

Can Encounters with the State Improve Minority-State Relations?

Evidence from Myanmar

Jangai Jap *

Department of Government - University of Texas at Austin

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Abstract

What determines ethnic minorities' attitudes towards the state? Diverging from existing explanations which focus on structural factors, I theorize that experiences with the state, specifically mundane bureaucratic encounters we often overlook, shape ethnic minorities' political attitudes. Positive experiences ease their apprehension about the state that is dominated by another ethnic group whereas negative experiences reinforce their suspicion of the state. Leveraging extensive fieldwork in Myanmar, including a survey and a survey experiment, I show that ethnic minorities who have had positive encounters with street-level bureaucrats express more national pride. This is the case even when an ethnic group is in direct conflict with the state. I also find that experiences with the state do not affect ethnic majorities' attitudes toward the state. These findings speak to the literature on minority-state relations, nationalism and service delivery, and have profound implications for Myanmar and beyond.

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1 Introduction

What determines ethnic minorities' or politically non-dominant ethnic groups' attitudes toward to the state?¹ Conventional wisdom in political science has primarily focused on macro level socio-political factors to explain minority-state relations. We expect positive minority-state relations in countries with successful nation-building ² and neutralizing language policies.³ Additionally, we expect ethnic minorities with collective rights, ⁴ political representation, ⁵ or state-provided goods and services ⁶ to have favorable views of the state. Yet there is a tremendous variation among ethnic minorities with the same socio-political backgrounds.

For example, according to existing survey data from Myanmar, 20 percent of Kachin, an ethnic minority group, are "not proud" or "not at all proud" of being a Myanmar citizen, but 22 percent are "very proud."⁷ Such within-group variation in ethnic minorities' attitudes toward the state is no doubt a common phenomenon across the world in democracies and autocracies alike, as well as in developed and developing countries. For every ethnic minority who expresses positive attitudes toward their country of citizenship, we can imagine a

¹While politically non-dominant ethnic groups are not always ethnic minorities in a numerical sense, I utilize "non-dominant ethnic groups" and "ethnic minorities" interchangeably in this paper because these two terms refer to the same set of ethnic groups in most countries including in Myanmar, which is the context of my empirical analysis.

²Ricks, 2019.

³Liu, 2015.

⁴McMurry, forthcoming; Kymlicka, 1995.

⁵Koter, 2019; Lijphart, 1969; Elkins and Sides, 2007; Wimmer, 2017.

⁶Hechter, 2013; Wimmer, 2018.

⁷The existing data consist of the *Asian Barometer Survey Wave 4* (2015), the World Value Survey (Haerpfer et al., 2020), and the original survey data I collected.

coethnic who feels alienated from that same country. Given that coethnics are presumably treated with the same state policies and have the same level of political representation, what explains the varying attitudes toward the state among ethnic minorities?

Studying how ethnic minorities view the state is important. It reveals their political loyalty to the state and the extent to which they affirm the state's authority, which are integral to state consolidation. As scholars have noted, although the typical conceptualizations of the Weberian definition of the state focus on its material underpinnings, it is important to also understand how the state's symbolic power expands and takes roots in the consciousness of its citizens.⁸ And attitudes toward the state conveys the state's symbolic power. Additionally, feelings of alienation from the state can have dire implications for democratization and democratic processes⁹ as well as instability and armed rebellion.¹⁰

In this paper, I present and evaluate a theory that focuses on ordinary citizens' experiences with the state—specifically mundane interactions with the state, like getting a government issued ID, a permit, or a vendor license which requires the kinds of bureaucratic encounters that we often overlook—to explain the individual-level variation in minority-state relations. I argue that ethnic minorities' most tangible experiences with the state inform their opinions of the state. A premise undergirding this argument is that members of the politically non-dominant ethnic groups are suspicious of the state's intentions toward them. Since nationalism became an organizing principle of political communities, the state is

⁸Morgan and Orloff, 2017.

⁹Dahl, 1989; Rustow, 1970.

¹⁰Cederman, Wimmer and Min, 2010; Gurr, 1993; Siroky and Cuffe, 2014.

associated with a particular ethno-national type, which is of the politically dominant ethnic group in the state. According to Brubaker (1996, 6), the state is conceived “of and for the core nation,” or the politically dominant ethnic group. Given their group status, ethnic minorities are motivated to gather information about the state’s intentions toward them, and the information-gathering primarily occurs in street-level bureaucracy where they interact with agents of the state. What they saw and experienced in these face-to-face encounters signals to ethnic minorities what their place is in the country’s polity. As such, ethnic minorities who have positive experiences with the state develop more favorable views of the state. I substantiate this claim based on extensive fieldwork in Myanmar, including original survey data.

While other settings are suitable for testing the aforementioned claim, subnational variation within Myanmar provides a unique opportunity to study minority-state relations. Myanmar is home to a few well-known cases of protracted armed conflicts between ethnic rebels and the central government, but there are also "typical" cases of minority-state relations—i.e., ethnic minorities who experience discrimination but are not engaged in an armed conflict with the state. Situating this research in Myanmar allows me to examine if positive experiences with the state can improve ethnic minorities’ opinions of the state in the typical as well as the most challenging cases of minority-state relations.

Using original survey data collected in 2019 which consist more than 800 respondents, I show that ethnic minorities who have had positive encounters with street-level bureaucrats exhibit more favorable attitudes toward the state. This is the case even when an ethnic group

is in direct conflict with the state. In contrast, positive experiences with the state do not improve ethnic majorities' (Bamar in this study) attitudes toward the state. Using a survey experiment fielded online in 2022, I show additional evidence consistent with findings from the first study. Specifically, ethnic minorities primed to think about positive encounters in street-level bureaucracy reported more positive attitudes toward the state compared to those in the control group; priming of negative encounters yielded a null result. However, ethnic majorities primed with negative or positive bureaucratic encounters are indistinguishable from their counterparts in the control group regarding their attitudes toward the state.

I also find that religion is a consistent predictor of ethnic minorities' views of the state in Myanmar. Ethnic minorities who are coreligionists of the politically dominant ethnic group have more positive attitudes toward Myanmar, which claims to be a Buddhist state. Additionally, I find that power-sharing, specifically descriptive representation, does not have a consistent effect on ethnic minorities' attitudes toward the state, echoing existing works.¹¹

Contributions

This research makes several contributions to the literature. The theory presented characterizes the relationship between citizens and the state as one based on exchange. While the literature focuses on an exchange of tangible public goods and services,¹² this study emphasizes interpersonal interactions. Ethnic minorities give political loyalty to the state in return

¹¹Elkins and Sides, 2007; Green, 2020.

¹²See Wimmer 2018.

for respectful and attentive service experiences. By focusing on interpersonal interactions, this study highlights the critical role of citizens' experiences with the state—that is, *how*, rather than *whether*, public services are delivered—in shaping their political attitudes. As such, this study serves as a corollary to the existing literature which shows that public service delivery in certain circumstances can alienate marginalized groups or amplify and reinforce feelings of being second class citizens, leading to lower political participation.¹³ It also joins the growing body of works that underscore the importance of interpersonal interactions in changing attitudes, perceived state legitimacy, and other important political outcomes.¹⁴

Furthermore, this study expands the literature on citizen-state encounters beyond interactions in the welfare offices of and police encounters in advanced democracies. It does so by examining interactions based on mundane regulatory services in a developing country. By expanding citizen-state encounters beyond the welfare offices and policing, this study advances a theoretical perspective that citizens' experiences with the state *can* be positive, and when they are positive, they can facilitate favorable attitudes toward the state. Moreover, by focusing on individuals' experiences, this study also advances our understanding of minority-state relations beyond structural explanations.

This study also speaks to works on nationalism as a theory of political legitimacy. According to Gellner, “nationalism is a theory of political legitimacy, which requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones, and in particular, that ethnic boundaries

¹³See Michener, 2018; Soss and Weaver, 2017.

¹⁴Kalla and Broockman, 2020; Karim, 2020.

within a given state...should not separate the power-holders from the rest."¹⁵ This conceptualization of nationalism suggests that the people who are governed accept the state precisely because the power-holders are one of them. It also implies that there is a breach between citizens and the state when the governed and the power-holders do not belong to the same group. This paper offers a theory of how a state dominated by an ethnic outgroup—or an "alien rule" as it is referred to by Hechter¹⁶— could become acceptable to members of the politically non-dominant ethnic groups.

Scope Condition

This study is motivated by a puzzling observation that ethnic minorities from the same group, treated with the same structural conditions including minority policies and representation, hold varying attitudes toward the state; and the survey samples analyzed primarily include minorities with some level of recognition. In a way, its examination of the ameliorating effects of everyday encounters with the state is already conditioned on some level of political representation, and findings presented are unlikely to extend to severely marginalized groups.

While all minority groups experience disadvantages compared to the dominant group, severely marginalized groups are particularly targeted with political, social, and economic exclusions, and even state violence. Examples of such groups include the Uighurs of China and the Rohingyas of Myanmar. Given their dire situation, positive experiences with the state may not be enough to sway their opinions of the state.

¹⁵1983, 1.

¹⁶2013

The paper proceeds as follows. First, I explain the imperative of studying citizen-state encounters and lay out my theoretical argument. Next, I describe what everyday encounters with the state is like in Myanmar based on qualitative interviews I conducted between 2017 and 2019. These discussions are followed by two empirical sections where I explain the design and results of Study 1 (2019 survey) and then Study 2 (2022 survey experiment). To conclude, I discuss a summary of my findings and directions for future research.

2 The Imperative of Studying Citizen-State Encounters

Why turn to citizen-state encounters to explain ethnic minorities' attitudes toward the state? The importance of understanding citizen-state encounters was first recognized 90 years ago and gained traction in the 1980s.¹⁷ According to Lipsky, "street-level bureaucrats have considerable impact on peoples' lives... They socialize citizens to expectations of government services and a place in the political community... Thus, in a sense street-level bureaucrats implicitly mediate aspect of the constitutional relationship of citizens to the state."¹⁸ Although scholars have long recognized the imperative of examining citizen-state encounters, this phenomenon remains understudied in political science,¹⁹ and in particular, in the context of developing countries.²⁰

Existing works in this line of research tend to focus on the provision of public goods

¹⁷Bartels, 2013; Finer, 1931.

¹⁸1980, 4.

¹⁹Pepinsky, Pierskalla and Sacks, 2017; Soss and Weaver, 2017.

²⁰Peeters and Campos, 2022; Bertelli et al., 2020.

and services and encounters with the criminal justice system.²¹ Interactions in the criminal justice system and welfare offices are typically defined by excessive force or social stigma. While these interactions constitute the bulk of citizen-state encounters in the higher income countries, street-level bureaucracy associated with regulatory services, like applications for permits and identification documents, are the primary interface between citizens and the state in developing countries.²² And the latter type of citizen-state encounters have been largely overlooked in existing research. Studying these encounters and their implications is essential for understanding minority-state relations in developing countries, because to most ordinary citizens in this context, the state is embodied by street-level bureaucracy that provides regulatory services and those who work in this setting.

In the past few decades, citizen-state encounters have also become increasingly relevant in lower income countries. Scholars have documented a proliferation of sub-national administrative units across Southeast Asian²³ and African countries.²⁴ This process has effectively brought the government and its services closer to ordinary citizens. Additionally, there is an attempt to streamline front-line service delivery, making street-level bureaucracy more accessible. For example, one-stop shops (OSS), which are consolidated local government agency offices, have become a major theme in the global development agenda and are

²¹Blair and Roessler, 2021; Bodea and LeBas, 2016; Dietrich and Winters, 2015; Michener, 2018; Soss and Weaver, 2017.

²²Note that the welfare state in many developing countries is almost nonexistent. According to the World Bank's Social Safety Net Expenditure indicators, between 2010 and 2019, Myanmar and 49 other lower income countries spent less than one percent of the country's annual GDP on social assistance programs. This stands in a stark contrast to the OECD countries most of which, in 2015, spent 20.9 percent of the country's GDP on average.

²³See Malesky, 2009; Pierskalla, 2016.

²⁴See Grossman and Lewis, 2014; Hassan, 2016; Hassan and Sheely, 2017; Lewis, 2014.

supported by various international organizations including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank.²⁵ In Vietnam, OSS were first established in 1995, and by 2017, there were almost 13,000 OSS covering 98 percent of the country.²⁶ The OSS in Vietnam provides regulatory services like civil status registration, land administration, business licensing, construction permits and tax collection.²⁷ Such consolidated offices providing similar kinds of regulatory services were established in Myanmar in 2015. By 2019, OSS have been established in over 70 district-level capitals across Myanmar.²⁸ These trends suggest that everyday encounters with the state are more prevalent in the lives of ordinary citizens now more than ever before in developing countries. In other words, interactions in street-level bureaucracy have become citizens' main experiences with the state.

3 Determinants of Minorities' Attitudes toward the State

The literature points to indicators of modernization and political representation to explain individual-level minority-state relations.²⁹ I shift the focus to the aspect of the state that is most tangible to ordinary citizens: their routine interactions with civil servants in local government offices to obtain basic services, referred to as *everyday encounters with the state*.

Everyday encounters with the state are different from other types of state encounters (i.e., meeting or writing to representatives) in two aspects: how direct and personal the

²⁵Aziza, Jana and Johns, 2017.

²⁶Blunt et al., 2017.

²⁷Blunt et al., 2017.

²⁸UNDP, N.d..

²⁹Elkins and Sides, 2007; Koter, 2019; Robinson, 2014; Wimmer, 2017.

interactions are, and how frequently they occur.³⁰ These encounters are personal not only because the information revealed is personal but also because they are conveyed face-to-face. In this setting, the state agents observe their clients' discomfort, urgency, and/or despair while the clients observe affirmation, empathy and/or judgement from their agents. As such, the interpersonal dimension of the interaction matters for people at the receiving end when evaluating their experiences.³¹

Indeed, everyday encounters with the state are primarily about *how* public goods and services are delivered rather than *whether* they are delivered. To conceptually disentangle service experiences from service outcomes, consider the following works which compare tone and quality of responses constituents receive from public officials. Examining correspondence between service seekers and service providers in an American setting, scholars find that public housing officials respond to email requests from black and white service seekers at an equal rate but with substantial differences in email tone.³² Indeed, several works have noted the distinction between response rate and tone.³³ Similar to citizen-state encounters examined in these works, in face-to-face interactions, the same service can be delivered to different clients in various manner and tone.

Some service experiences are more *positive* than others in that the agents are more attentive, caring, respectful, and generally make the service-seeking individuals feel taken care of. Positive treatment experiences also include instances when the agent goes the extra

³⁰Lipsky, 1980.

³¹Bies, 2001; Tyler and Bies, 2015.

³²Einstein and Glick, 2017.

³³Hemker and Rink, 2017; Giuliatti, Tonin and Vlassopoulos, 2019.

mile for the client, spends more time with the client and sympathizes with the client in the case of an unfavorable outcome. The agent might also provide the client with “privileged information,” enabling them to navigate the system better than others.³⁴ In other words, positive treatments are not just being nice to the client. In some situations, the privileged information may enhance the clients’ chance of receiving a more favorable outcome. However, regardless of the outcome, the client’s overall experience is more satisfactory when the treatment is positive.

The main argument I make about these interactions is that for ethnic minorities, positive everyday encounters with the state foster favorable attitudes toward the state. However, I do not expect these interactions to have the same affect on ethnic majorities. While ethnic minorities and majorities may have interactions of varying quality in street-level bureaucracy, these experiences matter for minority-state relations but not for majority-state relations. This expectation of differential effects of service experiences is consistent with existing theories of why people accept an “alien rule,” which occurs whenever the members of a given collectivity are ruled by nonmembers of that collectivity.³⁵ Although the local population is generally opposed to it, an alien rule can be more acceptable and viewed with greater legitimacy given a positive exchange relationship.³⁶

The way in which everyday encounters with the state become the basis for ethnic minorities’ attitudes toward the state consists of two parallel processes: recognition of street-

³⁴Lipsky, 1980, 90.

³⁵Hechter, 2013.

³⁶Hechter, 2013.

level bureaucracy as a local manifestation of the state and the drive to gather information about the state. First, ordinary citizens typically visit local government offices for services over which the state has a monopoly. Such services include processing applications for household registration documents, national registration cards or business licenses. Because the state has a monopoly on these services, when citizens determine that they need such documents, they are already aware of the need to interact with state agents.

I now turn to ethnic minorities' drive to gather information about the state. To explain how this drive emerges, I borrow Hale's conceptualization of ethnicity which defines it as an especially useful "set of points of personal reference on which people rely on to navigate the social world they inhabit."³⁷ This perceptual lens "operates primarily in the realm of the unconscious"³⁸ and drives human behavior in all kinds of situations including voting, political mobilization and how ordinary citizens pursue public goods and services.³⁹ I argue that ethnic minorities' perceptual radar is especially sensitive when they encounter the state precisely because they are members of a politically non-dominant ethnic group. Depending on the country's social and political history, this perceptual radar may be less sensitive in other situations like going to the markets or attending sporting events. However, when encountering the state, ethnic minorities process their experiences from the point of view of a member of a politically non-dominant group.

Given their group status, ethnic minorities are suspicious of the state and are con-

³⁷2008, 34.

³⁸Hale, 2008, 49.

³⁹Adida et al., 2017; Chandra, 2007; Habyarimana et al., 2007; Posner, 2005.

stantly motivated to gather information about the state's intentions toward them. The information they gather about the state in street-level bureaucracy signals their symbolic status in the polity. Positive treatments assure them of a favorable future prospect. In contrast, negative treatments affirm their apprehension of their fate as citizens of a state dominated by another ethnic group. In short, having recognized that they live under an alien rule, ethnic minorities' experiences in local government offices become signals of the government's intention toward them.

If ethnic minorities are motivated to gather such information due to their subordinate group status, then we would not expect a similar behavior from ethnic majorities. The latter are members of the politically dominant ethnic group and thus, are unlikely to be suspicious of the state on the account of the state being an "alien" ruler. And because they do not live under an "alien rule," ethnic majorities neither look for nor need information about the state's intentions toward their ethnic group. Thus, their experiences with the state, whether positive or negative, are unlikely to inform how they view the state.⁴⁰

4 Empirical Setting: Encountering the Myanmar State

Everyday encounters with the state in Myanmar occur within the context of the country's public administration system. There are four tiers of administrative units below the national government. The country consists of seven "regions," seven "states," and the Union Territory;

⁴⁰Their experiences may, however, affect other attitudes such as confidence in state institutions (Liu and Baird, 2012).

ethnic majorities are the dominant population in the regions, and each state is associated with a specific ethnic minority group. Each of these 15 subnational units are divided into districts, which are further divided into townships. The townships are divided into wards (urban) and village tracts (rural). The lowest tier at which most government departments and agencies operate is the township level.⁴¹ Given that the OSS offices also operate at the township level, the bulk of everyday encounters with the state in Myanmar occurs at this level of administrative unit.⁴²

The qualitative interviews I conducted indicate that the people of Myanmar rarely make a distinction between different levels of government. When talking about what they think the state is, respondents resorted to describing restrictions they have experienced due to state authority. Indeed, the state is primarily perceived as authority in a general sense. This is perhaps because Myanmar has been a unitary state for the last six decades with all authority emanating from the central government; the subnational governments were established just a decade ago. Furthermore, all township level government agency offices, except the municipal office, are extensions of the central government's ministries.⁴³ For instance, the office at which local residents register their household member list is the

⁴¹Saw and Arnold, 2014. Only the General Administration Department (GAD), which is the backbone of public administration in Myanmar, operates at the ward and village tract, or the locality level.

⁴²Townships are also the constituent units for representation in the lower house (Pyithu Hluttaw) of Myanmar's national legislature.

⁴³Arnold et al., 2015. The municipal offices are officially known as the Township Development Affairs Organization (DAO). These offices were established in 2010 along with the subnational (region or state) governments when Myanmar started transitioning from the military junta. The DAO is the only decentralized government agency. Compared to other township level government agencies whose staffs are rotated across the country, the DAO staff tend to be local residents. Furthermore, the DAO chair person is elected rather than appointed (Arnold et al., 2015).

township office of the central government’s Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population (LIP). Issues not resolved in this office may be passed up to the district level, then the regional level, and finally the national level office of this ministry. Thus, ordinary citizens in Myanmar are keenly aware that the township level government offices are the local manifestation of the state.

The primary services that Myanmar’s street-level bureaucracy provides relate to the state’s legibility project—that is, making the state’s population and territory more governable through simplification, rationalization, and standardization.⁴⁴ Some of the most sought after regulatory services are application for a government-issued ID, request for reference letters, various kinds of registration (ranging from households to grant or farm lands), and permit or license applications.⁴⁵ In other words, the motivation for visiting street-level bureaucracy is to obtain services over which the state has a monopoly. Abstaining from these services can result in travel restriction, losing property ownership and much more.

There are two noteworthy features of citizen-state encounters in Myanmar. First, nearly all citizen-state encounters occur face-to-face, because it is not yet possible to obtain information about bureaucratic services and procedures (e.g. documents and fees associated with a permit application) via telephone or online.⁴⁶ As such, encounters with the state also

⁴⁴Scott, 1998.

⁴⁵A reference letter from the ward or village tract level GAD office is almost always a requisite to obtain reference letters from the township level government agency offices. The content of reference letters varies depending on the purpose and the intended recipient. A generic letter from a ward/village tract GAD administrator, for example, would simply confirm that the person is a resident of their locality.

⁴⁶According to the United Nation’s 2020 e-government development index (EGDI) (UNDESA, 2020), Myanmar ranks 146 of 193 countries, meaning that almost a quarter of the UN member countries, primarily Southeast Asian and Sub-Saharan African countries, have e-government that is less developed than that of Myanmar.

entail information exchange between citizens and street-level bureaucrats. Second, obtaining an official document requires several office visits and documents from various offices. For example, to apply for a small business or vendor license, required for opening a restaurant or a small house-front convenience store, one would need to bring reference letters from the Health Department, the Fire Department and the ward/village tract General Administration office along with the license application to the municipal office.⁴⁷ Thus, individuals would have to collect these documents from relevant government office, each of which may require several visits.

Given the iterative nature of obtaining an official document, the ultimate outcome one strives to obtain (e.g. a vendor license) is different from "services" one seeks in each office visit. The latter is more mundane and achievable than the former. Consider the example introduced above. The first time an individual visits the municipal office may be to obtain information about documents necessary to apply for a vendor license. After collecting all the required document, the service seeker would return to the municipal office with the aim of having their application be accepted for processing. As such, local residents often obtain the specific service they seek, though *how* the services are delivered to them vary from time to time and from person to person.

Thus, regarding the process of information exchange, study participants noted that the “good” civil servants patiently explain what they need to know and offer advice on how to navigate the application process, whereas the “bad” ones grumble and scold their clients.

⁴⁷Interview with a municipal official, May 26, 2019, Myitkyina.

The “good” ones are remembered as being respectful and giving their clients the benefit of the doubt when explaining basic information. The clients who encountered the “bad” civil servants often concluded that the agent did not want to help them or that they simply did not care.

A major theme in clients’ recollection of everyday encounters with the state is ethnic-otering by the state agents. A respondent recalled a time when he visited the township LIP office to apply for a government-issued ID and the agent asked him if he was a rebel.⁴⁸ When adult ethnic minorities, particularly men, do not have a government-issued ID or other personal documents, state agents often assume that they have been involved in clandestine activities.⁴⁹ In this particular case, the client was a former soldier in the Kachin Independence Army and was alarmed by the agent’s question.⁵⁰ What the agent said and the way it was said made him feel that he was viewed with suspicion. Another respondent had a similar but less alarming experience. She shared about her experience at the Yangon International Airport: “. . . the way they [the immigration officers] look at my NRC card and my passport and ask me what kind of name my name is. . . this tells me that they don’t recognize that I am a native here. It makes me feel like a foreigner.”⁵¹ These recollections indicate that everyday encounters with the state can reinforce the perception that ethnic minorities are

⁴⁸Focus group discussion, Myitkyina, August 10, 2018.

⁴⁹Many Bamar adult men also do not have a government-issued ID, but they are not treated with the same suspicion that ethnic minority men often experience.

⁵⁰The Kachin Independence Army is the armed wing of the Kachin Independence Organization which was established in the early 1960s to fight for Kachin self-determination. Myanmar does not have formal reintegration programs. Thus, when former rebels resettle in the government-controlled areas, they have to navigate reintegration on their own.

⁵¹Interview, Yangon, July 3, 2017.

non-core groups in the Myanmar state.

Bureaucratic encounters can also instill a sense of being looked after. An interview with a civil servant revealed that they advised a former rebel who confided to them (the agent) why they (the client) did not have required documentations.⁵² Many respondents also recalled instances in which they were not "given a hard time" by the state agents. The next section leverages original survey data to systematically examine the extent to which these bureaucratic encounters affect ethnic minorities' attitudes toward the Myanmar state.

5 Study 1: Survey Evidence

An observable implication of the argument I outlined above can be summarized as the following hypothesis: Ethnic minorities who have more positive everyday encounters with the state hold more positive attitudes toward the state compared to other ethnic minorities. To evaluate this hypothesis, I constructed an original dataset based on a household survey from Myanmar.

5.1 Case Selection and Measurements

Myanmar is home to numerous ethnic groups among whom Bamar is the politically dominant ethnic group, accounting for nearly 70 percent of population. The survey focused on two ethnic minority groups, Chin and Kachin; they are the two most similar groups with different conflict legacies. Chin has a relatively peaceful relationship with the central government

⁵²Interview with a civil servant in the township LIP office, Kachin State, May 12, 2019.

compared to other ethnic groups, and Kachin has a long legacy of armed conflict that is still ongoing.⁵³ Selecting these two groups controls for several macro-level factors. Chin and Kachin are predominantly Christian and thus, experience the most similar nation-building policies. Whereas all ethnic minorities faced assimilationist policies with regards to Bamar language (Burmese) and culture, Chin and Kachin were also targeted with the promotion of Buddhism. Unlike Buddhist ethnic minorities, non-Buddhist ethnic minorities are likely to have a negative reception of Buddhist missionary activities. Furthermore, at the time of survey implementation, both groups had a similar level of presence in the national government. They had more seat share in the national parliament than their population share in the country, and they each occupied a senior position in the national government— a Chin as one of the Vice Presidents and a Kachin as the Speaker of the national legislature. Thus, focusing on these two groups account for several structural explanations for minority-state relations, and moreover, can reveal whether service experiences have ameliorating effect on minority-state relations even in conflict-affected societies.

The survey was implemented from February to November in 2019, which was a particularly optimistic year. There was a peaceful transfer of power to the main pro-democracy party in the country in 2015, and so, Myanmar was at the height of democratic transition when the survey was implemented. This milieu in the country contributed to the interest

⁵³There have been at least two onsets of Chin armed insurgencies since the early 1960s, but they were all short-lived. As such there was no Chin military action until democracy activists launched the Chin National Front following the 1988 uprisings (Swift, 2013). Though the CNF is the only sustained attempt at insurgency by Chins, its manpower is very small compared to other armed ethnic organizations and it rarely engages in armed conflict with the central government. Moreover, Chin population does not see their ethnic group as being in a contentious relationship with the central government (Interview with a Hakha Chin Baptist minister, Mandalay, May 30, 2019; Interview with a Falam Chin Baptist minister, Mandalay, May 31, 2019).

and openness with which respondents participated in the study.

There are several reasons, including serious errors in the data collection process, to be concerned about survey data generated from the developing world.⁵⁴ I attempted to mitigate some of the concerns by overseeing which housing units the enumerators approached and by observing a number of interviews. I also intended to raise the morale of the enumerators by being on the road with them.

The survey interviews were conducted in local languages: Burmese (the official language), Jinghpaw (Kachin), Falam (Chin), Hakha (Chin), and Tedim (Chin). The translations were prepared in advance so that the enumerators were not translating on the spot. All the enumerators were bilingual, fluent in their own ethnic language and Burmese. To ensure that ethnicity of the interviewers matched most respondents in the sample, only the Kachin enumerators conducted interviews in the Kachin townships and the Chin enumerators in the Chin townships. This was done to increase respondents' comprehension and comfort as well as to mitigate bias, as scholars have found that ethnicity of the interviewer affects the answers respondents provide.⁵⁵ Scholars also indicate that bias can arise if the respondents think that the survey is sponsored by the government or political actors.⁵⁶ In Myanmar, respondents can also be wary of certain local NGOs. To mitigate the refusal rate and question sensitivity, the enumerators were trained to emphasize that the survey was sponsored and supervised by a graduate student.

⁵⁴Lupu and Michelitch, 2018; Seligson, 2005.

⁵⁵Adida et al., 2016.

⁵⁶Lupu and Michelitch, 2018.

The survey data I collected differ from existing survey data from Myanmar in two aspects. In contrast to the existing survey data which are intended to be nationally representative, the data I collected are intended to be representative of the selected ethnic minority groups. Also, unlike the existing survey data which were enumerated primarily by members of the politically dominant group, the survey data I collected were enumerated by ethnic minorities. The sample I work with consists of 822 respondents from 35 townships across Myanmar. The sample is 21 percent Bamar, 32 percent Chin, and 34 percent Kachin; the remaining 13 percent are other ethnic minorities.

5.2 Key Variables

As in many existing works that examine a similar concept,⁵⁷ I operationalize attitudes toward the state as *pride* in one's citizenship: How proud are you to be a citizen of Myanmar? Response options range from "not proud at all" (coded as 0), "not proud" (1), "proud" (2) and "very proud" (3).

My measure of respondents' quality of everyday encounters with the state focuses on their rating of how respectfully they were treated and their satisfaction with service experiences. The respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed with this statement: "The local government officials and civil servants' treat me with respect regardless of my economic status." They were also asked: "How satisfied are you with your interactions with civil servants in the local government offices?"⁵⁸ The variable *service experience* is an average

⁵⁷See Elkins and Sides, 2007; Wimmer, 2017.

⁵⁸The numerical coding of the responses range from 0 to 3 with 3 being the most positive response.

of responses to these questions.⁵⁹ These questions are deliberately vague in order to tap the service experiences that are most salient for the respondents— different agencies are not equally relevant for all the respondents. They are also meant to capture the interpersonal dimension of citizen-state encounters.

There are two additional key variables in the main models presented below which evaluate heterogeneous effect of service experiences: *minority* and *ethnic attachment*. The variable *minority* is binary, and non-Bamar respondents are coded as 1. The variable *ethnic attachment*, also binary, is coded for ethnic minorities only and is based on an average score of several survey items.⁶⁰ Most ethnic minorities reported strong attachment to their ethnic identity; only 9 percent scored below 2 on a scale of 0 to 3. Respondents who score 2.8 and above (top 12 percent) are considered to have "strong" ethnic attachment while those who score 2 and below (bottom 40 percent) are considered to have "weak" ethnic attachment; the former are coded as 1 for the variable *ethnic attachment*.

Controls

Basic demographic variables (gender, urban residency, and religion) were included as controls. Urban residency indicates whether the respondent lives in an urban area as determined

⁵⁹87 percent of the sample answered both questions, 11 percent answer just one, and 2 percent did not answer either. For respondents who answered just one, the variable everyday encounters is simply their response for the one question they answered.

⁶⁰The survey questions were as follows. "How proud are you to be [ethnicity]?" To what extent do you agree with the following statements: (1) "Every [ethnicity] should teach their children to speak [ethnic language] fluently;" (2) "It is important to me that I am involved in [ethnicity] organizations/associations;" and (3) "I would rather be a [ethnic group] than any other ethnic group in the world." [Ethnicity] in the statements were replaced with the group the respondent identified with. These questions were omitted when interviewing Bamar respondents. For all questions, options ranges from 0 to 3 where 2 and above indicate affirmative answer.

Table 1: Summary Statistics of Independent Variables

	<i>N</i>	Mean	St. Dev	Min	Max
Dependent Variables					
Pride	809	2.24	0.67	0	3
Independent Variables					
Service experience	809	1.75	0.43	0	3
Minority	822	0.79	0.41	0	1
Ethnic attachment	333	0.23	0.42	0	1
Male	622	0.48	0.50	0	1
Non-Buddhist	822	0.64	0.48	0	1
District	822	0.42	0.49	0	1
Urban	822	0.47	0.50	0	1
Accessibility	740	1.34	0.59	0	3

by the government’s GAD. Religion was self-reported. Townships have different levels of bureaucratic capacity, and to control for this variation, I include a proxy variable, *district*, which indicates whether the township is a district capital. Districts in Myanmar are a sub-national unit consisting of several townships, and I expect the townships that are designated as district capitals to have a higher bureaucratic capacity because the OSS offices were first instituted in these townships. I also include respondents’ rating for *accessibility* of government services; this variable is expected to control for whether respondents received the services they sought and their general disposition to some extent.⁶¹ The descriptive statistics of the dependent variables and independent variables are summarized in Table 1.

[Table 1 about here]

⁶¹The survey question is: “How easy is it for you to obtain services from local government offices?” Response options ranges from "very difficult" (coded 0) to "very easy" (coded 3).

5.3 Results

I use linear regression framework to analyze the data. In the main analysis, attitudes toward the state is modeled as a function of respondents' *service experience* in street-level bureaucracy, gender, religion, urban residency, bureaucratic capacity (district), and service accessibility. The standard errors are clustered by locality in all the models because residents from the same ward or village tracts are likely to encounter the same civil servants.

Models presented in Table 2 evaluate heterogeneous effects of service experiences on national pride vis-a-vis minority status and strong ethnic attachment among minorities. Results in support of my argument— that individuals suspicious of the state, on the account of living under alien rule, gather information about the state and update their views of the state— should show that service experiences affect minorities' but not majorities' national pride. They should also show that service experiences affect minorities with strong ethnic attachment—those who can be expected to have the most sensitive ethnic perceptual radar— more so than those with weak ethnic attachment.

[Table 2 about here]

Table 2 indicates strong support for my argument. The effects of service experiences on minorities' attitudes toward the state (coefficients associated with the interaction of *minority* and *service experience*) are positive and statistically significant for ethnic minorities. However, service experiences do not appear to affect ethnic majorities' attitudes (Models 1 to 3). These results hold when I include controls for township-fixed effect and access to

Table 2: Experiences in street-level bureaucracy and national pride

	Entire sample			Minorities only		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Minority	-0.94*** (0.25)	-0.95*** (0.25)	-0.85*** (0.27)			
Minority X service experience	0.35*** (0.13)	0.36*** (0.13)	0.30** (0.14)			
Service experience	0.01 (0.10)	-0.01 (0.11)	-0.00 (0.12)	0.29*** (0.09)	0.26*** (0.09)	0.19** (0.09)
Ethnic attachment X service				0.41 (0.25)	0.42 (0.25)	0.45* (0.25)
Ethnic attachment				-0.60 (0.45)	-0.61 (0.45)	-0.64 (0.45)
Male	0.05 (0.04)	0.06 (0.04)	0.04 (0.04)	0.11 (0.07)	0.12* (0.07)	0.11 (0.07)
Non-Buddhist	-0.28*** (0.06)	-0.27*** (0.06)	-0.33*** (0.06)	-0.24*** (0.09)	-0.23** (0.09)	-0.28** (0.11)
Urban	-0.07 (0.04)	-0.07 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.04)	-0.12* (0.06)	-0.12* (0.07)	-0.13** (0.07)
District	0.03 (0.05)	0.03 (0.05)	-0.18 (0.24)	0.02 (0.07)	0.03 (0.07)	-0.44*** (0.14)
Accessibility		0.07* (0.04)	0.08** (0.04)		0.07 (0.05)	0.08 (0.06)
Constant	2.65*** (0.19)	2.60*** (0.21)	2.56*** (0.20)	1.72*** (0.19)	1.67*** (0.20)	1.82*** (0.18)
Township fixed effect	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
<i>N</i>	798	798	798	320	320	320

Standard errors in parentheses, clustered by locality. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Respondents with missing accessibility rating were imputed with the mean value.

government services.⁶² The heterogeneous effect of service experience for ethnic minorities and majorities is graphed in the left panel of Figure 1. The figure suggests that with positive experiences in street-level bureaucracy, ethnic minorities' attitudes toward the state could be as positive as that of the politically dominant ethnic groups. This finding is substantively important given that according to existing survey research, members of politically dominant ethnic groups across the globe have a higher national pride compared to their ethnic minority counterparts.⁶³

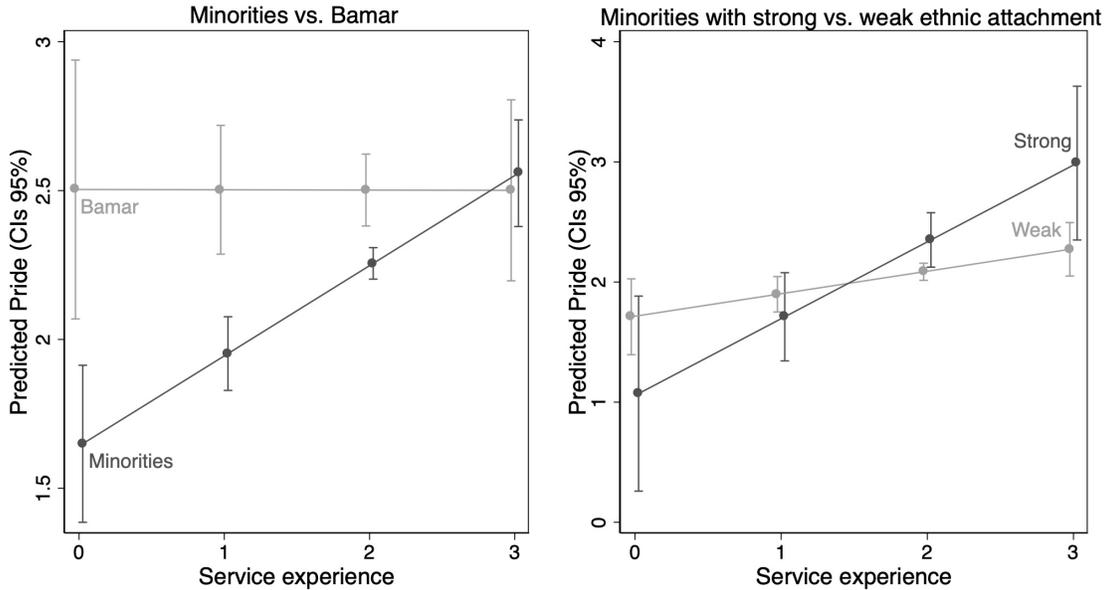
The null finding for ethnic majorities is primarily driven by a consistently high level of national pride reported by the Bamar respondents in the sample. In fact, nearly 70 percent stated that they were "very proud" to be Myanmar citizens while the remaining 30 percent said they were "proud." At the same time, there was significantly more variations in their service rating, including reports of negative experiences. Consistent with my theoretical expectation, this finding suggests that ethnic majorities' attitudes toward Myanmar do not respond to their experiences in street-level bureaucracy.

Regarding minority subgroup analysis, Table 2 shows suggestive evidence that while service experiences affect minorities with weak ethnic attachment, service experiences indeed have a stronger effect on minorities with strong ethnic attachment. Coefficients associated with the interaction of strong *ethnic attachment* and *service experience* in Models 4 to 6 are positive; and this effect is statistically significant in Model 6. When I re-estimate these

⁶²Results from re-estimation using the ordered logistic regression framework, presented in Table A2 in the appendix, are consistent with results here.

⁶³See Elkins and Sides, 2007. There are a few exceptions, however, including the Isan people in Thailand (Ricks, 2019; Selway, 2020).

Figure 1: Heterogeneous Effects of Service Experience. These figures are based on Models 3 and 6 in Table 2.



models using the ordered logistic framework, the interaction term is statistically significant in all three models (see Models 4 to 6 in Table A2 in the appendix). Recall that minorities with "weak" ethnic attachment has been defined as those with bottom 40 percent of ethnic attachment score. As such, lowering the percentile threshold may result in stronger heterogeneous effects of service experiences. However, this approach is not feasible in this study due to small sample size.

[Figure 1 about here]

Is the ameliorating effect of services experiences on minority-state relations driven by the least disaffected ethnic minorities— that is, the groups with peaceful relationship with the state? To address this concern, I conduct subgroup analysis analysis with just the Kachin

Table 3: Effect of Service Experiences by Conflict Status

	Chin (relative peace)		Kachin (on-going conflict)	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Service	0.36*** (0.11)	0.35*** (0.10)	0.35*** (0.11)	0.34*** (0.11)
Constant	1.56*** (0.19)	1.66*** (0.22)	1.41*** (0.20)	1.50*** (0.21)
Control variables	N	Y	N	Y
<i>N</i>	258	258	273	273

Standard errors, clustered by locality, in parentheses.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

and Chin samples. This additional analysis shows that service experiences improve minority-state relations even in conflict-affected societies. In fact, results presented in Table 3 indicate that the effect sizes of service experience on Chin’s and Kachin’s attitudes toward the state are the same. This finding underscores the importance of integrating service delivery reform in peace-building and national reconciliation processes.

[Table 3 about here]

Aside from service experiences, religion is a consistent predictor of ethnic minorities’ attitudes toward the state. Non-Buddhist ethnic minorities have an unfavorable view of the state compared to Buddhist ethnic minorities. This finding resonates with the logic underlying nationalism as a theory of political legitimacy. This theory, as perceived by Gellner, suggests that the ruled deem state authority to be acceptable because the rulers are one of them.⁶⁴ While ethnic minorities are not coethnics of the power-holders, they may

⁶⁴1983.

feel more proximate to the latter and thereby, to the state because there is a significant commonality between them and the ruling group. In the case of Myanmar, Buddhism, the official religion in Myanmar, is likely to facilitate a feeling of proximity to the politically dominant group. The vast majority of Myanmar’s population, including ethnic minorities, is Buddhist. The members of the politically dominant group tout being Buddhist as a cornerstone of their ethno-national identity (“To be Burmese is to be Buddhist”), which is amplified by the state. As such ethnic minorities who are more socially proximate to that identity—i.e., Buddhist ethnic minorities—may hold more favorable views of the state dominated by Bamar Buddhists compared to other ethnic minorities.

5.4 Robustness Checks

Models in Table 4 re-estimate effect of service experiences on ethnic minorities’ national pride accounting for several alternative determinants of attitudes toward the state.⁶⁵ All six models indicate that positive effects of service experiences in street-level bureaucracy are robust to specifications controlling for power-sharing, conflict casualty, government employment, reachability of government offices, public goods provision, and incumbent support.⁶⁶

[Table 4 about here]

Power-sharing

⁶⁵See Table A1 in the Appendix for descriptive summary of these additional variables.

⁶⁶Conflict casualty is coded 1 if the respondent reported that their family members or relatives were displaced, injured, or killed due to the civil war. Civil servant indicates whether the respondent was a civil servant at the time of the interview.

Table 4: Determinants of Minorities' Attitudes toward the State

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Service experience	0.35*** (0.08)	0.35*** (0.07)	0.36*** (0.07)	0.37*** (0.07)	0.36*** (0.07)	0.36*** (0.07)	0.31*** (0.08)
Coethnic cabinet minister	0.07 (0.05)						-0.03 (0.06)
Casualty		-0.07 (0.06)					-0.07 (0.07)
Civil servant			0.09 (0.07)				0.10 (0.07)
Reachability				-0.03 (0.02)			-0.03 (0.03)
Electricity					-0.16 (0.15)		-0.30* (0.18)
Incumbent support						0.09* (0.05)	0.08 (0.05)
Pop. share	-1.20 (3.61)						-0.83 (3.92)
Male	0.08 (0.05)	0.07 (0.05)	0.06 (0.05)	0.06 (0.05)	0.06 (0.05)	0.08 (0.05)	0.09* (0.05)
Non-Buddhist	-0.24*** (0.07)	-0.25*** (0.06)	-0.28*** (0.06)	-0.26*** (0.06)	-0.28*** (0.06)	-0.27*** (0.06)	-0.23*** (0.07)
Urban	-0.10* (0.05)	-0.10* (0.05)	-0.12** (0.05)	-0.18** (0.08)	-0.10* (0.05)	-0.10** (0.05)	-0.19** (0.09)
District	0.02 (0.06)	0.01 (0.05)	0.02 (0.05)	0.00 (0.05)	0.03 (0.05)	0.04 (0.05)	0.06 (0.05)
Constant	1.70*** (0.19)	1.75*** (0.16)	1.73*** (0.15)	1.80*** (0.17)	1.78*** (0.16)	1.57*** (0.17)	1.80*** (0.24)
<i>N</i>	586	630	630	630	607	595	536

Standard errors in parentheses, clustered by locality. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

First, power-sharing is commonly thought to have an ameliorating effect in diverse societies.⁶⁷ Various power-sharing institutions are expected to facilitate the inclusion of ethnic minorities in the political decision-making processes, leading to more preferred policies for their communities.⁶⁸ Political inclusion may also foster a feeling of ownership of the state. Wimmer finds that members of ethnic groups that are included in a power-sharing arrangement have a higher national pride.⁶⁹

As in existing literature, I operationalize power-sharing as descriptive representation in the national level government. Specifically, following Wimmer, the binary variable *coethnic cabinet minister* is coded 1 for individuals whose group is included in the president's cabinet (60 percent of the minority sample).⁷⁰ Contrary to Wimmer's findings, Models 1 and 8 in Table 4 show that, for ethnic minorities, the effect of inclusion in cabinet on national pride is ambiguous.⁷¹ On the one hand, it is possible that the effect of power-sharing is muted in this study because the sample consists primarily of minorities with political representation. On the other hand, it is also possible that Wimmer's findings are driven by ethnic majorities in the sample; minorities and majorities are pooled in Wimmer's analysis. In fact, a recent study, based on Afrobarometer survey, shows that being in power does not promote national identification for members of the politically non-dominant ethnic groups; it appears to affect

⁶⁷Lijphart, 1969.

⁶⁸Nordlinger, 1972.

⁶⁹2017.

⁷⁰2017.

⁷¹Group size was calculated based on the township reports compiled by the GAD. See the Appendix for more information.

the politically dominant ethnic groups only.⁷²

Given that the literature emphasizes power-sharing as a potential solution for managing divided societies, I use alternative measurements of descriptive representation to conduct additional analysis: seat share of respondents' ethnic group in the national legislature, proportionality of the seat share, and whether the respondent (their township) was represented by their coethnic MP in the national legislature. Table A3 in the appendix shows that while alternative measurements of descriptive representation are positively correlated with ethnic minorities' national pride, the effects are not statistically significant. These findings suggest that power-sharing has an ambiguous effect on minority-state relations, echoing works that challenge ameliorating effects of power-sharing institutions.⁷³

Other Determinants

My argument emphasizes the importance of interpersonal elements of face-to-face encounters with agents of the state. However, what if ethnic minorities' rating of their service experience actually reflects how hard it was for respondents to reach local government offices? Additional concerns also include whether respondents' access to public goods confound the effect of their service experience and the possibility that attitudes toward the state are affected by support for the incumbent government, which was led by Aung San Suu Kyi's party. To help address these issues, I include the variables (1) *reachability*, which is a composite score of both distance and road condition between the respondents' locality and urban center of

⁷²See Green, 2020.

⁷³See Liu, 2011; Selway and Templeman, 2012.

the township where the government offices are located, (2) access to electricity, which is percentage of township population with electricity, according to the 2014 census data, and (3) support for the NLD government, which was self-reported in the survey. Models 5 to 8 indicate that positive effects of everyday encounters with the state are robust to these specifications.

A surprising finding from the analysis discussed above is the negative relationship between access to public goods (proxied by electricity) and national pride. This finding concurs with Harutyunyan,⁷⁴ which examines how national identification and several indicators of public goods such as infant mortality, school attainment, and infrastructure quality, are related. However, the finding challenges Wimmer's argument that receiving public goods from the state should increase national pride.⁷⁵ One possible explanation for the discrepancy between Wimmer's expectation and my finding is the heterogeneous effect of public goods for the minorities versus the majorities. That is, the relationship Wimmer predicts may primarily hold for ethnic majorities, but not for minorities. Another possibility is that the state does not have a monopoly over the provision of public goods we examine. Much of the public goods in the developing countries are in fact provided by non-state actors, including community based organizations, political parties and INGOs, and thus, recipients are unlikely to attribute public goods provision to the state.

⁷⁴2020.

⁷⁵2018.

6 Study 2: Experimental Evidence

So far, I have demonstrated that the positive effect of service experiences on ethnic minorities' attachment to the state is robust to several specifications. However, because these findings are based on observational data, reverse causality in the key relationship examined is a concern. Another issue is mechanism: do positive or negative experiences, or both types of experiences, affect attitudes toward the state? Relatedly, are the null findings regarding ethnic majorities simply a function of a ceiling effect, as opposed to them not responding to service experiences?

To address these concerns, I leveraged an online survey experiment fielded in the post-coup Myanmar. On February 1, 2021, the military staged a coup in Myanmar, annulling results from the 2020 general elections. Following the coup, there were nation-wide pro-democracy protests, and many civil servants went on strike, refusing to work for the new military regime. To clamp down on the opposition, the regime unleashed security forces particularly to the localities where protest organizers and the striking civil servants reportedly lived. Violent crackdowns increased, unevenly, across the country. In the post-coup survey mentioned above, 20 percent reported that the presence of security forces increased in their area and 52 percent reported violence in their locality. In response to the crackdown, protests and demonstrations transformed into armed resistance movements. As a result, there is now grassroots level insurgency in Myanmar, beyond the ethnic minority areas where ethnic armed organizations operate.

In the midst of chaos, street-level bureaucracy continued to operate in Myanmar.

In the post-coup survey, 30 percent of the respondents reported that they have not been to a local government office since the coup, indicating that the majority still engage with Myanmar’s street-level bureaucracy. Among those who have been to a government office, the most visited offices were the ward/village level GAD office (55 percent), the electricity office (27 percent), the police station (16 percent), the township level GAD office (13 percent) and the transportation department (9 percent). These figures are consistent with new requirements the new junta announced following the coup which include guest registration at the ward/village GAD offices. These interactions provide genuine reference points for respondents as they engage with the treatment primes introduced in the study and the survey questions about their experiences in street-level bureaucracy.

The survey was implemented a year after the coup in March 2022. The post-coup Myanmar is often described as being on the brink of state collapse. This setting starkly differs from the context in which the first survey was conducted in 2019, and thus, results from the second survey also speak to generalizability of the findings presented above.

6.1 Survey data and priming experiment

The survey was hosted on Qualtrics and self-administered in Burmese. The participants were recruited through Facebook advertisement; existing estimates suggest that about 40 percent of Myanmar’s population are Facebook users at the time of survey implementation.⁷⁶ Given that a significant segment of the Myanmar population are offline, the resulting sample

⁷⁶This figure is based on statistics published by online marketing companies, NapoleonCat and Statista.

represents just the online users who tend to be younger, more educated and urban compared to the country's population as a whole. The sample consists of 4012 respondents who come from 275 of 330 townships across Myanmar. About 40 percent of them self-identified as Bamar, and the rest are ethnic minorities: Kachin (5 percent), Karen (9), Mon (8), Rakhine (8) and Shan (13).

In the survey experiment, participants were randomly assigned to three comparison groups: (1) the control, (2) positive treatment and (3) negative treatment. The positive prime was as follows: "Imagine that you visit a local government office to apply for an official document, and the bureaucrat you encounter treats you with respect. When you ask questions about the requirements and procedure, they patiently answer all your questions." The negative prime was a text of similar length but described the interaction as condescending and rude. These vignettes mention just the tone of the interaction and make no mention of the outcome of the interaction. This approach is intended to heighten the salience of *how*, rather than *whether*, services are delivered to service-seekers. Table A4 in the Appendix indicates effectiveness of randomization—the sample is balanced with respect to several pre-treatment covariates. There is a slight imbalance with respect to gender and Chin respondents; and thus, I conduct additional analysis accounting for these imbalances.

After reading the assigned vignettes, respondents were asked how satisfied would they be with the service experience described. Post-treatment manipulation check, reported in Figure 3 in the Appendix, confirms that those receiving positive prime indicated significantly more positive service rating compared to those in the negative treatment group. The average

rating of the positive treatment group is 2.23, on a scale of 0 to 3, while it is 0.50 for the negative treatment group. Those in the control group were also asked to rate their service experiences (no vignette); their average rating is 1.27. These numbers confirm the effectiveness of treatment manipulation. At the same time, there were non-compliers in both treatment groups; 12 percent of the participants in the negative treatment group indicated a positive rating and 19 percent of the participants in the positive treatment indicated a negative rating. Thus, in addition to intent-to-treat effects, I estimate a sub-sample analysis of just the compliers in the treated group.

Like in Study 1, the outcome was national pride, measured on a scale of 0 to 3. Those in the treatment groups were first exposed to the treatment, then asked to indicate their post-treatment service rating, and finally, asked to indicate their level of national pride. However, those in the control group were asked to indicate their level of national pride without any exposure and post-treatment service rating.

6.2 Results

I use a linear regression framework to evaluate whether respondents exposed to the treatment primes reported a different level of national pride compared to those in the control group. I estimate two types of models. In the first, the sample includes all the respondents, both minorities and Bamar, and a binary variable *Bamar* is interacted with the treatment primes. This model is replicated in the second but with a sub-sample of those who complied with their assigned treatment—respondents exposed to positive prime and indicated they would

be "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the interaction, and respondents exposed to negative prime and indicated that they would be "dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied." Results are reported in Table 5 and graphed in Figure 2.

[Table 5 about here]

Results show considerable support for my argument and provide suggestive evidence that positive experiences in street-level bureaucracy leads to a major updating of minorities' views of the state. The effect of positive prime on minorities' national pride is positive in all three models and is statistically significant at 0.1 level in the model with full sample and 0.01 level in model with the complier sub-sample.

However, the difference between the national pride reported by those exposed to negative prime and those in the control group is not detected. Why would negative experiences not matter for ethnic minorities' attitudes toward the state? One reason could be that minorities have such low expectations for how they might be treated by agents of the state that they update their views of the state only when their experiences are positive. Negative experiences could be business as usual, and thus, attitudes updating occurs only when negative experiences are worse than their preexisting low expectations.

Results also indicate that service experiences do not affect ethnic majorities' attitudes toward the state. Results from both models show that Bamar respondents exposed to positive or negative treatment primes are indistinguishable from Bamar respondents in the control group in terms of their national pride. While the coefficients are in the expected directions, none are statistically significant. Models 2 and 4 in Table 5 show that these

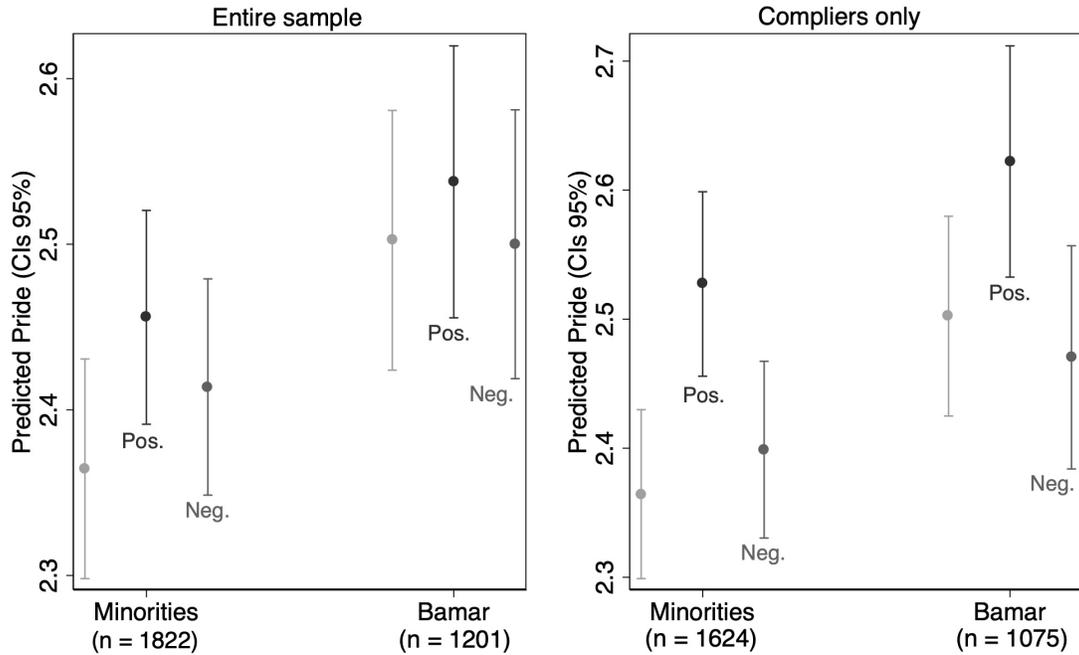
Table 5: Prime treatment

	Ref. category: control				Ref. category: positive prime			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Positive prime	0.09*	0.09*	0.16***	0.16***				
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)				
Negative prime	0.05	0.05	0.03	0.03	-0.04	-0.04	-0.13***	-0.12**
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Bamar	0.14***	0.15***	0.14***	0.15***	0.08	0.09*	0.09*	0.11*
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Pos. X Bamar	-0.06	-0.06	-0.04	-0.05				
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.08)				
Neg. X Bamar	-0.05	-0.05	-0.07	-0.07	0.00	0.00	-0.02	-0.02
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Male		-0.13***		-0.11***		-0.14***		-0.12***
		(0.03)		(0.03)		(0.04)		(0.04)
Chin		0.08		0.12		0.06		0.14
		(0.08)		(0.08)		(0.10)		(0.10)
Constant	2.36***	2.43***	2.36***	2.42***	2.46***	2.53***	2.53***	2.58***
	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Sample	All	All	Sub	Sub	All	All	Sub	Sub
<i>N</i>	3023	3023	2699	2699	2011	2011	1687	1687

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Figure 2: Treatment Effect



findings, regarding minorities and majorities, are robust to covariate adjustments.

Because national pride of minority and Bamar respondents exposed to negative prime is indistinguishable from those in the control group, it is also important to compare those exposed to positive prime to their counterparts exposed to negative prime. Models 5 to 8 replicate the first four models but without the control group. Results provide some evidence that for ethnic minorities, national pride of those exposed to negative prime is indeed lower than that of those exposed to positive prime. This effect is statistically significant in the model with compliers only, but not in the model with sample that pools compliers and defiers. A null finding is expected in the analysis with the pooled sample, because as discussed above, positive experiences lead to updating minorities' view of the state and defiers in the group

assigned to the negative prime would have improved the group's average rating of national pride. Regarding the Bamar sample, this analysis again indicates that those exposed to positive service experiences are indistinguishable, in terms of national pride, from their counterparts in the negative treatment group.

7 Conclusion

Many countries today are multiethnic or multinational states with tenuous relationship between the state and its minority citizens. How can this relationship be improved? Our current understanding of ethnic minorities' views of these states points to structural factors, and this study constitutes one of the first steps to go beyond the existing frameworks. Based on extensive fieldwork, including two original survey datasets, this study shows that the quality of interaction with the state, through its tangible, local manifestations (i.e., street-level bureaucrats), matter for minority-state relations. When ethnic minorities' service experiences in local government offices are positive, they update their views of the state and develop more favorable attitudes. Moreover, this ameliorating effect of service experiences can be effective even in conflict affected societies.

While this study highlights the importance of everyday encounters with the state in improving minority-state relations, it does not negate potential benefits of institutions like power-sharing in divided societies. Rather, it underscores the need to examine implications of structural factors at the micro-level—that is, how ordinary citizens are affected by them. Existing explanations focusing on power-sharing institutions and public policies are limited

in explaining attitudes toward the state precisely because the latter is an individual-level phenomenon. At the same time, structural factors likely undergird citizens' experiences with the state. For example, decades of discriminatory policies in the recruitment and promotion of Myanmar's civil servants resulted in a bureaucracy that is dominated by the ethnic majority and a deeply held perception among ethnic minorities that they are interacting with ethnic majority civil servants. Both of these factors are likely to affect ethnic minorities' experiences in street-level bureaucracy.⁷⁷

This study also raises questions about the limitations of focusing solely on descriptive representation when studying power-sharing. Powersharing and representation can take on several facets,⁷⁸ yet the empirical literature to date primarily examines the association between the most superficial facet of representation, descriptive representation, at the national level of government, and national pride and related concepts. This approach overlooks the subnational levels of government, including street-level bureaucracy, and other types of representation, i.e., symbolic and substantive representation. To better understand the role of power-sharing in minority-state relations, it is important to study the underlying mechanisms, including how power-sharing might facilitate positive everyday encounters with the state.

⁷⁷Conditions under which ethnic minorities' service experiences improve is an open empirical question and is beyond the scope of this study. Existing literature has documented that bureaucrats, often members of the politically dominant groups, discriminate against minorities in everyday interactions (White, Nathan and Faller, 2015; Distelhorst and Hou, 2014). At the same time, it is unclear if interacting with coethnic bureaucrats would improve ethnic minorities' service experiences. Kasara (2007), for example, find evidence of ethnic dis-favoritism. Recently, Choi, Harris and Shen-Bayh (2022) show that judges of different groups are not equally susceptible to group-based biases.

⁷⁸Pitkin, 1967.

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Appendix

A Study procedure and survey information

A.1 Study 1

There are 330 townships in Myanmar. To obtain a sample representative of Chin and Kachin population, only townships with a substantial Chin and Kachin populations were sampled. Townships selection for this study was based on the following criteria: (1) Chin or Kachin population accounts for at least a third of the township population or (2) at least 1.5 percent of Chin or Kachin population resides in the township. This criteria covers well over 90 percent of Chin and Kachin population. Note that the Chin population primarily lives in western and central Myanmar whereas the Kachin population predominantly lives in northern and northeastern Myanmar. There is no one township with a substantial population of both Chin and Kachin. I used the 2017 township reports compiled by the General Administration Department (GAD) because ethnicity data from the 2014 census, the first census in Myanmar in three decades, has not been released. Based on the GAD reports, 1.5 percent of the targeted group is determined as 13,500 for Chin and 10,500 for Kachin. These criteria produce a list of 43 townships (20 Chin and 23 Kachin). However, due to accessibility and safety concerns, the survey was implemented in 35 townships (822 households across 103 localities).

Myanmar townships consist of localities—designated as “ward” in the urban areas

and “village” in the rural areas. I used multistage sampling to select three localities within each township. I pursued different sampling strategies for the two types of townships I encountered. In the homogeneous townships, the ones in which the Chin or Kachin population accounted for at least 90 percent of the population, three localities were randomly selected based on urbanization level of the township, weighted by population size; urbanization level and population size are based on the 2014 Census report. In the heterogenous townships, the ones in which the Chin or Kachin population accounted for less than 90 percent of the population, I first identified localities that are predominantly Chin/Kachin or predominantly Bamar. This classification was made based on the list of Kachin churches obtained from the Kachin Baptist Convention and the list of Chin wards and villages obtained from the Asho Chin National Party. Where necessary, these administrative records were supplemented by information from local church ministers and community leaders.

Other localities were excluded from sampling. From the list of identified localities, I then randomly selected two predominantly Chin/Kachin localities and one predominantly Bamar locality. This sampling strategy ensures that Bamars are included in the sample while oversampling Chin and Kachin populations. Within each locality, approximately 8 households were randomly selected after a random selection of a starting landmark and a sampling interval.

A short note on safety concerns is in order. The year this survey was implemented, 2019, was a particularly peaceful year, making the travel from township to township much safer than previous years. The government armed forces declared a unilateral temporary

truce in northern and eastern Myanmar; at the time, the government's counterinsurgency effort was concentrated in western Myanmar in Rakhine State. The localities selected for survey implementation were fully under the Myanmar government's control, which means that there were not affected by fighting.

The response rate was 55.7 percent and the refusal rate was 12.4 percent. This is similar to the refusal rate encountered by the Asian Barometer Survey in 2015 (13.1 percent) which one of the first nationally representative surveys conducted in Myanmar.

Ethics approval and informed consent

Study 1 received approval from the Institutional Review Board at UNIVERSITY. Additionally, I met with ward/village tract administrators to seek permission to conduct the survey.

Eligible respondents included all person in the selected households between age 20 and 70. Given that younger adults are less likely to engage in everyday interaction with the state, the minimum eligibility age for this study is age 20, which is an average age of college graduates in Myanmar. In order to perform random selection of a within-household participant, names and birth dates of the household members were collected on a worksheet before the interview commenced. From the list of eligible household members, the person with the next birthday from the day of survey was selected.

Prior to administering the survey, the enumerators explained to the selected household member, the purpose of the survey and went through the informed document, which was translated in advance. The enumerators were trained to emphasize that participation

was completely voluntary and that participants could choose to stop the interview at any time. The respondents were not asked to sign the consent form; the enumerator proceeded to the survey after obtaining a verbal consent. The survey was administered verbally and the responses were recorded on paper. After the survey was completed, the paper record of responses and the within-household participant selection worksheet were kept separately to ensure that the responses and the participants' identity were delinked. The within-household selection worksheet were destroyed within 24 hours of the survey interview.

Data source and additional variables

Variables related to power-sharing are based on results from the 2015 General Elections. The variable *seat share* indicates the share of seats held by the respondent's ethnic group in the national legislature. A quarter seats in the legislature are reserved for the military appointed MPs, and they are excluded from calculating the variable *seat share*. Demographic information of the MPs—namely, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, etc.—were compiled by the Enlightened Myanmar Research Foundation, a Yangon-based non-profit research institution, based on data from the Union Election Commission which oversaw elections in Myanmar.

As mentioned already, population data come from the GAD township reports.

Conflict casualty was self-reported in the survey. About 30 percent of the ethnic minorities in the sample reported to have experienced some form of conflict casualty. As expected, a higher percentage of members of the ethnic group with on-going armed conflict with the state reported experiences of conflict casualty. 56 percent of Kachin respondents

Table A1: Summary Statistics of Additional Independent Variables (minorities only)

	<i>N</i>	Mean	St. Dev	Min	Max
Coethnic cabinet minister	649	0.41	0.49	0	1
Parliamentary seat share	649	3.54	1.26	0	6.52
Proportional representation	603	2.20	0.77	6.50	
Coethnic MP	649	0.47	0.50	0	1
Pop. share	577	0.58	0.37	0.006	0.999
Township population	603	0.02	0.01	0.001	0.064
Casualty	648	0.30	0.46	0	1
Reachability	649	1.51	1.86	0	7
Electricity	625	0.26	0.17	0.04	0.73
Incumbent support	610	1.61	0.59	0	3

reported a conflict casualty whereas only 9 percent of Chin reported a conflict casualty.

To calculate *reachability*, distance was measured using google map while implementing the survey. Localities in urban areas of the township (wards) were coded as 0. Villages 10 miles or less from downtown were coded as 1, between 10 and 25 miles as 2, between 25 and 50 miles as 3, and more than 50 miles as 4. I also rated the road condition while on the field. Excellent road condition is coded as 0, good as 1, fair as 2, poor as 3 and very poor as 4.

A.2 Study 2

The survey was hosted on Qualtrics and fielded between March 5 and 17, 2022. Respondents were recruited through Facebook advertisements and paid approximately US\$3 (5000 kyat) for their time and data usage. Once respondents click on the link embedded in the advertisement, they are presented with the study consent form. Those who agreed to proceed were prompted to click next. Study 2 received approval from the Institutional Review Board at UNIVERSITY.

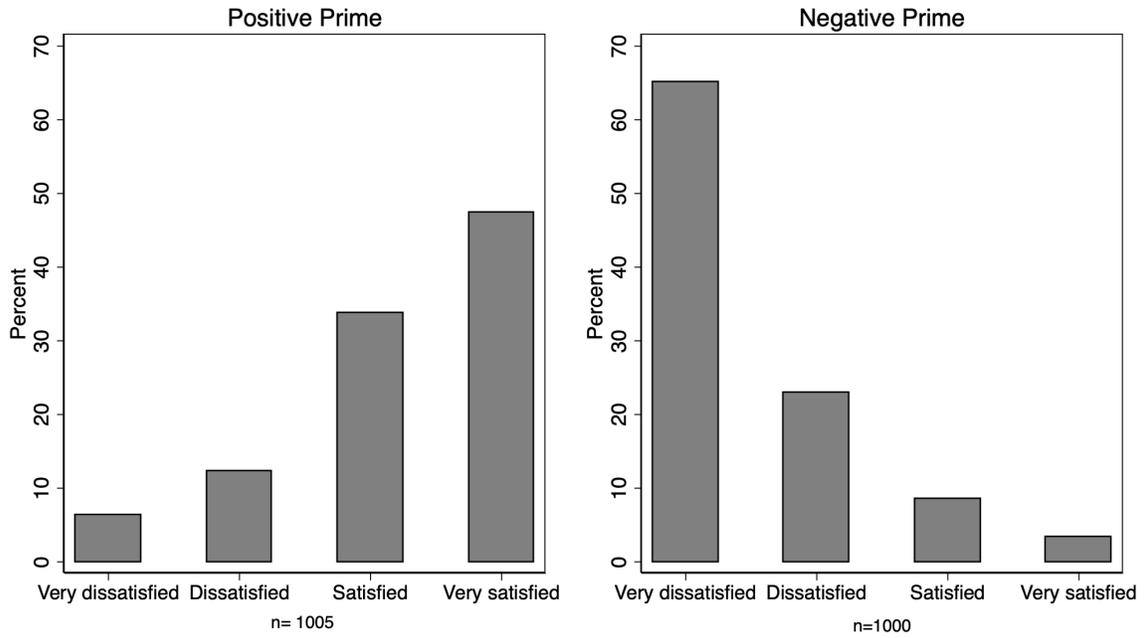
To ensure that the resulting sample contains a meaningful sample of ethnic minority, recruitment (advertisement) targeted townships in the states, the subnational administrative units with predominantly minority population. It is also important to mitigate over-representation of respondents from the Yangon and Mandalay metropolitan areas who disproportionately make up the online-user population in Myanmar. Thus, recruitment beyond the ethnic minority areas targeted major towns outside of Yangon and Mandalay Regions.

All the states and regions are represented in our sample. While there are 275 townships in our sample (83%), the respondents predominantly come from 15 townships. Since residents of the regions account for nearly three quarters of the country's population, according to the 2014 census report, residents of the state are overrepresented in the sample. However, as mentioned above, oversampling residents of the state was necessary in order to construct a sizable sample of ethnic minorities.

The study participation lasted 16.5 minutes on average. The treatment primes ap-

peared in the latter half of the survey. Treatment compliance rate is graphed in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Post-treatment Service Experience Rating



A.3 Additional Tables

Table A2: Experiences in street-level bureaucracy and national pride - ologit

	Entire sample			Minorities only		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Minority	-3.18*** (1.01)	-3.20*** (1.02)	-2.97*** (1.09)			
Minority X service experience	1.17** (0.54)	1.19** (0.55)	1.04* (0.60)			
Service experience	0.05 (0.46)	-0.03 (0.47)	-0.01 (0.52)	1.22*** (0.34)	1.09*** (0.36)	0.86** (0.36)
Ethnic attachment X service				1.37* (0.76)	1.44* (0.78)	1.56* (0.81)
Ethnic attachment				-1.69 (1.31)	-1.78 (1.35)	-1.85 (1.45)
Male	0.19 (0.15)	0.21 (0.15)	0.17 (0.15)	0.53** (0.26)	0.57** (0.26)	0.49* (0.29)
Non-Buddhist	-0.98*** (0.19)	-0.96*** (0.19)	-1.22*** (0.23)	-1.11*** (0.32)	-1.07*** (0.32)	-1.33*** (0.45)
Urban	-0.17 (0.15)	-0.19 (0.15)	-0.09 (0.16)	-0.44* (0.24)	-0.48** (0.24)	-0.64** (0.27)
District	0.14 (0.16)	0.15 (0.16)	-0.08 (0.92)	0.14 (0.26)	0.16 (0.26)	-1.43** (0.58)
Accessibility		0.19 (0.13)	0.25* (0.14)		0.30 (0.21)	0.45 (0.28)
cut1						
_cons	-5.86*** (0.93)	-5.72*** (0.95)	-5.81*** (0.96)	-2.54*** (0.76)	-2.35*** (0.75)	-3.22*** (0.73)
cut2						
_cons	-3.99*** (0.86)	-3.85*** (0.89)	-3.90*** (0.89)	-0.90 (0.73)	-0.70 (0.74)	-1.42** (0.72)
cut3						
_cons	-0.64 (0.85)	-0.49 (0.88)	-0.39 (0.87)	3.12*** (0.76)	3.34*** (0.76)	3.06*** (0.74)
Township fixed effect	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
<i>N</i>	798	798	798	320	320	320

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table A3: Descriptive Representation of Ethnic Minorities and National Pride

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Service experience	0.35*** (0.07)	0.36*** (0.07)	0.37*** (0.08)
Seat share	0.01 (0.06)		
Proportional seat share		0.03 (0.02)	
Coethnic MP			0.05 (0.08)
Township pop.			0.13 (0.09)
Pop. share	-2.34 (6.75)		
Male	0.09 (0.05)	0.06 (0.05)	0.06 (0.05)
Non-Buddhist	-0.26*** (0.07)	-0.29*** (0.06)	-0.31*** (0.06)
Urban	-0.10* (0.05)	-0.10* (0.05)	-0.11** (0.05)
District	0.03 (0.06)	0.02 (0.05)	0.03 (0.05)
Constant	1.72*** (0.22)	1.67*** (0.16)	1.62*** (0.16)
<i>N</i>	586	630	562

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table A4: Balance Table

Variable	Control	Positive prime	Negative prime
Male	0.60 (0.02)	0.55** (0.02)	0.55** (0.02)
Age	4.48 (0.07)	4.36 (0.07)	4.48 (0.07)
Urban	0.58 (0.02)	0.56 (0.02)	0.60 (0.02)
Education	6.06 (0.05)	6.02 (0.05)	6.04 (0.05)
Buddhist	0.81 (0.01)	0.78 (0.01)	0.82 (0.01)
Income	2.74 (0.04)	2.74 (0.04)	2.80 (0.04)
No visit post-coup	0.39 (0.02)	0.41 (0.02)	0.41 (0.02)
Homogeneous locality	0.65 (0.02)	0.66 (0.01)	0.65 (0.02)
Local violence	0.21 (0.01)	0.20 (0.01)	0.19 (0.01)
Ethnicity centrality	3.32 (0.03)	3.33 (0.03)	3.30 (0.03)
Bamar	0.42 (0.02)	0.39 (0.02)	0.39 (0.02)
Chin	0.05 (0.01)	0.04 (0.01)	0.03** (0.01)
Kachin	0.05 (0.01)	0.05 (0.01)	0.06 (0.01)
Karen	0.09 (0.01)	0.10 (0.01)	0.10 (0.01)
Karenni	0.04 (0.01)	0.03 (0.01)	0.04 (0.01)
Mon	0.07 (0.01)	0.08 (0.01)	0.08 (0.01)
Rakhine	0.09 (0.01)	0.08 (0.01)	0.09 (0.01)
Shan	0.12 (0.01)	0.14 (0.01)	0.14 (0.01)

Reference category is the control group.