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Good Neighbors:
Acceptance of Ethnic Minorities in Transitional
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Good Neighbors:

Acceptance of Ethnic Minorities in Transitional Myanmar

Abstract For four years since 2011, Myanmar has sought to make a transition to democracy. One clear comparative lesson is that respect for ethnic and religious minorities is essential for the creation of a stable, consolidated democracy. Feeding into this are protection of both individual and group rights, policies promoting inclusiveness and non-discrimination, and a more general sense among minority groups that a level political playing field means that they too could one day have the chance to attain majority status. This literature is relevant to Myanmar because of the deep ethnic and religious fragmentation and conflict that have long characterized it. This paper therefore seeks to look beyond elite attempts to generate national reconciliation by exploring whether reconciliation is currently taking place at the grassroots level. Are ethnic and religious minorities accepted by the Bamar Buddhist majority? In order to investigate the acceptance of ethnic minorities in the wake of peripheral war in Kachin State and pogroms against the Rohingyas, we have just completed a probabilistic survey of 1002 adults in Myanmar. The core finding is that two distinct dynamics of reconciliation are at work in the society: one views the Kachin as an ethnic group, and the other views the Rohingya as a religious group. The two different sets of predictors suggest that distinct theories explain why Bamar Buddhists are able, or not able, to live as good neighbors with the two groups.

Key words Burma/Myanmar – ethnic conflict – Bamar – Kachin – Rohingya

Introduction

For four years since March 2011, when an entrenched military junta ceded power to a notionally civilian government headed by President Thein Sein (formerly prime minister in the outgoing junta), Myanmar has sought to make a transition to democracy.¹ One clear comparative lesson from the literature on transitions is that respect for ethnic and religious minorities is essential for the creation of a stable, consolidated democracy. Several components feed into this: protection of both individual and group rights, policies promoting inclusiveness and non-discrimination, and more generally a sense among minority groups that a level political playing field means that they too could one day have the chance to attain majority status.

As part of the wider transition, the Myanmar government is sponsoring both a peace process with ethnic armed groups and, more broadly, an agenda of national reconciliation. Alongside peace talks, this has generated several disparate initiatives designed to bring people together across ethnic and religious fault lines. Nevertheless, at a time when low-grade civil conflict continues to plague both Kachin State and northern Shan State, and when sectarian violence remains potent across much of the society, long-standing divisions continue to have real social

¹ In 1989, the military junta decreed a series of name changes for the country and many places within it. Burma became Myanmar, Rangoon became Yangon, Karen State became Kayah State, and so on. This article uses the old geographic terminology when focusing on the period before 1989, and the new terminology when focusing on the period after 1989. This usage is not intended to convey a political message.

effect. Adding to this is the problem of the Rohingya minority, a stateless Muslim group based mainly in Rakhine State, which has been a subject of mob attacks fuelled by radical Buddhist monks.

This paper seeks to look beyond elite attempts to generate national reconciliation by exploring whether reconciliation is taking place at the grassroots level. Are ethnic and religious minorities accepted by the Bamar Buddhist majority? Are there differences in the degree of acceptance of distinct minorities? What is the degree of acceptance of the Rohingya minority? What factors shape ethnic and religious relations at the grassroots level? Such questions are of utmost importance not only for processes of democratization and national reconciliation, but also for tackling ongoing peripheral conflict in Kachin State and attacks against the Rohingya minority. Understanding the social dynamics of ethnic and religious conflict in Myanmar could enable progressive factions within the government, the opposition National League for Democracy, NGOs and international organizations to engage more effectively with the project of national reconciliation. It also provides an opportunity to test the major theories on tolerance and reconciliation in a non-western setting.

The first section presents key concepts, theories and hypotheses concerning multiculturalism, tolerance and reconciliation. The second provides more detail on the Myanmar political and social context, including ethnic and religious conflicts. The third describes the research methods used to undertake our fieldwork, which draws on a survey of 1002 adults in Yangon and Mandalay Regions, the two major centers in Myanmar. Only recently completed, the survey will be complemented by further surveys in three other ethnic states in Myanmar. The fourth

presents and discusses the first multivariate analysis of the survey data. The final section is a brief conclusion. The core finding is that two distinct dynamics of reconciliation are at work in the society: one views the Kachin as an ethnic group, and the other views the Rohingya as a religious group. Underpinning these two different sets of predictors, distinct theories explain why Bamar Buddhists are able, or not able, to live as good neighbors with the two groups.

Key concepts, theories and hypotheses

Our exploration of inter-ethnic and inter-faith relations at the grassroots level concerns the acceptance of other ethnic and religious groups. We are interested in the degree of acceptance of members of different ethnic and religious groups as neighbors, which rests at the intersection of three key concepts: multiculturalism, tolerance, and reconciliation. Multiculturalism focuses on the accommodation and coexistence of diverse groups (Kymlicka 2012), tolerance on “putting up with others” (Sullivan, Piereson and Marcus 1979), and reconciliation on rebuilding communities in the aftermath of violence (Stover and Weinstein 2003). Each concept enhances our understanding of inter-ethnic and inter-faith relations, and provides us with the theoretical background for examining predictors of these relations.

Multiculturalism: In developed western societies, debates about multiculturalism that can be traced back to the late 1960s have been most explicit in advancing claims about the accommodation and coexistence of diverse groups. The term itself is of course not well-defined or easy to clarify, and the policies implemented to give it meaning in different societies span a wide range. Broadly, though, multiculturalism denotes attempts by an established majority

racial or ethnic group to reach out to and make room for designated minority groups. In a recent analysis of states where multiculturalism is most developed, Modood (2013: 5) defines it as “the political accommodation of minorities formed by immigration to western countries from outside the prosperous West.” In an overview also published within the past few years, Kymlicka (2012: 1) takes a broader view, defining multiculturalism simply as “the legal and political accommodation of ethnic diversity.” Moreover, while multiculturalism has become contentious across many of these societies, with political leaders such as David Cameron in Britain, Angela Merkel in Germany, and Nicolas Sarkozy in France all speaking out against it, the associated policy agenda has continued to advance. Indeed, according to the Multiculturalism Policy Index (2014), run by Kymlicka and colleagues, only policies for immigrant minorities in the single case of the Netherlands reveal any significant retrenchment in recent years. Kymlicka (2012: 21) concedes that the term “multiculturalism” may now be taboo, but insists that the principles and policies associated with it remain in place. The Migrant Integration Policy Index (2010) presents broadly similar findings.

Growing popular hostility to minority groups in western Europe, which contradicts the findings of mainstream research and negates the contact hypothesis (Allport 1954), suggests that the experience of multicultural society may inhibit multiculturalism. Such attitudes are also shaped by liberal or illiberal political leaders, whether in government or opposition. From a number of empirical cases it appears that liberal attitudes are predictors of multiculturalism. We therefore hypothesize the positive effects of liberal attitudes and affinity to liberal leaders, and the negative effect of a multicultural environment and illiberal leaders.

H1. Liberal ideology: *The stronger the purchase of liberal ideology, the wider the acceptance of ethnic and religious minorities as neighbors.*

H2. Experience: *Experience of a multicultural environment decreases the acceptance of ethnic and religious minorities as neighbors.*

H3. Affinity to government and following liberal leaders:

H3a: *Greater trust in government decreases the acceptance of ethnic and religious minorities as neighbors.*

H3b: *Greater trust in the liberal opposition increases the acceptance of ethnic and religious minorities as neighbors.*

Reconciliation: Processes of national reconciliation are typically invoked in the aftermath of civil wars or oppressive regimes. The recent development of transitional justice as an academic field has propelled studies of reconciliation into the forefront of social inquiry. Survey research conducted at the individual level includes studies of inter-racial reconciliation in South Africa (notably Gibson 2002, 2004; Backer 2007), rebuilding communities in the aftermath of mass violence in Rwanda and Former Yugoslavia (Fletcher and Weinstein 2002; Stover and Weinstein 2004), and examination of the impact of lustration system on social divisions in eastern Europe (David 2011).

The major problem is that most theorized predictors of reconciliation in these studies stem from transitional justice policy interventions. By contrast, such interventions have been largely absent in Myanmar. Nonetheless, we are still left with a number of predictors that concern the

severity of human rights violations. Although it is often theorized that the more severe violations lead to more stringent retributive measures of justice, which then inhibit reconciliation, empirical research also suggests that the duration of human rights violations, measured by length of imprisonment, decreases the desire of victims for retribution (David and Choi 2009). However, this seems to be a specific case of the post-communist Czech Republic, where intellectuals and religious leaders were frequently prosecuted, rather than a general trend. Indeed, research from Croatia suggests that negative prewar experience with other ethnic groups, war trauma, authoritarian attitudes, nationalism and ethnocentric attitudes negatively affect readiness for reconciliation (Biro et al. 2004). Since we have already formulated a hypothesis concerning liberal (non-authoritarian) attitudes and a hypothesis that contradicts the contact theory, we now add only two additional hypotheses:

H4a: Experience of ethnic conflict *decreases the acceptance of ethnic and religious minorities as neighbors.*

H4b: Experience of historical injustice *decreases the acceptance of ethnic and religious minorities as neighbors.*

Tolerance: Tolerance has been understood as “a willingness to put up with those things that one rejects” (Sullivan, Piereson and Marcus 1979: 784) or as “an acceptance of an objectionable” (Gibson and Gouws 2003). For the purpose of this paper, however, we need to distinguish between tolerance at the macro and micro levels. The former may be more accurately described as political tolerance, and the latter as social tolerance. One of the mainstream conceptualizations of political tolerance stems from the Dahl’s notion of

contestation (1971). The opposition has to be able to exercise a set of political rights to replace government. The exercise of political rights is necessarily intertwined with the group that exercises those rights. Scholars have thus studied political tolerance by asking the public about attitudes toward a speech made by Nazis or communists (Stouffer 1955). However, such measurements fail to take account of the context, the substance of the speech or the affiliations of the listeners, all of which could hamper a proper measurement.

To overcome these problems, some scholars have explored several multidimensional scales, asking respondents whether various kinds of critical speech should be protected by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, whether the police should intervene, whether other repressive action by state should be taken against the group, and so on (Gibson and Bingham 1982). Another stream of research has developed the concept of the most disliked group (Sullivan, Piereson and Marcus 1982). Respondents are asked to indicate who they do not like and are then asked about having the group as a neighbor, or about acceptance of their political rights, (for instance, by allowing them to organize a march in the respondent's neighborhood). A more recent strand of research pays more attention to the variety of social groups, suggesting that tolerance may be larger for most disliked groups that follow laws in contrast to those that do not (Petersen et al. 2010).

For the purposes of this paper, we are more interested in social tolerance than political tolerance. First, in contemporary Myanmar, participating in politics and testing the scope of political liberties are not really options for many groups. This has practical consequences for our research. Studying tolerance by examining the exercise of rights by the most disliked groups

would be conceptually and operationally difficult in a country where people's rights are not yet fully respected. Furthermore, such an exercise of rights might be seen as an expression of antipathy against an unpopular government rather than as an expression of tolerance, yielding unreliable results. The central focus of our inquiry therefore is on people's willingness to accept members of other social groups as neighbors. We believe that acceptance of other social groups in one's neighborhood is an important characteristic of a political culture, and that it is likely to yield more reliable results in Myanmar than other conceivable operationalizations of "putting up with others". Second, in view of recent attacks against Rohingya groups, fuelled by radical monks, the issue of micro-level tolerance seems to be the more pressing social issue. Moreover, the concept of tolerance has religious roots, suggesting that the notion of "putting up with" other religions is especially important (Sullivan and Transue 1999).

The concept of tolerance, however, is conceptually less relevant to our study than the richness of the theories that explain it. To a large extent, these theories are applicable to our study of inter-religious and inter-faith relations manifested at the community level. Although many of the predictors of tolerance have already been hypothesized above in the context of multiculturalism and reconciliation, some predictors remain unexplored. One of the most salient predictors is the perception of threat by the target group or, conversely, anger at the target group (Sullivan and Transue 1999; Gibson and Gouws 2003). People who have a predisposition to be easily threatened are likely to score lower on the tolerance scale (Sullivan and Transue 1999). Another predictor of tolerance is social identity. According to social identity theory, perceptions of, and discrimination against, the outgroup are a function of being identified with the ingroup (Tajfel 1982). Additionally, strong group loyalties tend to undermine

democracy (Lijphart 1977; Dahl 1989). Empirical research has indeed established a link between social (group) identity in South Africa and intolerance (Gibson and Gouws 2003). We therefore put forward the following hypotheses:

H5. Perceptions of threat and other emotional responses:

H5a: *Anger at a group decreases the acceptance of ethnic and religious minorities as neighbors.*

H5b: *Threat by a group decreases the acceptance of ethnic and religious minorities as neighbors.*

H6. Social identity theory:

H6: *Stronger social identity decreases the acceptance of ethnic and religious minorities as neighbors.*

Ethnic and religious minorities in the context of Myanmar's transition

At this still early stage, Myanmar's transition remains a transition of an unusual kind. According to the current constitution, drafted by the junta in the 1990s and 2000s and overwhelmingly endorsed in a manipulated popular referendum in May 2008, the final destination toward which the Republic of the Union of Myanmar is heading is "discipline-flourishing" democracy. This is, for instance, the wording used in clause 39 of that document: "The Union shall enact

necessary law to systematically form political parties for flourishing of a genuine, disciplined multi-party democratic system” (Republic of the Union of Myanmar 2008). Additional clauses define a clear role for military forces in guiding not merely the transition, but also the democracy ultimately to be formed in Myanmar. At the same time, though, many competing forces in the society, including but by no means restricted to Aung San Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy, a series of minority ethnic political parties, a wealth of civil society organizations, and even some members of the politico-military establishment, are keen to ensure that the reforms now under way push well beyond constraints imposed by former authoritarian elites to establish meaningful democracy inside the country. Notwithstanding limiting constitutional provisions, then, or even the ongoing power of the political actors responsible for them, Myanmar’s transition can be viewed as democratic in aspiration.

Ethnic and religious groups

According to the provisional results of its 2014 census, contemporary Myanmar is a country of 51.4 million people, with 70 percent of the population living in rural areas and only 30 percent in urban areas. It has 93 males for every 100 females (Republic of the Union of Myanmar 2014). In 2013, the United Nations Development Programme (2014) put gross national income per capita (using purchasing power parities) at \$3998, and gave Myanmar a ranking of 150 on the human development index, placing it in the low human development category. Official doctrine that the country has eight major national races collectively containing 135 ethnic groups dates from the Citizenship Act 1982.

Deep ethnic and religious fragmentation has long characterized the country (Holliday 2014). Again according to the current constitution (and, indeed, to two other constitutions enacted for post-colonial Burma in 1947 and 1974), the society is divided into a series of major national “races”, and within them a set of “ethnic groups”. The major national races are de facto ethnic groups in the western vocabulary, and we shall therefore describe them as such. They are currently identified as the Bamar (previously Burman), Chin, Kachin, Kayah (Karenni), Kayin (Karen), Mon, Rakhine (Arakanese) and Shan. Roughly, the Bamar constitute two-thirds of the total population.² The other seven major national races dominate the seven states of the Union named for them: Chin State, Kachin State, Kayah State, and so on. In addition, there are several minority groups with no official recognition. By far the most important of these is the Rohingya Muslim population living mainly in Rakhine State, which was estimated at 750,000 in 2011 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2011: 7). This is a collection of people with disparate personal stories and a deeply, often violently, contested history inside the borders of contemporary Myanmar (Berlie 2008). Today, the Rohingya are known as Bengali people by Myanmar authorities at all levels of government, and are effectively stateless.

Finally, although the country is avowedly multi-faith, Buddhism is allotted a special place by the constitution. Clause 361 states that “The Union recognizes special position of Buddhism as the faith professed by the great majority of the citizens of the Union.” Following on, clause 362

² Provisional results from a March-April 2014 census (Republic of the Union of Myanmar 2014), released in August 2014, do not include information on ethnic identity, and all other available data are long out of date.

perhaps rather grudgingly notes that “The Union also recognizes Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Animism as the religions existing in the Union at the day of the coming into operation of this Constitution” (Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2008). Furthermore, in December 2014 President Thein Sein sent for parliamentary debate in early 2015 a set of four draft “protection of race and religion laws,” all of which were inspired by radical monks (Nobel Zaw, 2014). Most controversial among them is a proposal to restrict Buddhist women from marrying outside of their religion, which requires that non-Buddhist men convert to Buddhism before marriage. Ever since 1999, Myanmar has been a “country of particular concern” for the US State Department because of its poor record in guaranteeing genuine religious freedom. In 2014, it was one of eight countries on a list compiled by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (2014), making up an East Asian triumvirate with China and North Korea.

Ethnic and religious conflict

Ethnic conflict can be traced almost to the time of independence from Britain in January 1948. To a significant extent, it was generated by the British colonial practice of ruling Burma Proper directly, and other parts of the territory indirectly. In those parts lived a set of minority ethnic groups generally held to constitute about one third of the total population. Even constitutional reforms introduced by the British to prepare the colony for self-government were ethnically segregated. “Burma was fitted up with the machinery of responsible government on the fashionable model of western democracy ...,” wrote Furnivall (1948: 159); “this however was restricted to Burma proper, excluding the Shan States, Karenni and Tribal Hills.” Partial democratization of colonial Burma was thus discriminatory in its effects, as were associated

developments in mass political culture. Political evolution ran at different speeds on separate tracks. Although a famous attempt was made at Panglong in February 1947 to deliver a pan-ethnic settlement, the outcome was a very brief and highly ambiguous statement that could easily be read in a host of different ways (Walton 2008). The result was that communal rivalries quickly came to the fore. Ethnic claims made above all by Karens in the late 1940s also surfaced in Arakan, Shan State and elsewhere in the mid-1950s. In 1958, constitutional clauses enabling some minority states to trigger autonomy provisions provoked an upswing in revolt and when, a few years later, federation talks moved to the top of the political agenda, the nationalist Burman army seized power in a near-bloodless March 1962 coup. Under first a Revolutionary Council and then a one-party state dominated by the Burmese Socialist Program Party, ethnic divisions intensified still further, taking a bewildering variety of forms. Following the seismic 8-8-88 uprising, the collapse of the socialist regime, the crushing of the democracy movement and the installation of a formal military junta, ceasefires were agreed in the 1990s with a wide range of ethnic armed groups, though no political settlements were ever reached (Smith 1999; Zaw Oo and Win Min 2007). The result was undeniably less fighting, though by no means anything that could truly be labeled a sustainable peace (Callahan 2007; South 2008). Indeed, only after the switch to civilian rule in 2011 was a formal peace process launched, and the possibility of a grand political accord floated. Still, though, progress remains elusive, and fighting continues to flare from time to time in Kachin State and northern Shan State.

Sectarian violence also has deep roots, surfacing in the Arakan west of the country both during and after World War II, and generating anti-Muslim government action again in Arakan during both the socialist and junta periods. It took a particularly violent turn in 2012 through an

eruption of inter-communal clashes between Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims. On June 3, sectarian violence in four out of 17 townships in Rakhine State targeted mainly Rohingya communities, killing dozens and displacing tens of thousands. On October 23, a more systematic campaign was launched against both Rohingya Muslims and Kaman Muslims (who have official recognition as one of Myanmar's 135 ethnic groups) in nine townships across the state, again killing dozens and displacing tens of thousands. Today an estimated 140,000 people, almost all Muslim, are internally displaced in Rakhine State. In a carefully-researched report (using the former terminology of Arakan State rather than Rakhine State), Human Rights Watch (2013: 4) argued that the 2012 attacks "were organized, incited, and committed by local Arakanese political party operatives, the Buddhist monkhood, and ordinary Arakanese, at times directly supported by state security forces." Its overall assessment was uncompromising: "The criminal acts committed against the Rohingya and Kaman Muslim communities in Arakan State beginning in June 2012 amount to crimes against humanity carried out as part of a campaign of ethnic cleansing" (Human Rights Watch 2013: 11). In July 2013, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon drew global attention to the "disturbing" humanitarian situation faced by the Rohingya (UN News Centre 2013). There has also been some spreading of anti-Muslim violence into both the Bamar core and parts of several ethnic states (International Crisis Group 2013; Physicians for Human Rights 2013).

Research design

Against this backdrop, our research methods had several strands. In Mandalay and Yangon Regions (within the Bamar heartland), we conducted a survey of 1002 adult Myanmar citizens using a probabilistic sample based on 2014 census data. In Kachin, Kayin and Shan States, we conducted a parallel survey of roughly 600 members of ethnic minority groups. We also undertook a total of about 60 in-depth interviews. For the purposes of the paper, we have selected only Bamar Buddhist responses in order to capture acceptance of other ethnic and religious groups.

Operationalization

Dependent variables: For the purposes of this paper, the core survey question we asked was: “Would you like, rather like, neither like nor dislike, rather dislike, or dislike members of the following groups to be your neighbors?” The response categories were reflected on the five-point Likert scale: disagree, rather disagree, neither agree, nor disagree, rather agree, agree. The list of groups included religious, national, and ethnic groups, namely Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Muslim; Bangladeshi, Indian, Chinese, British; Chin, Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Mon, Rakhine, Shan, Bamar; Rohingya. The most negative answers in these and all other variables in the study were coded 0.

Independent variables:

Liberal ideology: belief in ethnic equality, belief in religious equality, approval of interethnic marriage, approval of inter-religious marriage, our country would be better without some ethnic/religious minorities (5 response categories each)

Trust in government: trust in government (5 response categories)

Trust in the liberal opposition: trust in Aung San Suu Kyi (5 response categories)

Experience of a multicultural environment: buying products from other religious group, buying products from other ethnic groups, another ethnic group lives in the neighborhood, another religious group lives in the neighborhood, inter-faith marriage in the extended family, inter-ethnic marriage in the extended family (2 response categories each)

Experience of the past conflict: fatality in the family, fleeing past conflict (2 response categories each)

Experience of historical injustice: being a political prisoner or having a political prisoner in the family, losing a job due to past conflict (2 response categories)

Threat by a group: being afraid of another ethnic group, being afraid of another religious group (5 response categories each)

Anger at a group: angry at people of other religions, angry at people from other ethnic groups (5 response categories each)

Social identity: support for the inter-faith restriction law (5 response categories).

We also controlled for gender, education, and income.

Results and discussion

The results of the descriptive statistics are presented in the table below.

**Perceptions of Religious, Ethnic and Foreign Groups:
Descriptive Statistics**

	LIKE (per cent)	DISLIKE (per cent)
<i>(Buddhist)</i>	99.5	0.5
<i>(Bamar)</i>	96.1	1.5
Christian	41.2	42.3
Hindu	37.2	47.0
Muslim	15.4	72.1
Bangladeshi	6.0	81.7
Indian	20.5	58.8
Chinese	26.3	52.8
British	20.0	57.2
Kachin	85.7	7.6
Shan, Chin, Kayah, Kayin, Mon, Rakhine	87.2	6.4-8.0
Rohingya	5.6	82.7

In order to test our hypotheses, we selected Kachin and Rohingya for multivariate analyses. There were two major reasons. First, both are ethnic and religious groups, namely Christian and Muslim respectively. Second, both groups have been victims of ongoing conflict. The former are victims of a peripheral civil war fought in Kachin State, and the latter are victims of pogroms and mob attacks mostly in Rakhine State. We used ordered logistic regression.

A. Our results reveal some common predictors. When asked about perceptions of both Kachin and Rohingya populations, education was a significant predictor of the acceptance of both groups as neighbors. Similarly, though less strongly, the experience of losing a job in some sense because of either inter-ethnic or inter-faith conflict was correlated with intolerance. Here, then, are the only two factors having the same effect for both our selected groups.

B. The most intriguing finding is that several attitudinal predictors had opposite effects depending on whether the population in question was Kachin or Rohingya. Respondents who favored inter-ethnic marriage would accept the Kachin as neighbors but not the Rohingya. By contrast, respondents who favored inter-faith marriage (as proposed by the legislation currently before parliament) would accept the Rohingya but not the Kachin. Contrastingly again, respondents with a favourable view of ethnic equality would accept the Kachin but not the Rohingya.

C. Focusing on the Kachin, acceptance as neighbors was associated with males, with having another ethnic group living in the neighborhood, and with having a positive view of curbs on inter-faith marriage. Having a fatality in the family as a result of civil conflict was a negative predictor of accepting Kachin neighbors.

D. Focusing on the Rohingya, acceptance as neighbors was positively associated with year of birth (with younger people more likely to be tolerant), with having served jail time as a political prisoner, with having experience of buying goods and/or services from other religious groups, and with having a supportive view of religious equality. Acceptance of Rohingya as neighbors was negatively associated with feeling angry toward people of other faiths, with a belief that the country as a whole would be better off without other ethnic and religious groups, and with support for Aung San Suu Kyi.

Conclusion

As Myanmar grapples with its transition process, attention needs to be paid to the comparative lesson that respect for ethnic and religious minorities is essential for the creation of a stable, consolidated democracy. Our findings show that two distinct dynamics of reconciliation are at work in the society: one views the Kachin as an ethnic group, and the other views the Rohingya as a religious group. The result is that some factors that increase possibilities for reconciliation with one group either have no effect with the other, or even run in the opposite direction. Favorable views of inter-ethnic marriage and ethnic equality feed into positive feelings (acceptance) toward the Kachin but negative feelings (non-acceptance) toward the Rohingya. Favorable views of inter-faith marriage feed into positive feelings toward the Rohingya but negative feelings toward the Kachin. Underpinning these two different sets of predictors, distinct theories explain why Bamar Buddhists are able, or not able, to live as good neighbors with the two groups.

Liberal ideology has apparent limitations in the Myanmar context. Belief in equality increases acceptance of the Kachin, but not of the Rohingya. This reveals “selective liberalism” among the Bamar people: equality yes, but not for everyone. Moreover, this selective liberalism has a damaging effect for liberal opposition leaders. Our results show clearly that supporters of Aung San Suu Kyi do not like the Rohingya.

Individual experiences feed clearly into the religious-ethnic distinction between the Kachin and the Rohingya. Experience of a multicultural environment (family, community) increases the acceptance of both Kachin and Rohingya, though with a different social mechanism operating in each case. Having another ethnic group in the neighborhood generates acceptance of the

Kachin. Serving jail time as a political prisoner and even buying from another religious group both lead to acceptance of the Rohingya. Experience of conflict leads to rejection of the Kachin only, suggesting that some responsibility for ongoing civil war attaches to the Kachin people. Likewise, support for the inter-faith restriction law is associated with acceptance of the Kachin only. Indeed, although the law discriminates against all faiths other than Buddhism, it is seen by the Bamar people as targeting only Muslims, not Christians.

Finally, perceptions of threat are not a significant predictor of acceptance of either of the two groups. However, anger at another religious groups leads to rejection of the Rohingya as neighbors.

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