authoritarian-era elections. The performance of ethnic-minority parties in Myanmar's 1990 election—a relatively free and fair election whose results the military immediately annulled—strongly predicts where ethnic-minority parties gained substantial representation in 2015. This finding comports with a growing body of research on the enduring legacies of political loyalties established during periods of authoritarianism (Wittenberg, 2006) and the authoritarian origins of democratic party systems (Hicken and Kuhonta, 2011; Riedl, 2014, Tudor and Ziegfeld, 2019). Increasingly, democratization occurs among countries that have experienced either previous, if brief, periods of democracy or prolonged periods competitive authoritarianism.³ Prior spells of (semi-) competitive elections can shape electoral competition that later takes place under fully democratic conditions. Our study speaks to the ways in which authoritarian-era histories can potentially explain the success of parties aimed explicitly at the representation of ethnic minorities in new democracies.

Additionally, our findings constitute an important empirical contribution to the study of Myanmar. With a population roughly equivalent to that of South Korea or Kenya and significantly larger than the populations of Argentina, Spain, or Ukraine, Myanmar is a large country as well as one of the world's youngest democracies. Yet, thanks to decades of self-imposed isolation, Myanmar has gone largely unstudied by political scientists and has rarely figured into debates in comparative politics. In testing a series of hypotheses about the success of ethnic-minority parties in Myanmar, this article offers a range of descriptive insights about Myanmar's nascent democracy, particularly with respect to ethnic politics. For many decades, because "ethnic politics [was] concentrated largely in extra-parliamentary politics, that being the armed struggle" (Watson, 2015), examining ethnic politics in Myanmar meant studying armed ethnic organizations, civil war, and ceasefire deals. However, with the 2015 election, ethnic politics in Myanmar is now about ballot boxes as well as bullets, and our study represents a first step in better understanding the nexus between electoral politics and ethnic politics in this new democracy.

Importantly, now that Myanmar has emerged from its long period of extreme isolation, we see little reason to expect that Myanmar's experience with EMPs is unique. For the purposes of our analysis, two particularly salient features of the 2015 election in Myanmar stand out: the country's recent transition to democracy and the salience of ethnic identities whose members are geographically concentrated. The combination of these two features is hardly uncommon. According to the Minorities at Risk (MAR) and Polity IV datasets,⁴ 44 countries (apart from Myanmar) have geographically-concentrated minorities at risk and are either, as of 2018, newly democratic or non-democratic (and therefore potentially new democracies in the future).⁵ This group includes countries around the world, but with an especially large number in Sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ethiopia) and Asia (e.g., Afghanistan and Thailand). We anticipate that our findings from Myanmar may be of particular use for understanding contexts like these if and when they fully (re-)democratize.

1. Background: Myanmar's electoral history

Myanmar, then known as Burma, gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1948.⁶ After winning elections in 1947 to form the country's Constituent Assembly, the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) then won the country's first two post-independence multiparty elections, in 1951–52 and 1956. In 1958, the military stepped in as a caretaker government and held multiparty elections in 1960. The 1960 election again returned an AFPFL government, which the military toppled in 1962, ushering in a period of military rule that lasted until 2015.

From 1962 to 1988, a military-led socialist regime governed Myanmar. During much of that time, elections took place, but the sole legal party was the military-backed Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP). Following nationwide protests in 1988, known as the 8888 Uprising, the military agreed to hold multiparty elections in 1990, though scholars disagree as to whether these elections were intended to form a legislature or an assembly to draft a new constitution (Tonkin, 2007). Either way, the successor to the BSPP, the National Unity Party (NUP), performed disastrously, while the National League for Democracy (NLD), founded after the 8888 Uprising by Aung San Suu Kyi, won decisively. The military immediately annulled the results of the election, resulting in a period of direct military rule, no longer with socialist trappings.

After the 8888 Uprising, the military regime was led by the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), later reconstituted as the State Peace and Development Council, and lasted for 20 years. By the end of 1992 nearly all of the 93 political parties that had competed in the 1990 elections were banned; the ten remaining legal parties included the NLD, NUP, and the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) (Shan Taing Yin Tar, 2015). Then, in January 1993 the SLORC convened the National Convention to draft a new constitution. In that same year, the SLORC established the Union Solidarity and Development Association, which was transformed into the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) in 2010. The national convention process eventually culminated in the 2008 constitution, which reserves 25 percent of seats in the parliament for military personnel. Following the promulgation of a new constitution, the military regime held elections in 2010. Although a number of EMPs competed in the 2010 election, the NLD and nearly all of the EMPs founded before the previous election in 1990 boycotted the 2010 contest, and many observers declared the election fraudulent (Lidauer, 2012; Turnell, 2011).⁷ The pre-1990 parties that boycotted the 2010 election were then effectively banned by the government, as they had failed to register with the Union Election Commission.

In 2015, the military-backed regime headed by the USDP held elections, this time with the participation of all major parties and few claims of fraud. The 2015 election marked a series of firsts—the first free and fair election held since 1990, the first election since 1960 whose results were not immediately annulled, and the first election ever to produce a democratic transfer of power. The NLD won a sweeping victory, garnering a majority of votes cast and more than three-quarters of the elected seats in both chambers of the national legislature.

1.1. A closer look at the 2015 election

In 2015, Myanmar held simultaneous elections to its lower legislative house (Pyithu Hluttaw or House of Representatives), upper legislative house (Amyotha Hluttaw or House of Nationalities), and fourteen

³ See Levitsky and Way (2010) on competitive authoritarianism.

⁴ Minorities at Risk Project, 2009; Polity, 2019.

⁵ We treat a country as having a geographically concentrated minority at risk if the country has a group coded as 2 ("Majority in one region, others dispersed") or 3 ("Concentrated in one region") on the GROUPECON variable or a group with a regional base on the GC2 variable. We follow Polity IV's guidelines, treating a country as a democracy if it has a score of 6 or higher. We code a country as having recently transitioned to democracy if it scored a 6 or higher in 2018 (the last year available in the latest Polity IV data) but scored less than 6 at some point in the previous five years.

⁶ The military regime changed the country's name from Burma to Myanmar in 1989. For consistency, we refer to the country as Myanmar, regardless of the time period under consideration.

⁷ The Kokang Democracy and Unity Party, Lahu National Development Party and Mro National Development Party were the only pre-1990 EMPs that registered and competed in the 2010 election.

subnational legislatures (State and Regional Hluttaws or Local Assemblies). In all legislatures, 25% of seats were reserved for military appointees, and all elected legislators were chosen using single-member district plurality (SMDP) rules. Throughout, we focus on the House of Representatives because it is the larger of the two national legislative chambers. However, the results of the lower house, upper house, and subnational assemblies were very similar, meaning that our conclusions would not substantively change if our focus were, instead, the upper house or the country’s subnational legislatures.⁸

Administratively, Myanmar is divided into seven regions, seven states, and one Union territory comprising the capital, Naypyidaw. Myanmar’s seven regions and the Union territory of Naypyidaw are located primarily in central and lower Myanmar and are majority Bamar, the ethnic group that accounts for nearly 70% of the country’s population and has been politically dominant since Myanmar gained independence in 1948. In contrast, the seven states, located in Myanmar’s east and west, all have large ethnic-minority populations. In fact, each state’s name comes from a titular ethnic-minority group. Although titular groups tend to be heavily concentrated in their titular states, both non-titular ethnic minorities and Bamars are also present, often in considerable numbers. Because Myanmar’s ethnic minorities are heavily concentrated in the country’s seven states, our analysis centers exclusively on Myanmar’s states, where EMPs competed widely.

The two main national parties in the 2015 election were the NLD, the leading pro-democracy party headed by Aung Sang Suu Kyi, and the USDP, the ruling party backed by the military. Both are dominated by Myanmar’s ethnic-majority group, the Bamars (Belford, 2015). In all seven administrative regions and in Naypyidaw, these two parties together won at least 85% of the vote, often more. In Myanmar’s states, where ethnic minorities are numerous, these two major national parties faced opposition from a wide range of parties that explicitly targeted ethnic minorities for support. In total, 51 of the 91 parties competing in the 2015 election represented ethnic or religious minorities (TNI, 2015). However, the NLD’s sweeping victory in 2015 extended to most of Myanmar’s ethnic-minority dominated states as well.

On the whole, EMPs fared poorly. However, as Table 1 highlights, there was considerable variation across states. Table 1 lists the percentage of seats won by EMPs in the various legislatures. (The bottom row in the far right column aggregates the results for the seven local assemblies elected in Myanmar’s states). The results for all three types of legislative election tell a broadly similar subnational story. Rakhine State was the only state where EMPs won a clear majority of seats. In Shan State, these parties were relatively less successful, but still won a bit less than half of all seats. In Chin and Kachin States, EMPs did not do

particularly well but nevertheless won some representation (except in the House of Nationalities from Kachin State). Finally, in Mon, Kayin, and Kayah States, EMPs secured very little representation. Interestingly, there was hardly any variation in the state-level USDP vote share; in the House of Representatives, the USDP’s vote share ranged between 22% and 27% across the seven states. In contrast, the NLD vote share varied with the success or failure of EMPs. Where EMPs did well (in Rakhine and Shan States), the NLD did relatively poorly, whereas the NLD won a clear plurality of the vote—close to or more than 50%—in states where EMPs did poorly (in Kayah, Kayin, and Mon States). What explains variation across space in the performance of EMPs?

2. Hypotheses

The 2015 election was a founding election—that is, an inaugural post-authoritarian contest—that took place following decades of ethnic conflict and, in most races, pitted Bamar-dominated national parties against EMPs. This simple description of the election in Myanmar’s states suggests four hypotheses that could explain variation in EMP success, all of which resonate with existing literature, primarily in ethnic politics. To these four hypotheses, we add a fifth, which is somewhat more specific to Myanmar but draws on a broader literature on the role of authoritarian-era politics in shaping democratic elections.

2.1. Party-system fragmentation

Most races in Myanmar’s states featured multiparty competition. Our first hypothesis is that *ethnic-minority parties were more successful in gaining legislative representation in places where the ethnic-minority vote was more heavily concentrated behind one or a small number of ethnic-minority parties than in places where the ethnic-minority party vote was fragmented across many parties*. On face, this hypothesis appears self-evident. In the context of Myanmar’s SMDP electoral rules, the more fragmented the landscape of EMPs, the less likely that any one of them should win a seat. For instance, suppose that EMPs won 60% of the vote in two different constituencies. In one constituency a single EMP won 60% of the vote, while in the other constituency that 60% was divided equally among three EMPs. Whereas the EMP winning 60% of the vote necessarily wins the seat, each of the EMPs winning 20% of the vote in the other seat could easily lose to one of Myanmar’s national parties. In other words, party-system fragmentation—not variation in EMPs’ ability to win votes—could potentially explain nearly all the variation that we observe in where EMPs won seats. Indeed, Thawngmung (2016) attributes the NLD’s victory at least partly to the “fragmentation of small ethnic political parties and a first-past-the-post electoral system that favors large parties” (136).

We know that the fragmentation of the EMP vote should, in theory, diminish the likelihood of EMPs winning seats. However, in practice, we might not find evidence in support of this hypothesis. If the fragmentation of the EMP vote is fairly consistent across constituencies, then EMPs might simply win seats in those places where they win more votes and fail to win in places where they win fewer votes. To illustrate, if nearly all constituencies feature two EMPs of roughly similar size, then whether an EMP wins a seat will depend on whether EMPs corner, say, 80% of the vote in the constituency or 20%. A casual perusal of election results in 2015 suggests that variation in where EMPs win seats stems largely from EMPs’ vote shares, not simply from the fragmentation of the EMP vote. But, systematically testing this hypothesis about the fragmentation of the EMP vote is essential for determining whether variation in EMPs’ ability to win seats is ultimately a function of how popular these parties are (a question to which our other hypotheses directly speak) or a function of how many EMPs are competing (which would potentially suggest a very different set of underlying causes).

Table 1
Ethnic-minority party (EMP) performance in Myanmar’s 2015 elections.

Percent of Seats Won by EMPs			
State	House of Representatives (lower house)	House of Nationalities (upper house)	Local Assemblies
Rakhine	70.6	83.3	64.7
Shan	41.7	50.0	43.8
Chin	22.2	16.7	10.0
Kachin	16.7	0	16.7
Mon	0	8.3	15.0
Kayin	0	0	7.1
Kayah	0	0	0
Seats won/ total seats	37/116	19/84	76/232

⁸ For instance, the NLD’s constituency-level vote share in the House of Representatives is almost perfectly correlated (correlation coefficient = 0.9883) with its performance in the Local Assemblies.

2.2. Candidate selection

Across nearly every constituency in Myanmar's states, multiparty competition featured candidates from national parties dominated by Myanmar's ethnic majority, Bamar, as well as candidates from EMPs. Our second hypothesis is that *ethnic-minority parties were more electorally successful where national parties fielded Bamar (that is, non-ethnic-minority) candidates*. Chandra (2004) famously argues that in patronage-democracies ethnic parties succeed on the basis of the ethnic profile of their candidates and leading members.⁹ Voters count the heads of leaders and vote for the party that provides the greatest representation to members of their ethnic group. According to this logic, since EMPs in Myanmar explicitly target certain ethnic-minority groups and Bamar dominate the NLD and USDP, EMPs should be the preferred choice of most ethnic-minority voters in Myanmar's states.

In the context of Myanmar, a preference for EMPs among ethnic-minority voters is, however, unlikely to be due mainly to co-ethnic patronage networks or expectations of material benefits. Historically, EMPs have not had the resources to hand out material benefits in exchange for votes during the campaign period or make credible promises of material rewards after the election¹⁰; only the military-backed USDP was able to do so.¹¹ The EMPs primarily run on a message of ethnic-minority rights, amending the constitution, and instituting federalism. Some EMP officials explicitly told their voters that their parties aimed to work for long-term systemic changes rather than for short-term material benefits, and that the voters should not expect cheap handouts from them.¹² In other words, a preference for EMPs among some ethnic-minority voters likely stems from either the "psychic benefits"—such as dignity or self-esteem—that voters receive thanks to voting for a co-ethnic or longer-term policy promises.

National parties can potentially blunt whatever appeal EMPs have among ethnic-minority voters by fielding ethnic-minority candidates, especially if voters focus as much on the ethnicity of candidates running in their constituencies as they do on the overall ethnic profile of the parties' candidates (Chauchard, 2016). Indeed, if national parties field ethnic-minority candidates that diminish the appeal of EMPs but can also promise national-level influence—since many "believed only big parties can develop their region" (MacGregor 2015)—then national parties might have an advantage over much smaller EMPs whose national-level influence is limited. As such, Thawngmung (2016: 137) argues that part of the NLD's appeal in ethnic-minority areas stemmed from its decision to field ethnic-minority candidates.

Fielding ethnic-minority candidates in constituencies in Myanmar's states was the unofficial policy of both the NLD and USDP. However, factors such as the size of the ethnic-minority population, the fragmentation of this population into multiple groups, and the ability to recruit ethnic-minority candidates likely affected whether the national parties actually fielded an ethnic-minority candidate, rather than a Bamar, in a particular constituency. The vast majority of constituencies in Myanmar's states include both ethnic-minority and Bamar populations. If the ethnic-minority population in a constituency is highly

⁹ The USDP, which held power in the late stages of military rule, engaged in extensive patronage. The NLD, which has been in power since 2015, certainly has the discretion to engage in widespread patronage. But, given the paucity of academic literature on this subject, it is unclear whether Myanmar in 2015 ought to be classified as a patronage-democracy.

¹⁰ Interview with Myihtoi Zau Lat, Kachin State People's Party official, Myitkyina, October 12, 2019; Interview with Shing Tun, Chin National League for Democracy senior party official, Yangon, October 15, 2019; Interview with Sai Nyunt Lwin, SNLD senior party official, Yangon, December 12, 2019.

¹¹ The USDP has funded many development projects, such as boreholes, wells, and small bridges, across Myanmar. During the 2015 election, it also handed out solar panels, batteries and light bulbs in villages without electricity.

¹² Interview with Myihtoi Zau Lat, Kachin State People's Party official, Myitkyina, October 12, 2019.

fragmented across multiple groups, then Bamar might constitute the single largest group, and fielding a Bamar candidate may be advantageous. Or, if certain ethnic-minority groups were unlikely to vote for a candidate from a rival ethnic minority group, then Bamar might constitute the most neutral ethnic profile to win over voters from several ethnic communities. Furthermore, several EMPs often simultaneously targeted the same ethnic-minority groups in a single constituency, alongside national parties, heightening the possibility of vote splitting. For example, three Chin parties, four Kachin parties, and three Rakhine parties competed in the 2015 Lower House Election. If vote splitting was highly likely among ethnic-minority communities in a constituency, then winning over Bamar voters might be crucial to success in Myanmar's SMDP electoral system.

Even if the national parties wished to field an ethnic-minority candidate, candidate selection ultimately requires successful recruitment, which can be an *ad hoc* process. In some constituencies, the headquarter party officials would select, recruit and "assign" candidates to constituencies without input from—and sometimes over the objection of—local party officials.¹³ In contrast, in some constituencies, local party officials recruited and selected potential candidates.¹⁴ The national parties used various tactics to recruit reputable and well-known individuals from ethnic-minority communities. For example, an ethnic-minority USDP MP was offered a lucrative position in the regional government if he agreed to compete as a USDP candidate in the election.¹⁵ In another case, the NLD attempted, but failed, to poach a high-ranking member of an EMP, who was formerly an NLD member.¹⁶ If a party was unsuccessful in recruiting its top choice, it might attempt to recruit another individual with the same ethnic profile or move on to a candidate with a positive local reputation but less than ideal ethnic (read: Bamar) profile.

In all, the NLD and USDP fielded ethnic-minority candidates in nearly three quarters of the constituencies in Myanmar's states. The EMPs, of course, fielded ethnic-minority candidates everywhere. We expect the national parties to be more successful, on average, in constituencies where they fielded ethnic-minority candidates, and the EMPs to be more successful in constituencies where the national parties fielded Bamar candidates.

2.3. Ethnic demography

Although each state in Myanmar is named after a titular minority group, Myanmar's states are nevertheless ethnically heterogeneous. Our third hypothesis is that *ethnic-minority parties were more electorally successful where ethnic minorities are more numerous*. Horowitz (1985) describes elections in some contexts as approximating ethnic censuses, in which election results closely mirror a society's demographic breakdown, with each party winning support from a particular ethnic group. If elections in Myanmar's states assumed a census-like quality, then EMPs should be more successful in places with more ethnic-minority voters and less successful in places with larger Bamar populations.

Even if voting behavior is not nearly as polarized as in countries like Trinidad and Tobago or Guyana, which Horowitz cites as cases of census elections, EMPs should still have performed worse, on average, in areas with large Bamar populations. Assuming that EMPs are unlikely to attract the support of Bamar voters, then as the pool of ethnic minorities decreases, EMPs must win an increasingly large *share* of ethnic-minority voters in order to win the same absolute vote share. For example, if one

¹³ Interview with Saw Hla Tin, NLD party member, Hpa-an, October 21, 2019.

¹⁴ Interview with LNS, an ethnic minority USDP MP, Yangon, December 11, 2019.

¹⁵ Interview with LNS, an ethnic minority USDP MP, Yangon, December 11, 2019.

¹⁶ Interview with Mahn Min Ye Htun, Karen National Party senior party official, Yangon, November 1, 2019.

constituency is 10% Bamar and another is 50% Bamar, then 90% of voters in the former constituency are potential EMP voters, whereas only 50% are in the latter case. For EMPs to win 45% of the vote, they only need to win half of their potential voters (45% of the vote from 90% of voters) in the former case but 90% in the latter case (45% of the vote from 50% of voters). When EMPs have a larger pool of potential voters, they can afford to be less successful in winning over their target audience and still win large vote shares.

2.4. Conflict

Myanmar's election took place against a backdrop of recent or ongoing conflict. Indeed, ethnic conflict was ongoing in Kachin, Rakhine and Shan states in the months leading up to the election as well as after the election.¹⁷ Our fourth hypothesis is that *ethnic-minority parties were more electorally successful where there was ongoing ethnic conflict*. Voters bring many considerations to bear when voting and have multiple identities that can influence their vote choice. Ethnicity may be one of many identities that voters consider when deciding whom to vote for, and the salience of ethnic-minority identities in Myanmar may vary from one place to another. One of the most obvious sources of such variation is violence. Violence and conflict can heighten the salience of ethnic identity in electoral politics if violence plays out along ethnic lines or when violence targets certain ethnic groups (Wilkinson, 2004, Hadzic et al., 2020). Therefore, voters for whom conflict is an ongoing reality may be more likely to privilege their ethnic identities when voting, leading them to cast a ballot for an EMP. Meanwhile, for voters for whom conflict is more (temporally or spatially) remote, they may privilege other identities or issues when voting, which might lead ethnic-minority voters to vote for national parties.

2.5. Party history

Finally, we suggest a fifth hypothesis rooted in the histories of various EMPs. *Ethnic-minority parties were more electorally successful where pre-1990 ethnic-minority parties competed than in places with newer ethnic-minority parties*. Looking to the authoritarian past to understand democratic elections has considerable precedent. Important features of democratic party systems often stem from authoritarian-era politics (Hicken and Kuhonta, 2011; Riedl, 2014). Many parties competing in new democracies were either former authoritarian incumbents (Loxton, 2015) or parties active in opposing the authoritarian regime. The EMPs that competed in Myanmar's 2015 election emerged in three waves: prior to the annulled 1990 election, just prior to the fraudulent 2010 election, and just prior to the 2015 election. We expect the older parties, particularly those founded prior to 1990, to be more electorally successful for several reasons.

First, older parties tend to have an electoral advantage over newly organized parties (Turner, 1990). Thanks to their long histories, EMPs established before 1990 are far more likely to enjoy widespread name recognition. Additionally, EMPs that survived from before 1990 until 2015 are predominantly those that ran successful campaigns in 1990, suggesting that they have some sense of how to run a winning campaign. In contrast, most of the pre-1990 EMPs that were unsuccessful in the 1990 election ceased to exist. The very fact of an EMP's survival from 1990 until 2015 points to a certain measure of organizational acumen that may help it attract voters.

Second, a comparative advantage of the EMPs from prior to 1990 may stem from their "political dignity," since ethnic-minority voters

"respect the 1990 parties for the sacrifices they made."¹⁸ The older EMPs are not tainted by association with the military junta, like some of the newer EMPs are; rather, they are associated with the longstanding democratic opposition, the NLD. During the 1990 elections, more than a dozen EMPs allied with the NLD, the main democratic opposition movement in the country (Muller et al., 2012). One component of the alliance involved coordination on candidates; the NLD sat out races where it expected an EMP-candidate could win. The second component of the alliance was an agreement to form a coalition government after the election. Of course, none of these parties assumed power after the election, and many of the EMP leaders were ultimately jailed along with NLD leaders.

Whereas this older generation of EMPs stood up to the military dictatorship, the former military junta and, later, the military-backed USDP co-opted some of the newer EMPs, thereby reducing their standing within their respective ethnic communities.¹⁹ Additionally, nearly all the pre-1990 EMPs boycotted the 2010 election along with the NLD because they argued that the 2008 constitution was undemocratic. However, the newer EMPs, particular those newly founded before the 2010 election, participated anyway. So, when the pre-1990 EMPs registered for the election in 2015, the newer EMPs that competed in 2010 were cast as the parties that had accepted the 2008 constitution even though they claimed to have done so in order to amend the constitution.²⁰ These party reputations, though sometimes based on presumptions and suspicions, may well have been especially relevant given the lack of ideological differentiation among Myanmar's EMPs. Since "aside from a general commitment to democracy and federalism, few [EMPs] have any apparent ideological underpinnings or developed party platforms" (Pedersen, 2008: 51), the extent to which EMPs were tied (or not) to the former authoritarian regime may have been especially helpful to voters when deciding how to vote.

There is a third possible reason why the older EMPs may have enjoyed an electoral advantage over newer EMPs: continued political activity over a prolonged period of time. Though this reason may well apply to other contexts, we suspect that it carries less weight in the context of Myanmar's 2015 election. As noted above, most of the EMPs that competed in the 1990 election disbanded by early 1993, effectively ceasing to function. Many EMP leaders were also arrested or exiled. Among the pre-1990 EMPs that re-registered and competed in the 2015 election (12 parties in the Lower House election), only half had remained legal during the military junta. While there is very little information about EMPs' grassroots engagement during military rule, a party history compiled by the leading Shan party (SNLD) suggests that EMPs' activities primarily pertained to participation in the national convention to draft a new constitution and mobilizing the "no vote" in the referendum on the 2008 constitution (Shan Taing Yin Tar, 2015). Additionally, the SNLD organized youth conferences and collected money from the Shan community to help victims of natural disasters and armed conflict in other areas of the country. There was some, albeit very limited, social assistance to co-ethnics.²¹ Given that the SNLD is one of the strongest and most well-organized EMPs, other pre-1990 EMPs likely

¹⁸ Interview with Shing Tun, CNLD senior party official, Yangon, October 15, 2019.

¹⁹ While not all of the newer EMPs were junta sympathizers, a number have been flagged as such. For example, the Unity and Democracy Party of Kachin state, which was established just prior to the 2010 election, has been profiled as a party that allied with the Union Solidarity and Development Party in the 2010 election (Election Parties, 2015). In a similar manner, the Pao National Organization is described as having been "formally allied with the USDP in 2010, with the military-backed party electing not to field candidates against it" (Election Parties, 2015).

²⁰ Interview with JE, election monitor in 2010, Yangon, December 16, 2019.

²¹ The SNLD gave vocational trainings and provided housing for youths at the party headquarter in Yangon to attend English and computer training (Shan Taing Yin Tar, 2015). However, very few actually attended these programs.

¹⁷ When referring to ethnic conflict, we include both vertical ethnic conflicts between ethnic minorities and the government and horizontal ethnic conflicts between two minority groups. The vast majority of ethnic conflict in Myanmar has been vertical conflict, though the Rohingya crisis in Rakhine state is both a horizontal and vertical ethnic conflict.

engaged in fewer mobilization activities in their co-ethnic communities during this period.

All told, although the electoral context in 2015 was overwhelmingly one of low information, ethnic-minority voters likely had more information about the pre-1990 EMPs than the newer EMPs, and if they had any priors about the newer EMPs at all, they were potentially more negative than positive. Hence, we expect that constituencies featuring older EMPs to be those where EMPs were more successful.

3. Where did EMPs succeed?

We test our five hypotheses quantitatively. Our unit of analysis is the election constituency, though, as noted above, we restrict ourselves to constituencies in Myanmar's ethnic-minority dominated states. Until recently, the scarcity of data in Myanmar has made quantitative analysis of many political topics all but impossible. However, since Myanmar started liberalizing in 2011, government administrative data have become increasingly accessible. The main dataset utilized in this study comes from the Union Election Commission (UEC), which was established in 2010 to organize and oversee Myanmar's elections. The UEC website published official election results for elections to the upper and lower houses and regional assemblies in 2010 and 2015.²² The official results include each candidate's name, party affiliation, vote count, and vote share. We supplement this data from the UEC with demographic information on candidates—namely, ethnicity, gender, age, religion—prepared by Enlightened Myanmar Research Foundation, a Yangon-based non-profit research institution.²³ Constituency-level ethnic demographic data comes from the 2017 Township Reports compiled by the Ministry of Home Affairs' General Administration Department (GAD).²⁴ These reports are organized and made available online by the Myanmar Information Management Unit, which is managed by the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Myanmar.²⁵

3.1. Variables

In the analysis presented below, we examine two dependent variables. The first, *EMP Win*, is a dummy variable indicating whether an EMP won in the constituency. It is coded as 1 if an EMP won and 0 otherwise. In later analyses, our dependent variable is, *EMP Vote*, a continuous variable measuring the combined vote share won by all EMPs in the constituency.

We operationalize our independent variables of interest as follows. To test our first hypothesis about party fragmentation, *EMP ENP* is the effective number of EMPs in the constituency. In other words, we calculate a standard effective number of parties measure, but only for votes for EMPs. For instance, if national parties won 40% of the vote and EMPs won 60% of the vote, then *EMP ENP* would capture the fragmentation of the vote only for the 60% of the vote won by EMPs. If a single EMP accounts for all of the 60% of the vote won by EMPs, then the value of *EMP ENP* would be 1, indicating that 100% of the EMP vote was won by a single party. In contrast, if there were two EMPs, one winning 35% of the vote and the other 25% of the vote, then *EMP ENP* would be 1.95, indicating a roughly even split of the EMP vote between two parties. We expect that as *EMP ENP* increases, EMPs should be less likely to win seats. Alongside *EMP ENP*, we also include *ENP Vote* as an independent variable in our initial analyses in which *EMP Win* is the dependent variable. We do so to test the extent to which EMPs' aggregate popularity (measured through *EMP Vote*) or the fragmentation of

their support (*EMP ENP*) better predicts their ability to win legislative seats. In analyses in which *EMP Vote* is our dependent variable, we do not include *EMP ENP* as a predictor.²⁶

To test our second hypothesis about candidate selection, we rely on two dummy variables indicating whether the two main national parties fielded ethnic-majority Bamar candidates. *NLD Bamar* is coded as 1 if the NLD fielded a Bamar but 0 if the NLD fielded an ethnic-minority candidate. *USDP Bamar* is coded as 1 when the USDP fielded a Bamar but 0 if the USDP fielded an ethnic-minority candidate. We expect that where the NLD or USDP fielded Bamar candidates, EMPs should be more likely to win and should win larger vote shares. Thus, *NLD Bamar* and *USDP Bamar* should be positively correlated with *EMP Win* and *EMP Vote*.

To test our third hypothesis about ethnic demography, *Ethnic Minority Population* captures the percentage of the constituency belonging to an ethnic minority. Only the "officially recognized" ethnic minorities are included in the percentage.²⁷ In other words, ethnic minorities such as Chinese or Indians are excluded from the ethnic minority percentage in our data. We exclude them because no EMPs claim to represent their interests,²⁸ and thus, it is unlikely that they would have been potential EMP voters. Put another way, the variable *Ethnic Minority Population* reflects the potential pool of voters for EMPs. In any event, these minorities tend to make up fairly small portion of the population in our constituencies. We also adjusted the data from the township reports compiled by the General Administration Department for Rakhine State in order to reflect the mass disenfranchisement of Rohingyas, a Muslim ethnic minority group that is primarily concentrated in Rakhine State.²⁹ We expect that *Ethnic Minority Population* should be positive correlated with both *EMP Win* and *EMP Vote*.

To test our fourth hypothesis about conflict, *Ongoing Conflict* is an indicator variable that takes a value of 1 if the constituency is located in a state where ethnic conflict was ongoing in the year leading up to the 2015 election and 0 otherwise. Ethnic conflict in Myanmar has been ongoing since independence. Since then, the government and various armed ethnic organizations have brokered a series of ceasefire negotiations and agreements, though many of the agreements have broken down, sometimes leading to the formation of new armed groups or

²⁶ The total EMP vote and the fragmentation of the EMP vote are determined simultaneously, so one cannot cause the other. It is possible that voters' expectations regarding the fragmentation of the EMP vote could influence vote choice and therefore overall levels of EMP vote, but we do not have strong expectations that this should be the case.

²⁷ The Myanmar government officially recognizes 136 ethnic groups, "taing yin thar" in Burmese (Thawngmung and Yadana, 2018). Members of these officially recognized ethnic groups are considered "full citizens" while others can be either "associate" (qualified for citizenship under the previous 1948 citizenship law) or "naturalized" citizens (have been in Myanmar for three generations). Those with associate citizenship cannot occupy any government office while those with naturalized citizenship are prohibited from holding any important political office and from serving in the armed offices (Thawngmung and Yadana, 2018).

²⁸ Democracy and Human Rights Party claims to represent the interests of the Rohingya, but the party only fielded three candidates, all of whom competed for seats in the State/Regional Hluttaw. No EMPs that competed for the Pyithu Hluttaw claimed to represent the Rohingyas.

²⁹ In February 2015, the President's Office announced that temporary ID cards would expire on March 31, 2015, effectively revoking the card holders' right to vote. Kean and Min. (2015) report that this notice most affected the Rohingya who held 600,000–700,000 of these cards. The adjustment we make in our data involves subtracting the Rohingya population, reported as "Bangladeshi" in the GAD township report, from the constituency population. For example, in Kyauktaw Township, the total population, including the Rohingya population, was 217,867 and the ethnic minority population would have been 79%. However, by subtracting the Rohingya population from the total population, the new total population became 175,082 and the ethnic minority population is 98%.

²² See www.ueumyanmar.org for details.

²³ The demographic data originally come from the UEC. See www.mypilar.org.

²⁴ We rely on estimates from the GAD's Township Reports because ethnic demographic data from the 2014 Census reports are still unavailable.

²⁵ See www.themimu.info for more information.

splinters from existing ones. The most recent round of ceasefire negotiations began in 2011 when Myanmar started transitioning away from a military government. Several armed ethnic organizations signed ceasefire agreements, but the Kachin Independence Organization, the Arakan (Rakhine) Army, and several armed ethnic organizations operating in Shan state have not signed ceasefire agreements. Furthermore, the Rohingya crisis in Rakhine continued during the months leading up to the election. Therefore, ethnic conflict status is coded as “ongoing” in constituencies in Kachin, Rakhine and Shan states.³⁰ We expect that *Ongoing Conflict* is positively associated with *EMP Win* and *EMP Vote*.

Finally, we test our fifth hypothesis about party history using two related variables. The first is *Pre-1990 EMP*, which takes a value of 1 if a constituency features an EMP established prior to the 1990 election and 0 otherwise. Our coding of party history is based on a Transnational Institute’s policy briefing paper (TNI, 2015).³¹ However, since older EMPs often competed alongside newer EMPs, it is possible that newer EMPs could account for the bulk of the EMP vote even where older EMPs are present. We therefore create a second variable, *Pre-1990 Leading EMP*, which takes a value of 1 if a constituency’s most electorally successful EMP was established prior to 1990 and 0 otherwise.

3.2. Analysis

We begin in model 1 of Table 2 with just two independent variables, *EMP ENP* and *EMP Vote* (which we later use as our dependent variable), to test our first hypothesis about party system fragmentation. In other words, did EMPs lose because they did not get enough votes, or because the votes they received were split among several EMPs? If variation in where EMPs won was purely a function of the fragmentation of the EMP vote and not variation in the vote shares won by EMPs, then our second, third, fourth, and fifth hypotheses—which speak to EMPs’ vote winning capacities—would be moot. Our dependent variable in model 1 is *EMP Win*. Because it is a binary variable, model 1 is estimated using logistic regression, with standard errors clustered by state. Model 1 shows that while fragmentation decreases EMPs’ probability of winning, EMPs’ overall levels of support primarily drive whether an EMP wins.

Fig. 1 presents the predicted probabilities of an EMP winning in a constituency as *EMP Vote* varies (left panel) and *EMP ENP* varies (right panel).³² As the left panel demonstrates, when EMPs win a small vote share, the predicted probability of an EMP winning the seat is, unsurprisingly, close to 0. Once the overall level of support for EMPs reaches about 50% (or 0.50 on the figure), the predicted probability for *EMP Win* reaches nearly 70%, and once it is past about 60%, the likelihood that an EMP wins the seat is close to 1. In other words, if EMPs win a majority of votes in a given constituency, they are highly likely to win a seat in that constituency. In contrast, though the predicted probability of an EMP winning a seat goes down as *EMP ENP* increases—that is, as the EMP

³⁰ For more information on the location of armed clashes between ethnic minority rebels and the government since 2013, see the Peace Monitoring Dashboard which is compiled by the Myanmar Peace Monitor (www.mmpeacemonitor.org).

³¹ Though we treat the Karen National Party as a pre-1990 EMP based on the TNI coding, according to Mahn Min Ye Htun, a KNP senior party official, no pre-1990 Karen EMP survived to the 2010 or 2015 elections. The results in Table 2 do not change if the KNP is coded as a pre-2015 rather than pre-1990 EMP. Another thing to note regarding coding of party history concerns the Arakan National Party (ANP). The ANP formed from a merger between the Arakan League for Democracy (ALD), a pre-1990 EMP, and the Rakhine Nationalities Development Party, a pre-2010 EMP. However, the ANP is coded as a pre-1990 EMP, because it likely enjoys the reputation of having “political dignity” given that the ALD is its constituent part. Our findings in Table 2 remain consistent when Rakhine State, where the ANP competed, is excluded from the analysis (see Table A2 in the appendix).

³² These predicted probabilities are calculated with the other variable in the model set to its mean, which is 1.88 for *EMP ENP* and 38.55% for *EMP Vote*.

Table 2
Constituency-level analysis: Regressions on EMPs’ performance.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	EMP win	EMP win	EMP win	EMP vote	EMP vote
EMP ENP	-3.88* (2.07)	-1.81*** (0.43)	-1.34*** (0.42)		
EMP Vote	42.87*** (10.50)				
NLD Bamar		0.11 (0.28)	-0.42 (0.38)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.02)
USDP Bamar		-1.01** (0.51)	-1.22** (0.53)	-0.05** (0.02)	-0.05** (0.02)
Ethnic Min. Pop.		5.97*** (1.67)	5.26** (2.17)	0.31*** (0.04)	0.30*** (0.03)
On-going Conflict		2.93*** (0.67)	2.52*** (0.85)	0.17*** (0.03)	0.14*** (0.02)
Pre-1990 EMP		1.25** (0.57)		0.16*** (0.03)	
Pre-1990 Leading EMP			2.00*** (0.49)		0.16*** (0.02)
Cons	-13.00*** (2.88)	-6.49*** (2.30)	-6.39*** (2.21)	-0.13** (0.05)	-0.06*** (0.01)
N	114	103	103	103	103
R2				0.44	0.48

p* < 0.1; *p* < 0.05; ****p* < 0.01.

vote is increasingly split across many parties—the association is far weaker.

Since model 1 in Table 2 and Fig. 1 make clear that EMPs’ seat-winning ability is not just a function of the fragmentation of the EMP vote, we next turn to testing our remaining four hypotheses. In lieu of *EMP Vote* we include in models 2 and 3 the independent variables testing our other four hypotheses. This analysis uncovers support for our third, fourth, and fifth hypotheses about ethnic demography, conflict, and party history, respectively. Larger ethnic-minority populations, ongoing ethnic conflict in the state, and an older EMP competing in the constituency are all associated with larger vote shares for EMPs. The only difference between models 2 and 3 is that we use *Pre-1990 EMP* in model 2 and *Pre-1990 Lead EMP* in model 3. The results are very similar in both models.

Interestingly, we find no support for the candidate selection hypothesis. In model 2, the coefficient on *NLD Bamar* is small and imprecisely estimated, suggesting that there is little correlation between whether the NLD fields a Bamar or ethnic-minority candidate and the success of EMPs. Fig. 2 presents the predicted probabilities of *EMP Win* for our independent variables of interest, based on model 3. The upper left panel of Fig. 2 shows that the predicted probability of an EMP winning does not really change depending on whether the NLD fields a Bamar candidate (right side of the panel) or not (left side).

Furthermore, we find that the probability of an EMP winning actually *decreases* in constituencies where the USDP fielded a Bamar candidate. This surprising correlation is not a function of the demographic make-up a constituency. One possibility is that the USDP (and NLD) field Bamar candidates only in those constituencies where there is a large Bamar population. We might therefore observe a negative correlation between USDP Bamar candidates and EMP vote because the places where the USDP fields Bamars are those that are demographically less favorable to EMPs. However, when we interact *USDP Bamar* and *Ethnic Minority Population*, we find that the negative association between *USDP Bamar* and *EMP Vote* is actually driven by constituencies with *large*

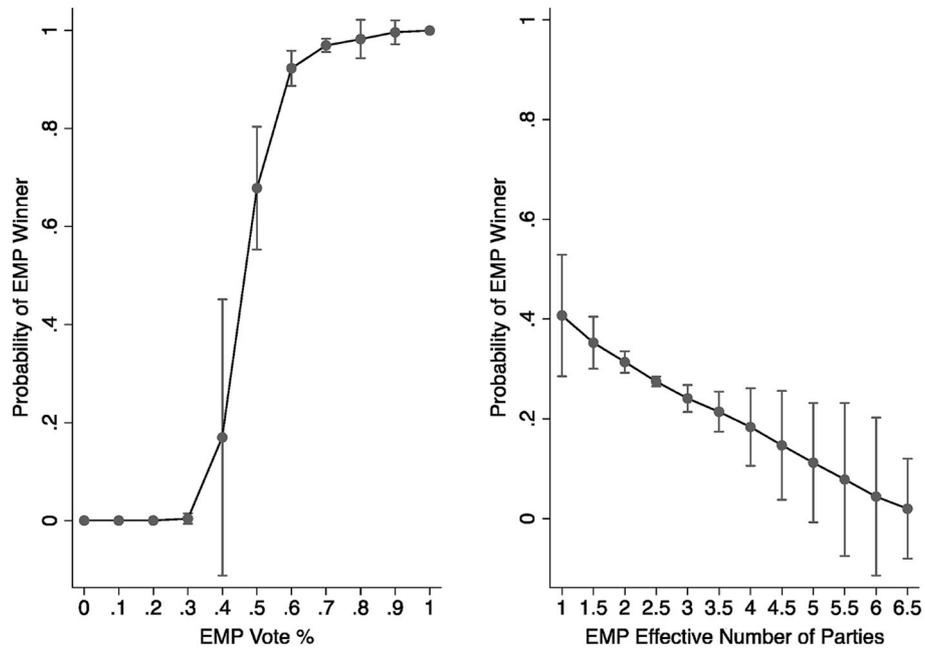


Fig. 1. Vote share, party system fragmentation, and EMP winners.

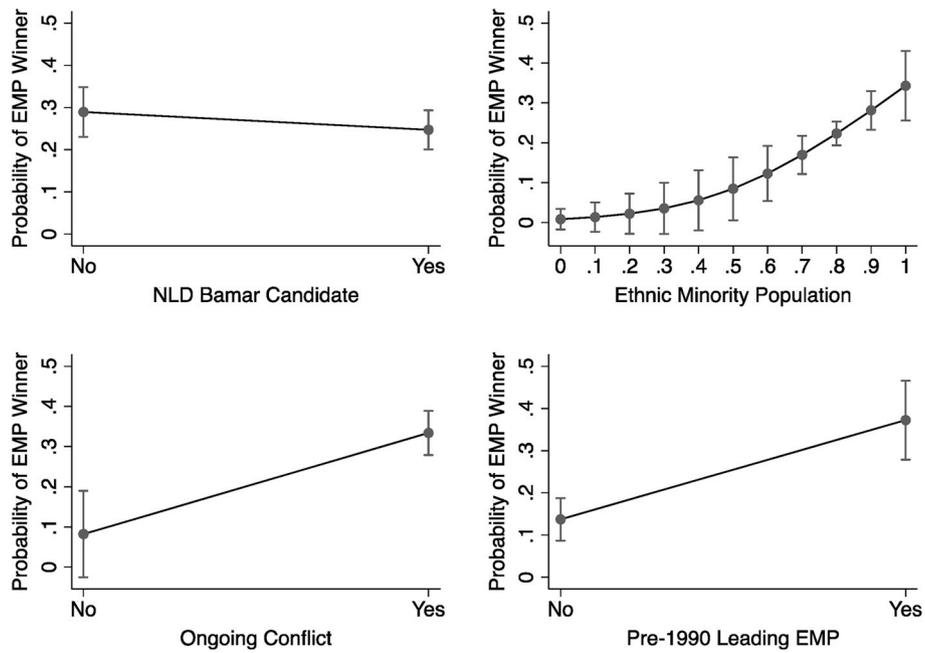


Fig. 2. Predicted probabilities of EMPs winning a seat.

ethnic-minority populations, not small ones (see Table A1 and Fig. A1 in the appendix).³³ This correlation between the EMP vote and the USDP fielding Bamar candidates remains something of a mystery.

However, as models 2 and 3 in Table 2 and Fig. 2 demonstrate, we find substantial evidence in support of our hypotheses about ethnic demography, conflict, and party history. The predicted probabilities of an EMP win increase dramatically as one moves from constituencies 1) with very small ethnic-minority populations to those that are predominantly ethnic minority (upper right panel of Fig. 2), 2) where conflict has ceased to those where it is ongoing or recent (bottom left panel), and 3) in which the leading EMP is newer to ones where it is older (bottom right). It is worth noting that most (73%) constituencies have ethnic-minority populations of more than 80%, meaning that the substantive effect of ethnic demography is somewhat more muted than Fig. 2 might suggest.

Next, we examine whether the findings from models 2 and 3 hold when our dependent variable is *EMP Vote*, rather than *EMP Win*. Models 4 and 5 in Table 2 replicate models 2 and 3, respectively, but with the different dependent variable. Additionally, we do not include *EMP ENP* as a predictor because the total EMP vote and the fragmentation of the EMP vote are determined simultaneously. One cannot therefore cause the other, and we do not have a strong theoretical basis for believing that voters' expectations about the fragmentation of the ENP vote (for which *EMP ENP* might be a reasonable proxy) should affect overall levels of electoral support for EMPs.

Because *EMP Vote* is a continuous variable, we estimate these models using ordinary least squares (OLS). The results are, in effect, the same as in models 2 and 3. We find evidence in support of the ethnic demography, conflict, and party history hypotheses. In particular, the associations between EMP vote share and states with on-going conflict and constituencies where there are older EMPs are precisely estimated and substantively meaningful. On average, EMPs do noticeably better in states with ongoing conflict and where there are older EMPs. The substantive impact of ethnic demography is somewhat smaller. Though the coefficient on *Ethnic Minority Population* is large, a standard deviation of this variable is 0.21, meaning that a standard deviation increase in the ethnic minority population is associated with a 6.4% increase in the EMP vote (model 5). In contrast, moving from a constituency in a state where conflict has ended to one where it is ongoing is associated with a 14% increase in the EMP vote, while moving from a constituency where the leading EMP was founded after 1990 to one where it was founded before 1990 is associated with a 16% increase in the EMP vote share.

Our findings remain consistent when Rakhine State, where EMPs were most successful, is excluded from the analysis (see Table A2 in the appendix). The Arakan National Party, a Rakhine party, was not only the most successful EMP but also unique in that it appealed aggressively to a heightened Rakhine nationalism in the context of Rohingya crisis in the area. Our results also persist when we differentiate among the three waves of EMP formation (Table A3). The constituencies with the oldest EMPs (founded prior to 1990) are those where the EMP vote and likelihood of winning are largest. But, constituencies where there is an EMP formed during the 1990–2010 period or where the leading EMP was

formed during the 1990–2010 period have more successful EMPs than in those constituencies where there are only new EMPs or where the leading EMP is very new. To corroborate our constituency-level findings about party history, we also demonstrate (Table A4), in a candidate-level analysis, that candidates from pre-1990 parties win larger vote shares than candidates from newer parties.

4. Conclusion

In this article, we have examined variation in the electoral success of ethnic-minority parties in Myanmar's 2015 election by testing five hypotheses that are both grounded in the literature and in some of the most salient features of this particular election. We find that EMPs are more likely to gain legislative representation when the EMP vote is less fragmented, where the ethnic-minority population is larger, where ethnic conflict is ongoing, and when EMPs are older. In terms of the substantive significance of our findings, conflict and party history are especially important, as the effects of party fragmentation and ethnic demography are somewhat more modest. In particular, our finding that EMPs fare better in constituencies with parties founded during Myanmar's authoritarian past resonates with a growing body of literature on the ways in which politics during authoritarian periods influences democratic elections.

As one of the first, if not the first, quantitative studies of electoral politics in Myanmar, this paper makes an important descriptive contribution to our understanding of a large yet understudied country. Of course, this study constitutes just a first step in advancing the study of electoral politics in Myanmar through quantitative analysis. As such, our analysis has some important limitations. However, these limitations point to important avenues for future research.

First, we are only able to code conflict status at the state level even though there is great within-state variation. Finer-grained data on conflict would help us to better understand the relationship between conflict and ethnic-party success. We theorize that conflict matters because it raises the salience of ethnicity. Ideally, our aggregate-level analysis of election results would one day be accompanied by individual-level analysis testing whether the salience of ethnic identity indeed correlates with vote choice.

Second, we theorize that party history matters in Myanmar because, in this low information election, older EMPs had greater name recognition, provided voters with more information, and tended to be less tainted by association with the military junta. However, we are not able to test these mechanisms directly and distinguish among them. Future research should examine which mechanisms link older parties to electoral advantage.

Third, our findings about party history also raise important questions about the origins of Myanmar's early ethnic-minority parties. Ethnic-minority parties in Shan and Rakhine states were the most successful ethnic parties in Myanmar in the 2015 election, and they were also the most successful ethnic parties 25 years earlier in 1990. Though we hypothesize that the age of parties and their experiences under the pre-2015 military regime explain their electoral success in 2015, we cannot rule out an alternative possibility concerning the origins of these parties. It is possible that enduring features of both Shan and Rakhine states differentiate these places from Myanmar's other states and account for the persistent success of EMPs in these states, beginning in 1990 and continuing to 2015. Examining this possibility would require a much closer look at the politics of ethnic-minority communities under Myanmar's authoritarian rule dating back several decades. Given ongoing data limitations and a relative lack of scholarship on Myanmar, all of these avenues for future research pose great challenges; but, they also present the opportunity to learn a great deal about one of the world's newest democracies.

³³ It is still possible that candidate selection is driven by fractionalization within ethnic-minority communities, particularly if there is considerable tension among ethnic-minority groups. Many ethnic groups in Myanmar are comprised of sub-groups. For instance, the Kachin ethnic group is comprised of six ethnic groups, two of which, Lhavo and Lisu, have established their own ethnic parties. If the ethnic-minority population of a constituency includes multiple sub-groups of a larger ethnic group, then the national parties might choose to field a candidate with a more neutral ethnic profile (that is, a Bamar) who can potentially appeal to all sub-groups. However, because publicly available township reports do not tell us ethnic demographic information at the subgroup level, we cannot test this possibility. Subgroup information would be particularly useful for those ethnic groups with politically salient subgroups.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Jangai Jap: Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing -

original draft, Writing - review & editing. **Adam Ziegfeld:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing.

Appendix

Table A1
Ethnic Demography and Bamar Candidates.

	(1)	(2)
	EMP vote	EMP vote
NLD Bamar	0.16* (0.07)	-0.02 (0.02)
USDP Bamar	-0.05** (0.02)	0.03 (0.05)
Ethnic Min. Pop.	0.40*** (0.07)	0.35*** (0.05)
NLD Bamar X Ethnic Min. Pop.	-0.23* (0.10)	
USDP Bamar X Ethnic Min. Pop.		-0.09 (0.06)
Ongoing Conflict	0.12*** (0.02)	0.14*** (0.02)
Pre-1990 Leading EMP	0.17*** (0.01)	0.16*** (0.02)
Constant	-0.14** (0.05)	-0.10** (0.03)
R ²	0.49	0.48
N	103	103

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A1 replicates model 5 of Table 1 but interacts NLD Bamar and Ethnic Minority Population (model 1) and USDP Bamar and Ethnic Minority Population (model 2).

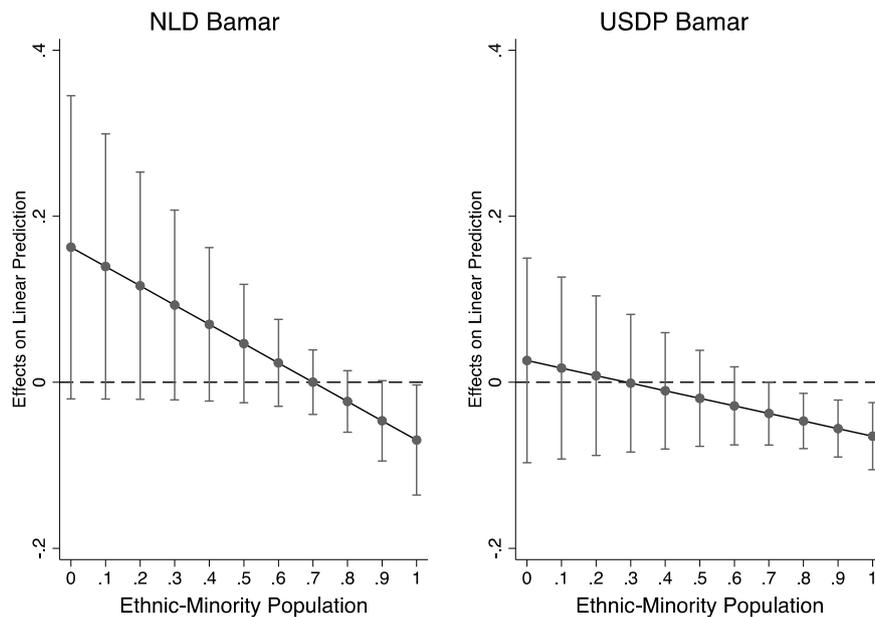


Fig. A1. Average Marginal Effects of NLD Bamar and USDP Bamar.

Fig. A1 presents the average marginal effects of NLD Bamar and USDP Bamar as Ethnic Minority Population varies. This figure shows that the NLD and USDP fielding Bamar candidates is negatively associated with EMP Vote Share when the ethnic-minority population is high. That is, when a constituency is dominated by ethnic-minority voters, EMPs tend to do worse when the NLD and USDP field Bamar candidates.

Table A2
Replication of Table 2 without Rakhine State.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	EMP win	EMP win	EMP win	EMP vote	EMP vote
EMP ENP	-3.56*	-1.96***	-1.70**		
	(2.15)	(0.50)	(0.66)		
EMP Vote	39.53***				
	(10.31)				
NLD Bamar		0.08	-0.79***	-0.02	-0.02
		(0.28)	(0.19)	(0.03)	(0.03)
USDP Bamar		-0.67***	-1.01*	-0.04*	-0.04
		(0.21)	(0.58)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Ethnic Min. Pop.		8.09***	9.32***	0.30***	0.30***
		(0.39)	(2.75)	(0.05)	(0.03)
On-going Conflict		3.19***	3.14***	0.16***	0.13***
		(0.59)	(0.75)	(0.04)	(0.03)
Pre-1990 EMP		1.53***		0.15**	
		(0.49)		(0.04)	
Pre-1990 Leading EMP			2.78***		0.15***
			(0.47)		(0.02)
Cons	-12.06***	-8.57***	-10.18***	-0.12*	-0.06***
	(2.74)	(1.26)	(2.09)	(0.06)	(0.01)
N	97	86	86	86	86
R2				0.43	0.47

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A2 replicates Table 2 but excludes observations from Rakhine State. The results in Table A2 are very similar to those in Table 2.

Table A3
Replication of Table 2 with Two Party History Variables.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	EMP win	EMP win	EMP vote	EMP vote
EMP ENP	-1.79***	-1.34***		
	(0.45)	(0.40)		
NLD Bamar	0.07	-0.42	-0.04	-0.03**
	(0.31)	(0.37)	(0.02)	(0.01)
USDP Bamar	-1.04**	-1.22**	-0.05**	-0.03
	(0.47)	(0.53)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Ethnic Min. Pop.	6.02***	5.35**	0.34***	0.30***
	(1.61)	(2.24)	(0.06)	(0.04)
On-going Conflict	2.96***	2.55***	0.18***	0.16***
	(0.67)	(0.86)	(0.03)	(0.01)
Post-1990/Pre-2010 EMP	0.71		0.14	
	(1.15)		(0.07)	
Pre-1990 EMP	1.41		0.24**	
	(0.94)		(0.07)	
Post-1990/Pre-2010 Leading EMP		0.30		0.11***
		(0.69)		(0.03)
Pre-1990 Leading EMP		2.15***		0.22***
		(0.82)		(0.03)
Cons	-6.74***	-6.63***	-0.24*	-0.13**
	(2.52)	(2.55)	(0.10)	(0.05)
N	103	103	103	103
R2			0.46	0.51

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A3 replicates Table 2 but includes a dummy for parties founded after 1990 but before 2010. Thus, the excluded category is parties formed after 2010. The results in Table A3 are very similar to those in Table 2. Though we see that EMPs are more successful in constituencies with old, but not the oldest, EMPs, the coefficients on Pre-1990 EMP and Pre-1990 Leading EMP are much larger.

Table A4
Individual-Level Analysis of Party History and Candidate Vote Share.

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Candidate Vote	Candidate Vote	Candidate Vote
Post-1990/Pre-2010 EMP	0.02	0.02	0.02
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Pre-1990 EMP	0.10***	0.10***	0.05***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Male		-0.01	-0.01
		(0.03)	(0.03)
Buddhist		-0.03*	-0.02
		(0.02)	(0.01)

(continued on next page)

Table A4 (continued)

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Candidate Vote	Candidate Vote	Candidate Vote
Age		0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
State dummies	Y	Y	Y
Constant	0.08*** (0.02)	0.08 (0.06)	0.10* (0.05)
R ²	0.17	0.18	0.11
N	301	296	262

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

To corroborate that the constituency-level findings with respect to party history are driven by candidates from older parties, we conduct a candidate-level analysis, examining candidates from EMPs. The dependent variable is *Candidate Vote*, the vote share won by each candidate. Because the dependent variable is continuous, we estimate all models using OLS, and we cluster standard errors by constituency. Model 1 includes only the two party history variables used in Table A3 and state dummies. Model 2 adds in demographic variables. Candidates from older parties win, on average, 10% more of the vote than candidates from newer parties. Model 3 drops candidates from Rakhine State, where EMPs are most successful. The coefficient on *Pre-1990 EMP* is noticeably smaller but still substantively and statistically significant.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2020.102131>.

References

- Belford, Aubrey, 2015. In Burma, Ethnic Loyalties Could Crimp Suu Kyi's Party. Irrawaddy. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/in-burma-ethnic-loyalties-could-crimp-suu-kyis-party.html>.
- Birnir, Jóhanna Kristín, 2007. Ethnicity and Electoral Politics. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.
- Chandra, Kanchan, 2004. Why Ethnic Parties Succeed: Patronage and Ethnic Headcounts in India. Cambridge University Press, New York.
- Chandra, Kanchan, 2011. What is an ethnic party? Party Polit. 17 (2), 151–169.
- Chauchard, Simon, 2016. Unpacking ethnic preferences: Theory and micro-level evidence from north India. Comp. Polit. Stud. 49 (2), 253–284.
- Election Parties, 2015. Election Parties. Myanmar Times. <https://web.archive.org/web/20151117184337/http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/election-2015/parties.html#unity-democracy-kachin>. (Accessed 1 June 2019).
- Hadzic, Dino, Carlson, David, Tavits, Margit, 2020. How exposure to violence affects ethnic voting. Br. J. Polit. Sci. 50 (1), 345–362.
- Hicken, Allen, Kuhonta, Erik Martínez, 2011. Shadows from the past: party system institutionalization in Asia. Comp. Polit. Stud. 44 (5), 572–597.
- Horowitz, Donald L., 1985. Ethnic Groups in Conflict. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Kean, Thomas, Aung, Kyaw Min, 2015. President Backtracks on White Cards. Myanmar Times. <https://www.mmtimes.com/national-news/13106-president-backtracks-on-white-cards.html>. (Accessed 24 May 2019).
- Levitsky, Steven, Way, Lucan A., 2010. Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War. Cambridge University Press, New York.
- Lidauer, Michael, 2012. Democratic dawn? civil society and elections in Myanmar 2010–2012. J. Curr. Southeast Asian Aff. 31 (2), 87–114.
- Loxton, James, 2015. Authoritarian successor parties. J. Democr. 26 (3), 157–170.
- Lupu, Noam, Riedl, Rachel Beatty, 2013. Political parties and uncertainty in developing democracies. Comp. Polit. Stud. 46 (11), 1339–1365.
- MacGregor, Fiona, 2015. Ethnic Parties Fall Short of Expectations. Myanmar Times. <https://www.mmtimes.com/national-news/17632-ethnic-parties-fall-short-of-expectations.html>.
- Minorities at Risk Project, 2009. Minorities at Risk Dataset. Center for International Development and Conflict Management, College Park, MD. Retrieved from. <http://www.mar.umd.edu/on>. (Accessed 16 December 2019).
- Myanmar (Burma). In: Muller, Thomas C., Isacoff, Judith F., Lansford, Tom (Eds.), 2012. Political Handbook of the World 2012. Sage, Washington, D.C.
- Pedersen, Morten B., 2008. Burma's ethnic minorities: Charting their own path to peace. Crit. Asian Stud. 40 (1), 45–66.
- Polity IV, 2019. Polity IV Project: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800–2018. Center for Systemic Peace, Vienna, VA. Retrieved from. <https://www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html> on. (Accessed 15 December 2019).
- Riedl, Rachel Beatty, 2014. Authoritarian Origins of Democratic Party Systems in Africa. Cambridge University Press, New York.
- Shan Taing Yin Tar, 2015. Mya Democracy A Phoi Gyoke Naing Ngan Yay Phyet than Mu Thamein 1988–2013 [History of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy]. Yangon: Shan Nationalities League for Democracy.
- South, Ashley, 2008. Ethnic Politics in Burma: States of Conflict. Routledge, New York.
- South, Ashley, Lall, Marie, 2018. Introduction. In: Lall, Marie, South, Ashley (Eds.), Citizenship in Myanmar: Ways of Being in and from Burma. ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore.
- Thawngmung, Ardeth, 2016. The Myanmar elections 2015: Why the national league for democracy won a landslide victory. Crit. Asian Stud. 49 (3), 379–395.
- Thawngmung, Ardeth, Yadana, 2018. Citizenship and Minority Rights: The Role of “National Race Affairs” Ministers in Myanmar's 2008 Constitution. In: South, Ashley, Lall, Marie (Eds.), Citizenship in Myanmar: Ways of Being in and from Burma. ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute/Chiang Mai University Press, Singapore.
- Tonkin, Derek, 2007. The 1990 elections in Myanmar: Broken promises or a failure of communication. Contemp. S. Asia 29 (1), 33–54.
- Transnational Institute (TNI), 2015. Ethnic Politics and the 2015 Elections in Myanmar. In: Myanmar Policy Briefing, vol. 16. <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/ethnic-politics-and-the-2015-elections-in-myanmar>.
- Tudor, Maya, Adam, Ziegfeld, 2019. Social cleavages, party organization, and the end of single-party dominance: Insights from India. Comp. Polit. 51 (1), 149–168.
- Turnell, Sean, 2011. Myanmar in 2010: Doors open, doors close. Asian Surv. 51 (1), 148–154.
- Turner, Arthur, 1990. Postauthoritarian elections: Testing expectations about “First” elections. Comp. Polit. Stud. 26 (3), 330–349.
- Watson, Angus, 2015. NLD Majority Poses Threat to Minority Politics. Democratic Voice of Burma. <http://english.dvb.no/analysis/nld-majority-poses-threat-to-minority-politics/59152>.
- Wilkinson, Steven I., 2004. Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India. Cambridge University Press, New York.
- Wittenberg, Jason, 2006. Crucibles of Political Loyalty: Church Institutions and Electoral Continuity in Hungary. Cambridge University Press, New York.