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# Ethnicity without Meaning, Data without Context

## The 2014 Census: Identity and Citizenship in Burma/Myanmar

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The 2014 Population and Housing Census is the most significant ethnic and political boundary-making exercise since 1931, however its colonial-era designations and simplifications are likely to raise ethnic tensions at a critical time in the peace process.

[Ethnicity without Meaning, Data without Context](#) (PDF, 661.88 KB)

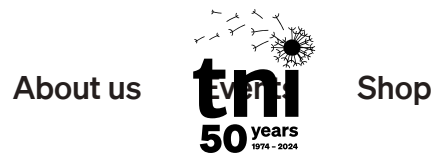
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Myanmar. With one of the most diverse populations in Asia, Myanmar has been home to ethnic conflict and political discord through every governmental era since independence from Great Britain in 1948.

Under the Thein Sein government, which assumed office in 2011, a new political system is emerging, and hopes are continuing that the country is set on the path towards modernity and political reform. However many serious tensions remain over political freedoms and ethnic nationality rights.

In particular, despite ceasefire offers by the government to ethnic opposition forces, many minority groups have expressed concerns that their peoples will be marginalised during another time of political and economic change. Such perceptions are especially acute among communities where the impact of conflict remains.

Many ethnic groups fear that the timing and methodology of the 2014 census, with an unwarranted array of questions and overseen by law enforcement officers, will further diminish the political status of minority peoples. The designation of "135 national races" in the country is widely regarded as confusing and wrong.

Citizenship rights for some people could even be under threat. The scheduling of the census in the year before a key general election - and before political agreements have been achieved in the ceasefire talks - is only deepening concerns. Unreliable data that results from the census could have negative impact on political debate and ethnic representation in the legislatures.

Instead of creating the opportunity to improve inter-ethnic understanding and citizenship rights at a critical moment in the country's history, the census promises to compound old grievances with a new generation of complexities. Such fundamental challenges should be addressed before proceeding.