

# GENDER, ETHNICITY AND GEOGRAPHY ON SECURITY IN MYANMAR

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**IDRC · CRDI**

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## **Gender, Ethnicity, and Geography on Security in Myanmar**

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Myanmar has experienced more armed conflicts since its transition in 2011 from military rule. On 8 November 2020, general elections were held. Security threats prevented holding elections in 15 townships and parts of 41 others. The number of village-tracts where elections were not held increased from nearly 600 to approximately 1,400, that is, a whopping 129 percent from 2015 to 2020 (Maung & Lwin, 2015; MIMU, 2020) (see map). Security threats affect men and women differently. Finding ways to build a lasting peace and to design policies that address the impacts of conflicts in all regions requires an understanding of different perceptions on the performance and situation of security and police services in ethnic states from both gender, and Burman and non-Burman perspectives. How does the security situation impact public perception of security and policing in ethnic states? Does gender make any significant difference in perceptions? How do Burman and non-Burman views differ? Does geography matter in people's perception of security in Myanmar?

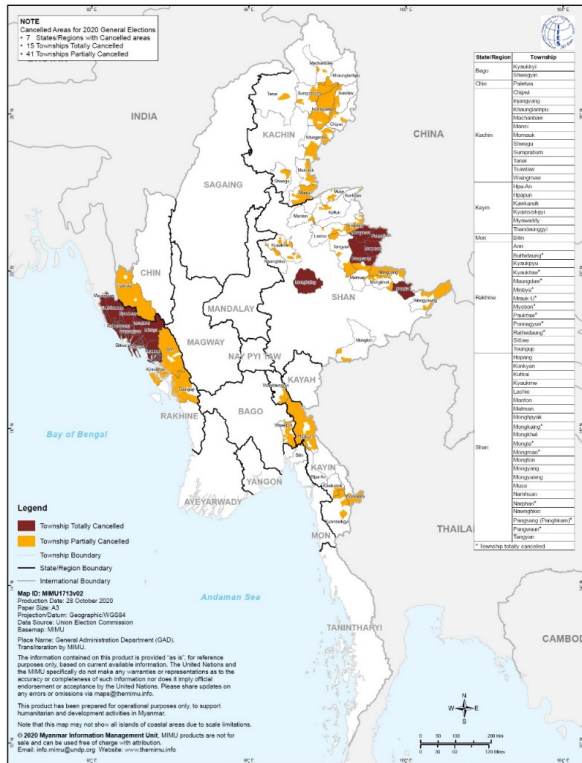
To answer these questions, MIPS, in collaboration with University of Toronto, conducted a quantitative survey, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions in three ethnic states and one Burman dominated the region as part of an International Development Research Centre-funded project. A total of 2,747 household surveys, 15 FGDs, and 124 key informant interviews were conducted in Kachin, Kayin and Chin states, and Magway region in early 2019. We selected Kachin State to understand how the breakdown of ceasefire between the Tatmadaw and Kachin Independent Army (KIA) impacted people's opinion on security. We chose Kayin state to understand how the ongoing ceasefire shaped public opinion on security while Chin state was selected because it was one of the least developed ethnic states. Magway was our control case since it was a Burman-dominant state not directly affected by armed conflict. The study looked into public perceptions towards public service delivery on health, education and security. Besides, MIPS chronicled civilian casualties with gender aggregation nationwide in 2019 and 2020.

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**Figure 1: 2020 General Elections Cancelled Areas (Union Election Commission)**



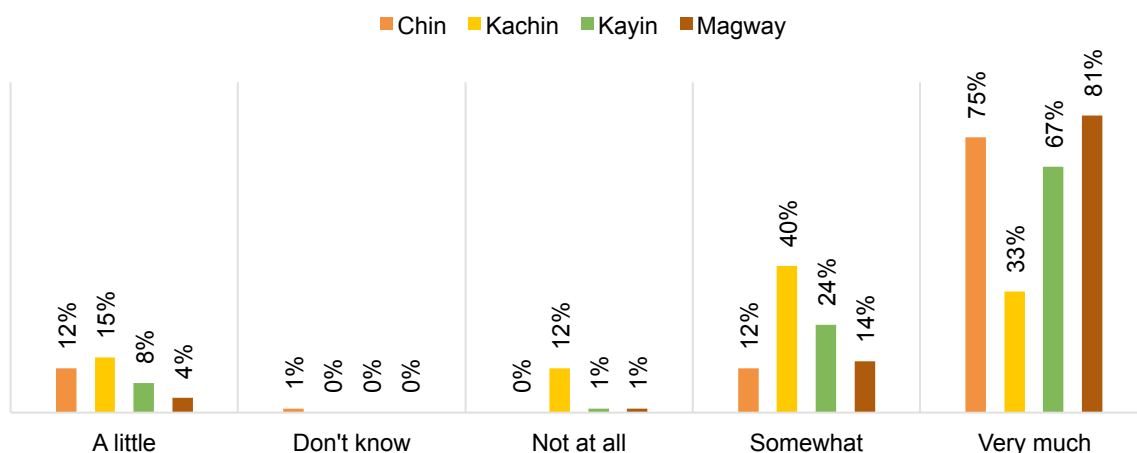
Source: MIMU, 2020.

A significant majority of the general public in all four states and regions thought crime rate reduced. On average, about 50% of all respondents thought there was less crime in the last five years. Nearly half of both female (48%) and male (52%) respondents feel that there were fewer crimes in the previous five years while less than one-third of female and male, 33% of respondents from each gender, viewed that the crime rate increased in last five years. We also observed about half (50%) of non-Burman and (49%) of Burman thought there was less crime in the previous five years while one-third (33%) of non-Burman and (31%) of Burman considered more crime in the last five years. These perceptions are supported by participants at the FGDs held in 15 wards/villages in Kachin, Kayah and Chin states, and Magway region in early 2019.

Answers varied mostly by states and region. In Kachin state, only 33.10% of respondents stated that there were fewer crimes in their region in the last five years relative to respondents in Chin (51%), Kayah (63%), and Magway (53%). The least positive opinion was in Kachin State. Similarly, over 70% of respondents answered that they felt safer now in their community. The feeling of being safer now than before is high in Chin, Kayah and Magway and low in Kachin state. Magway (81%), Chin (75%), Kayah (67%), and Kachin (33%) felt very much safe in their community. This finding is also in line with that of focus group discussions and key informant interviews. Almost all participants reported that they feel safer now than before. In ethnic

differences, 60% of non-Burman and 73% of Burman respondents feel very safe in their community. Female respondents (63%) and male (64%) said they felt ‘very much’ secure in their community. Again, geographical differences made the most distinctive opinion than gender and ethnicity.

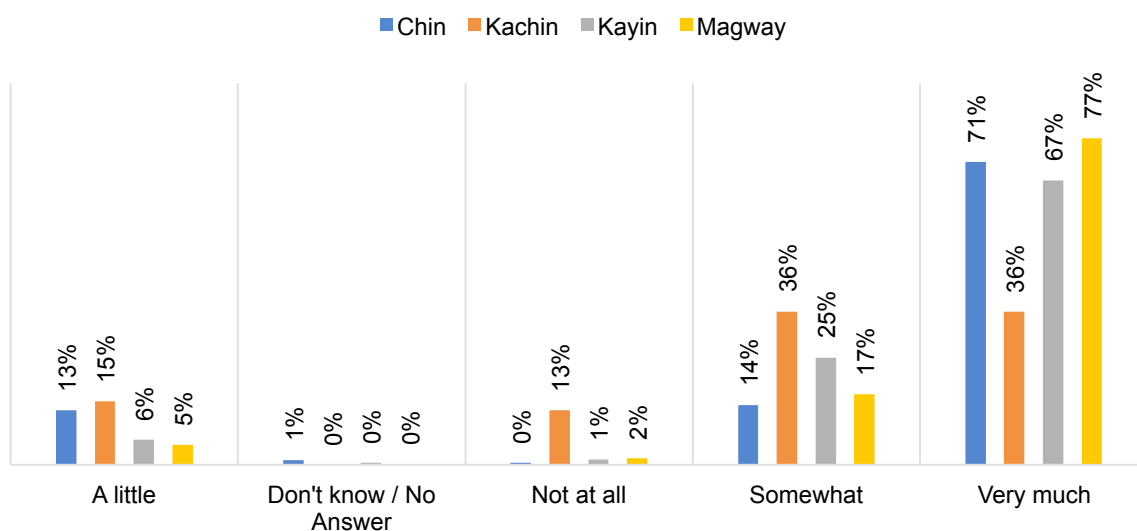
**Figure 2: The extent respondents feel safe now in their community**



Source: MIPS-UofT Survey on Public Services Delivery in Chin, Kachin, Kayin, and Magway, 2019.

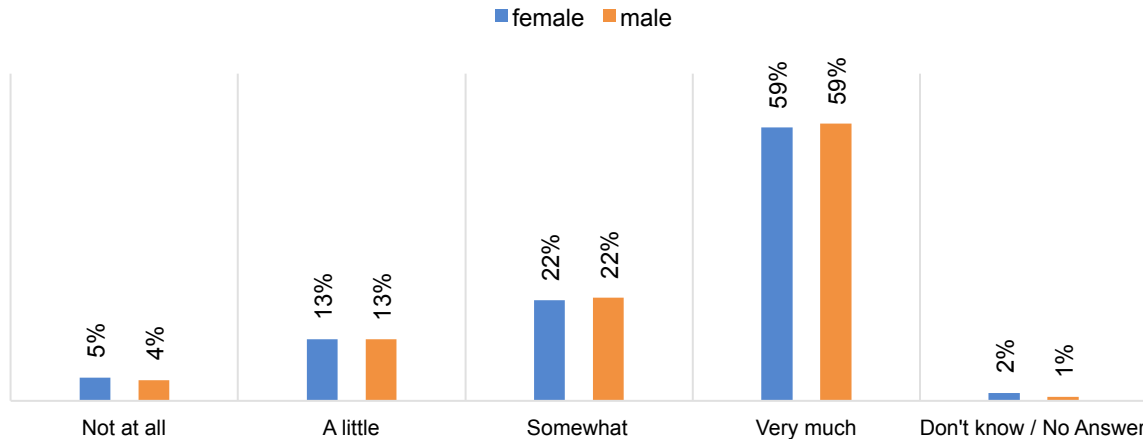
Except in Kachin state, around 70% of female respondents stated that they feel ‘very much safe’ in their community—71% in Chin, 67% in Kayin and 77% in Magway region, and only 36% of in Kachin state reported that they felt very much safe in their community (Figure 3). Across four states and region, 59% of both genders felt that women were ‘very much safe’ in their community (Figure 4).

**Figure 3: How much women feel safe in their community**



Source: MIPS-UofT Survey on Public Services Delivery in Chin, Kachin, Kayin, and Magway, 2019.

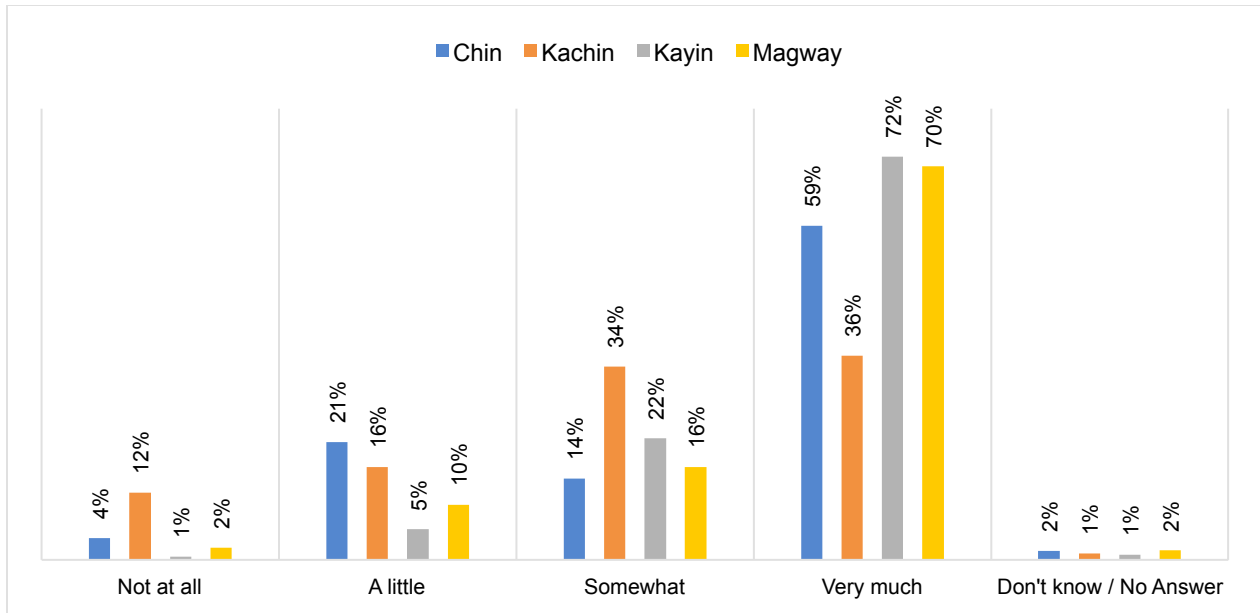
**Figure 4: How much women feel safer now than five years ago, in different gender**



Source: MIPS-UofT Survey on Public Services Delivery in Chin, Kachin, Kayin, and Magway, 2019.

It is remarkable to note that over 80% of female survey-participants state that they feel safer now than five years ago (59% feel very much safer and another 22% feel somewhat safer). The survey data reveal that the number of female respondents in Kachin who feel very much safer now than five years ago is much lower than those in other states and region (36% in Kachin and 59%, 72% and 70% in Chin, Kayin and Magway respectively). Moreover, the majority of respondents (87% in Kachin and more than 94% in all three other regions) reported that women now felt safer than five years ago (Figure 5). Moreover, majority of focus group discussion participants express that women feel safe in reporting crime to the police. Overall, the perceptions between female and male respondents were almost the same, as shown by the very close mean values of female and male respondents (3.36 and 3.37 respectively). Among non-Burman respondents, the perceptions of female and male were also similar to each other; the mean value is 3.50 for both non-Burman female and male respondents. Similarly, among Burman respondents, it is almost identical—the mean value is 3.30 for female and 3.30 for male.

**Figure 5: How much women feel safer now than five years ago, in different states**

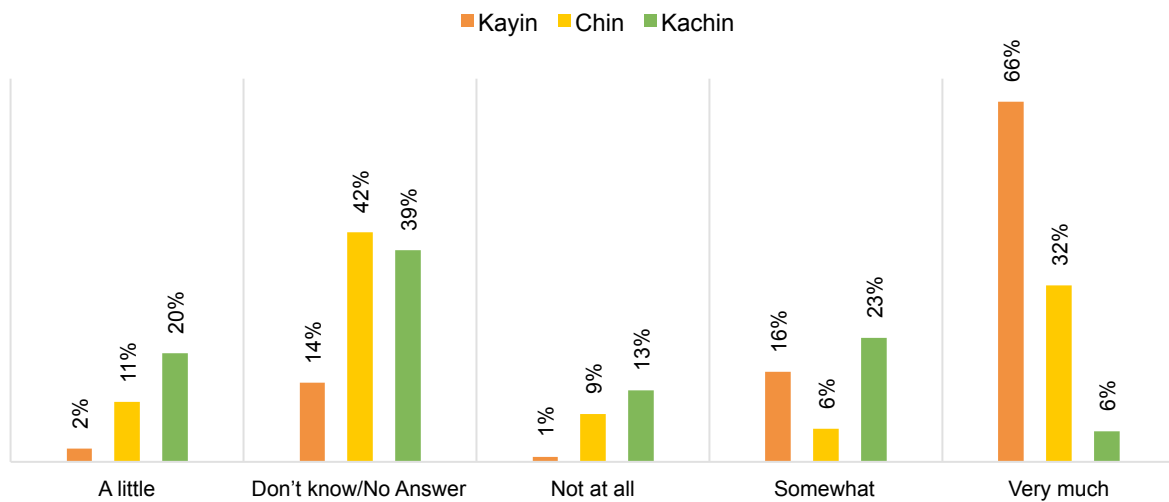


Source: MIPS-UofT Survey on Public Services Delivery in Chin, Kachin, Kayin, and Magway, 2019.

The most differences were observed in different states and region. In Chin and Kayin States, non-Burman felt safer than Burman. In Chin, the mean value of non-Burman is 3.31 while that of Burman is 3.17. In Kayin, the mean value is 3.66 for non-Burman and 3.09 for Burman. In Kachin, the perception between non-Burman and Burman are slightly different. Burman feel slightly safer than non-Burman. The mean value was 2.63 for non-Burman and 3.09 for Burman. In Magway, the perception of non-Bamar and Bamar were almost the same, the mean value of non-Burman is 3.56 while that of Burman is 3.57. Our survey result indicated that both genders shared similar perception towards security and safety in their community. We observed minor differences between Burman and non-Burman in their view towards security, even in each state. The most distinctive opinion lies in the stats and regions where they live.

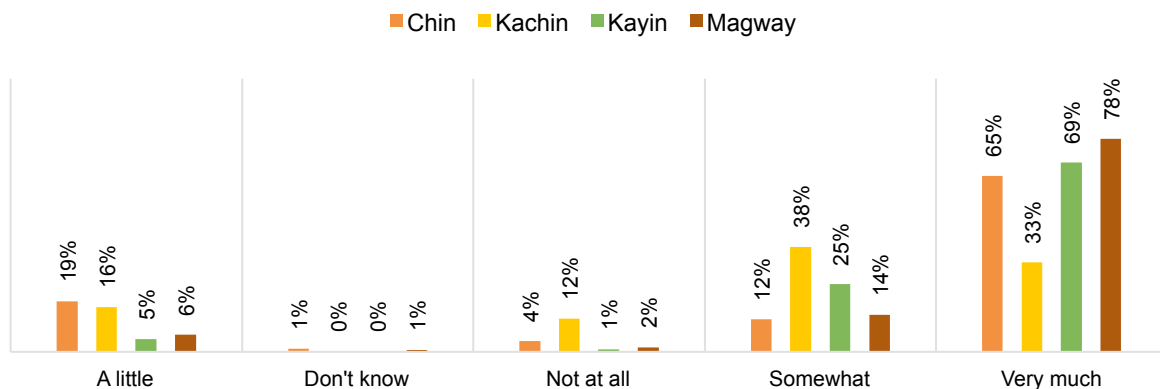
The resumption of fighting from 2011 to mid-2018 is likely a reason behind the least positive opinion about security in Kachin State compared to other three locations. Kayin people mostly enjoyed relative calm since the ceasefire in early 2012; 66% feel very much safer and 16% somewhat safer after the ceasefire agreement was signed (Figure 6). In our survey, people in Kayin state (69%) showed as much positive as the residents of Magway (78%). Kayin respondents felt overwhelmingly that security was improved compared to the last five years (Figure 7). Ethnicity made a little difference than geography. For example, 31% of Burman respondents in Kachin state felt security improved in last five years, compared to 78% of Burman in Magway.

**Figure 6: The extent respondents feel safe now than before the ceasefire agreement was signed**



Source: MIPS-UofT Survey on Public Services Delivery in Chin, Kachin, Kayin, and Magway, 2019.

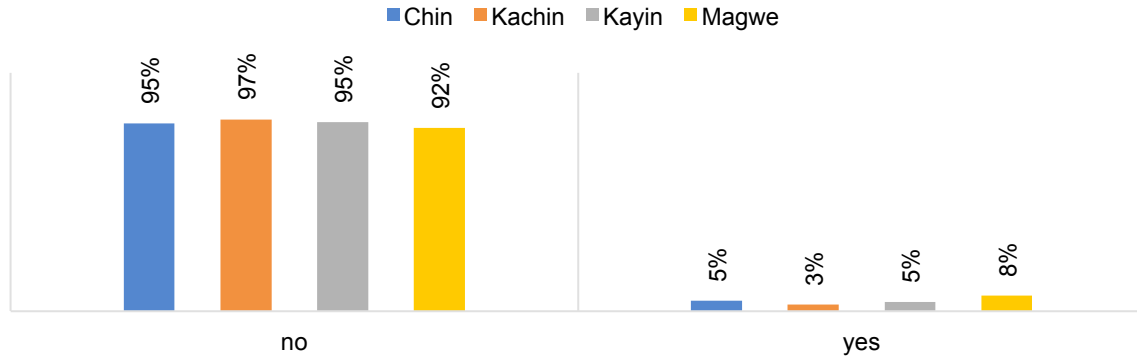
**Table 7: The extend respondents feel safer now than five years ago (by regions)**



Source: MIPS-UofT Survey on Public Services Delivery in Chin, Kachin, Kayin, and Magway, 2019.

Although some reports (for instance, Human Rights Council, 2019; Onello & Sann, 2019 & CAM, 2016) described prevailing sexual violence in conflict-affected areas in Myanmar, our survey showed little evidence of reporting. When asked if respondents knew women who were harassed, sexually assaulted, or raped in their communities, 95% of respondents answered ‘no.’ The number of ‘yes’ response was the highest in Magway (7.78%) and the lowest in Kachin (3.38%), indicating that conflict and sexual abuses might not be directly related (Figure 8). By nature, sexual violence was largely underreported. At the same time, the rise of social media made such abuses difficult to hide in conflict zone. In 2019, nevertheless, there were only three reported cases of sexual violence in conflict zone.

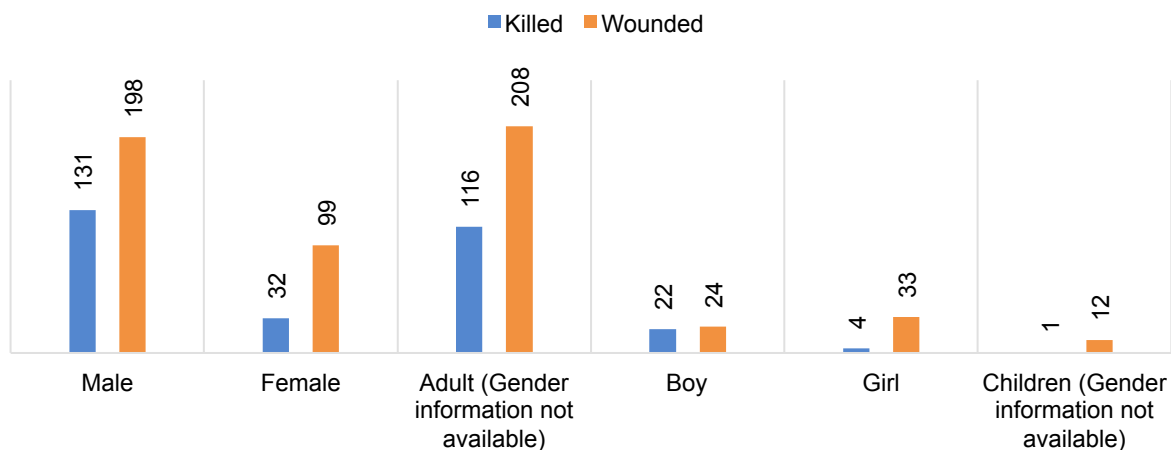
**Figure 8: Knowledge about women who have been harassed, sexually assaulted, or raped in community (by States)**



Source: MIPS-UofT Survey on Public Services Delivery in Chin, Kachin, Kayin, and Magways, 2019.

In contrast to some other armed conflicts, more men than women were killed among civilian casualties in Myanmar. In 2020, 306 civilians were killed and 624 wounded by armed conflicts in Myanmar. Among the dead, women civilians (32) were killed four times less than males (131) while males (198) were wounded about twice more than women civilians (99). We also observed that journalists frequently omitted gender information when they reported about civilian casualties while they usually described children victims in their story. Among children, who are between 8 and 18 years old, boys (22 died and 24 wounded) tend to suffer more casualty than girls (4 died and 33 wounded) mostly because they were involved in incidents in which kids played with unexplode ordinance. In 2020, one child, who are under 8, died and 12 children, who are under 8, wounded. The genders of children were not able to identify (Figure 9).

**Figure 9: Civilian causality by gender in 2020**





Source: MIPS Data-Set, 2020

Answering the questions posted above, our data reveal that while overwhelmingly feeling positive about the security and police service in all four states, people's perception towards security changes overtime, especially where they live in Myanmar, depending on the conflict dynamics in their locality. Nevertheless, gender makes little difference in security perception. The views of Burman and non-Burman towards security and policing are almost similar in Chin, Kayin and Magway while different in Kachin state. According to data from interviews, FGDs and survey, we can conclude that geography matters in people's perception of security in Myanmar.

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