

[Working Paper Series: 2019 MDRN Survey 5]

## The Perceptions of Yangon City Residents of Streets and Street Lights

Yone Kyi Yar

### Introduction

Rapid urbanization is a big challenge for Myanmar, and the government, Parliament, and municipal organizations are working hard to plan systematic and sustainable urban development. The respective authorities and policy makers prescribe rules and procedures for urban planning and implementation, which shape the urban life of residents in both the short and long term. However, in Myanmar, authorities have in the past disregarded participation of residents and their opinions in urban planning processes and on other issues due to the authoritarian nature of the prior regime. Under the current democratic regime, government officials have begun to assess and emphasize public opinions and perspectives in the policy process. In democratic systems, public opinions and experiences comprise a vital part of policy making and the policy implementation process. The perspectives of residents in a particular area reflect the real situation on the ground of that place, and so citizen perspectives and experiences of their urban lives, which are a key aspect in managing urban planning and urban development, should always be explored and recorded.

Democratic governments are also accountable to their citizens for the policies they implement and how they implement them. Governments should reflect the priorities and needs of their citizens (International Budget Partnership, 2012). The Yangon City Development Committee (YCDC) provides urban services within its city limits. Those urban services should be aligned with citizen needs. In the 2017 and 2018 City Life surveys, residents remarked that Yangon is headed in the right direction with continuous infrastructure and road development. Residents also prioritize budget allocation to the improvement of road conditions (The Asia Foundation, 2017 and 2018). Streets are one of the key aspects of the development indices of a city or a town.

At the same time, streets are public spaces and should be for everyone to assess. Particularly in Yangon, which has a high volume of traffic congestion, streets are loaded with cars, yet ordinary people who walk along the streets should have good access to them as well. Citizens should be able to enjoy a pleasant atmosphere when walking along or using the streets. In addition to the streets, the public is concerned with other related infrastructure. Streets and related infrastructure are essential components that every urban authority should emphasize.

The main focuses of this study are as follows:

1. To explore the perception of residents of streets and street lights in Yangon City.
2. To provide evidence to YCDC for better urban planning through the perceptions of Yangon City residents.

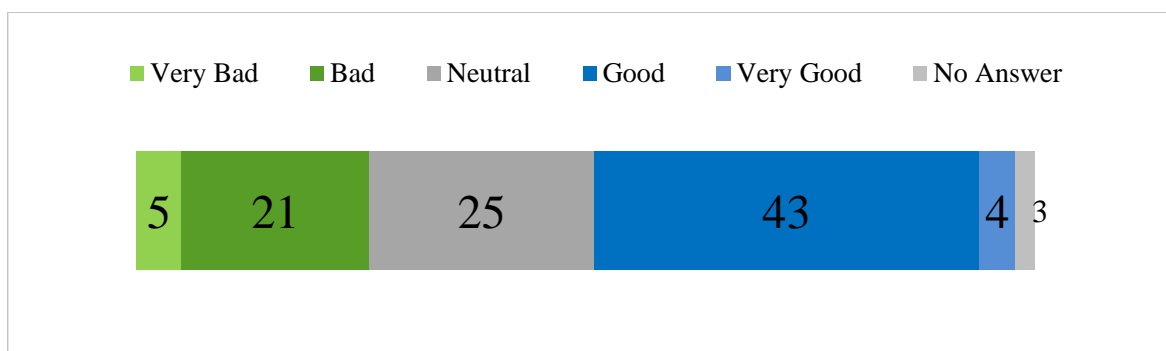
Yone Kyi Yar worked as part of the Myanmar Democracy Research Network (MDRN) in conducting the survey “Citizen Perceptions of Yangon City’s Public Services” in April 2019, and the results from this survey are presented in this report. The MDRN survey was conducted using four-step probability sampling. With a 95% confidence level and a margin of error of (+/-) 4.45, the data was collected from 485 adults (aged 18 years and older) in Yangon via face-to-face interviews.

### Key Findings

#### Overall Rating

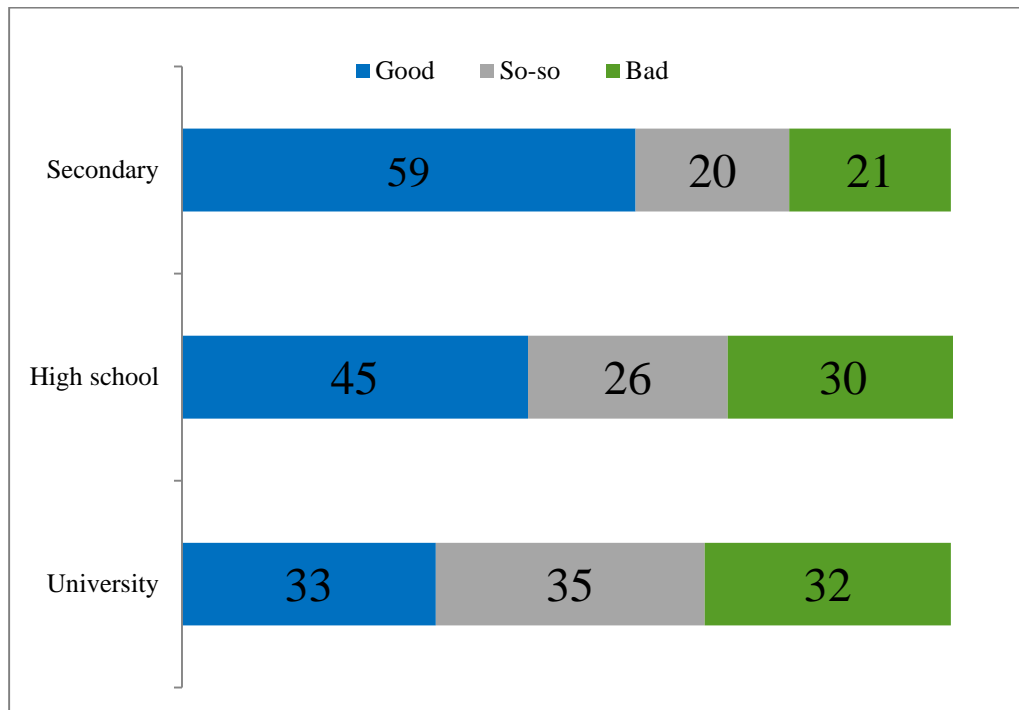
This section presents the overall public opinion rating of YCDC’s street and street light administration in the city. It was found that overall public opinion ratings of street and street light administration were low. Forty-three percent of respondents rated YCDC street administration as good, and 4% of respondents rated it as very good. A total of 47% of Yangon residents generally gave a positive rating to YCDC’s street and street light administration. On the other hand, 26% of respondents rated street and street light administration as bad and 25% of respondents gave a neutral response.

**Fig. 1 How would you rate the administration of street and street lights by YCDC?**

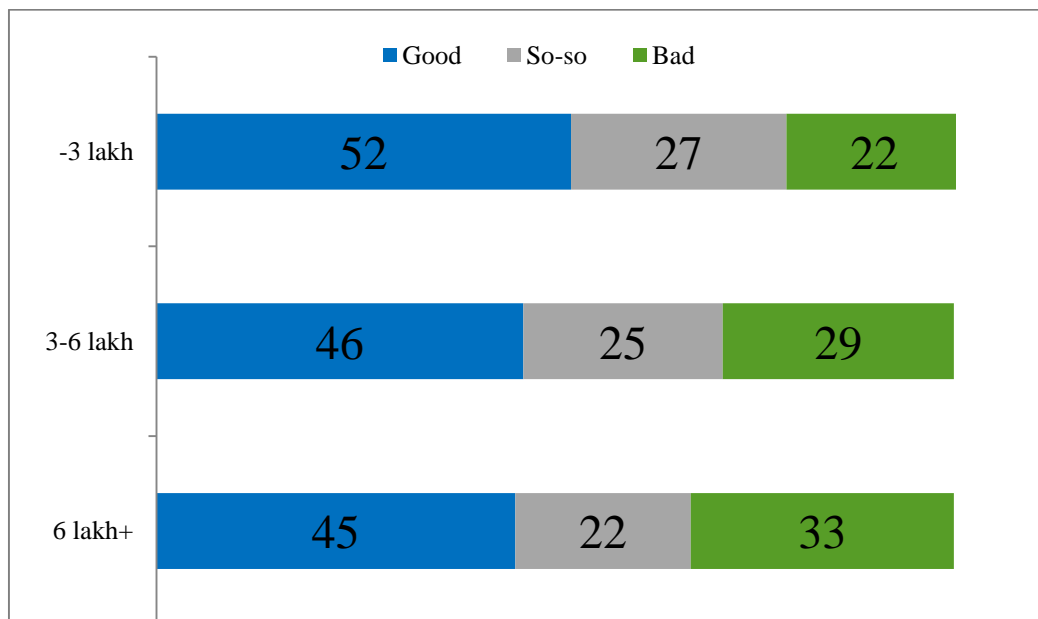


The ratings of street and street light administration were analyzed according to the characteristics of the respondents. It was found that a higher level of education corresponded to a lower overall rating. Further, individuals who had a higher income level were more likely to give a negative overall rating of street and street light administration. However, there was no significant difference found among the four major districts surveyed when the data was cross-tabulated with districts and overall ratings.

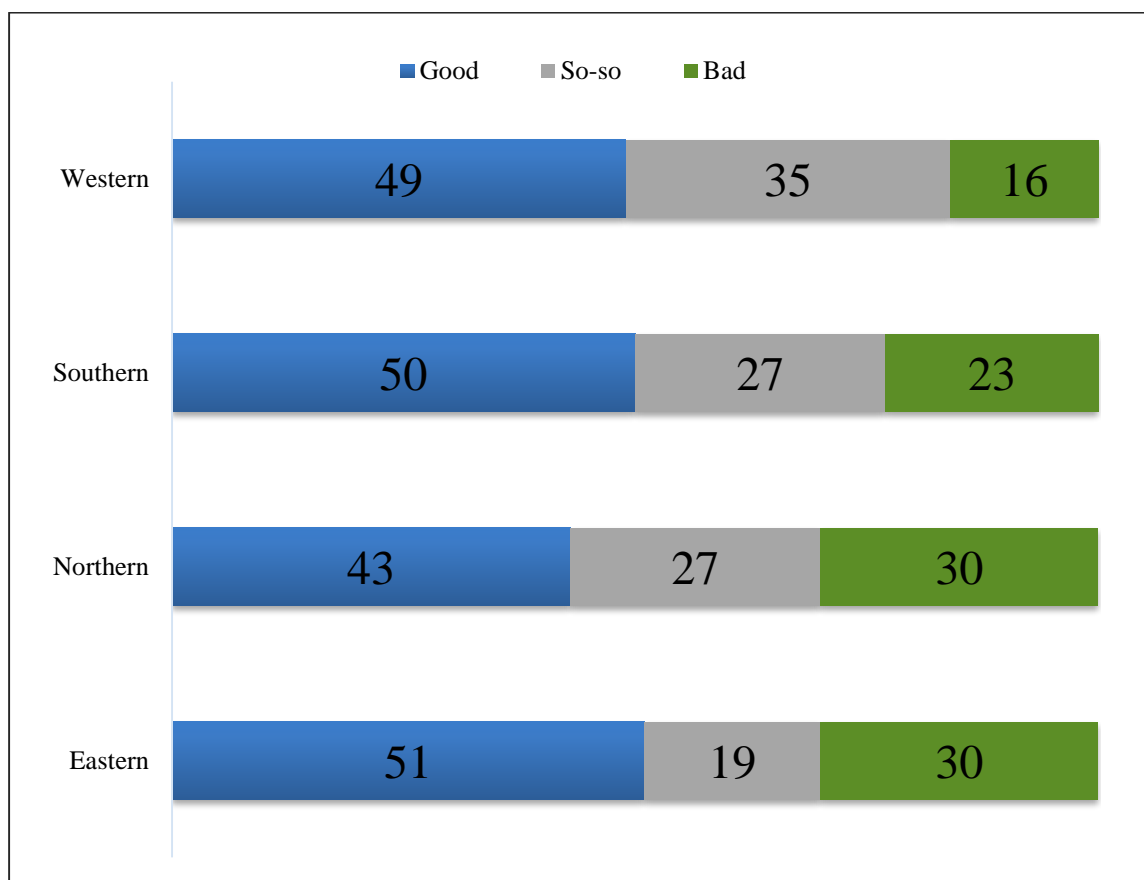
**Fig. 2 Overall ratings of street and street light administration (by education)**



**Fig. 3 Overall ratings of street and street light administration**



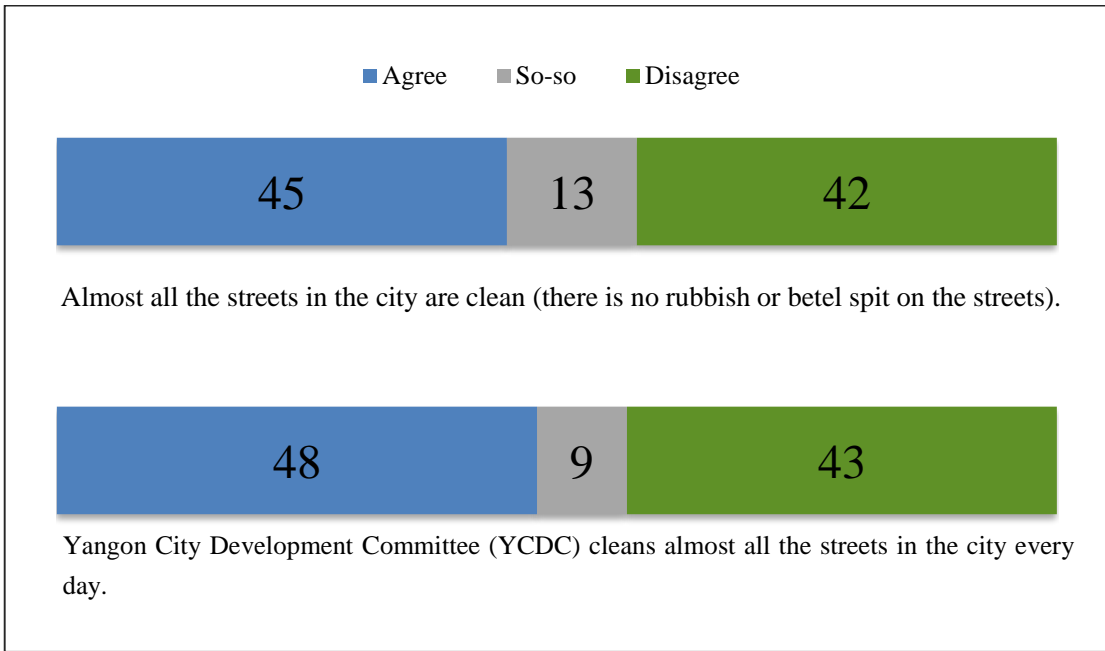
**Fig. 4 Overall ratings of street and street light administration (by district)**



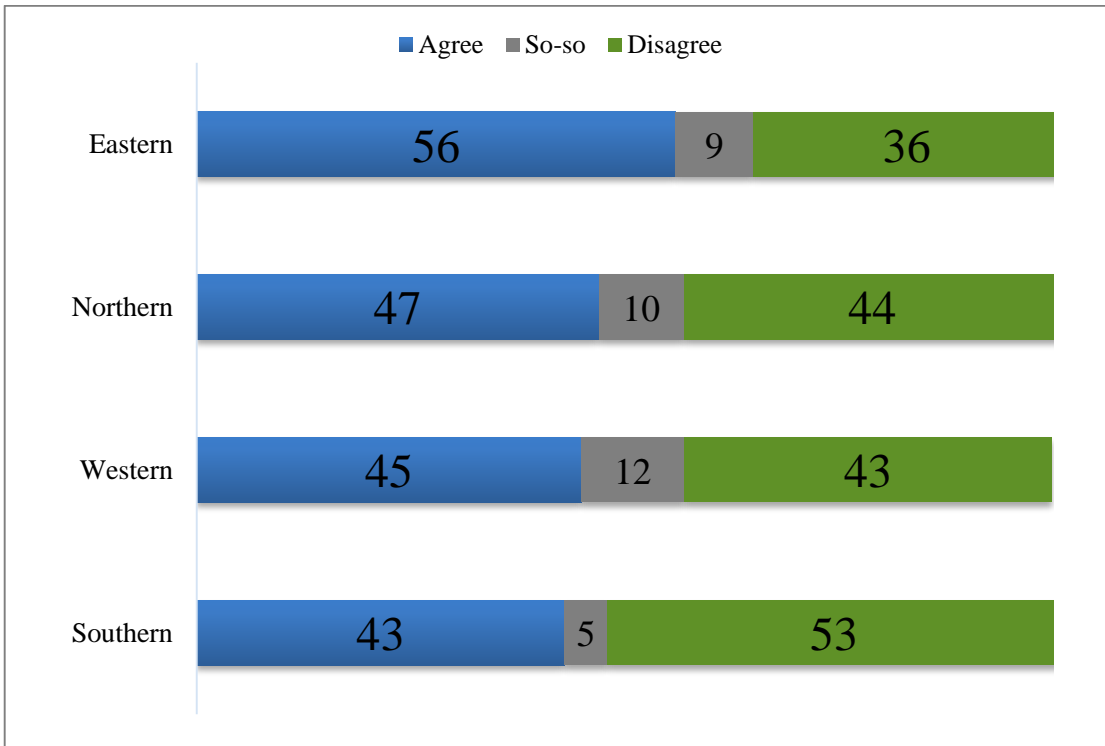
#### Perceptions of Street Cleanliness and Quality

This section presents the perception of Yangon residents on street cleanliness— their perceptions of YCDC street services, street cleanliness, and street quality. In general, it was found that the public opinion of street cleanliness was nearly evenly split between positive and negative. In response to the statement “Yangon City Development Committee (YCDC) cleans almost all the streets in the city every day,” 48% of the respondents gave a positive answer, while 42% of the respondents gave a negative response. Likewise, in response to “Almost all the streets in the city are clean (there is no rubbish or betel spit on the street),” the opinion of respondents was nearly identical to that of the previous statement. Citizen perceptions of street cleanliness were analyzed according to district. Although the significance level was not particularly distinct, those in the southern district had the most negative response to the statement “YCDC cleans almost all the streets in the city every day” compared to the other groups. Likewise, nearly half of southerners and northerners disagreed with the statement “Almost all the streets in the city are clean.”

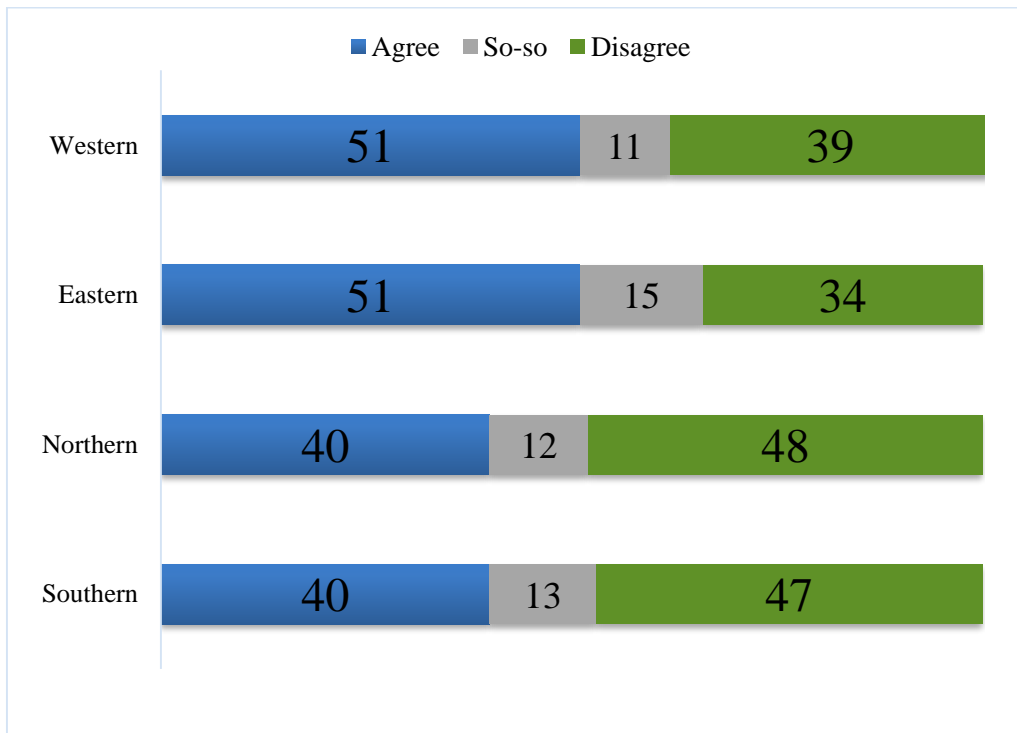
**Fig. 5 Overall ratings of street cleanliness**



**Fig. 6 YCDC cleans almost all the streets in the city every day (by district)**

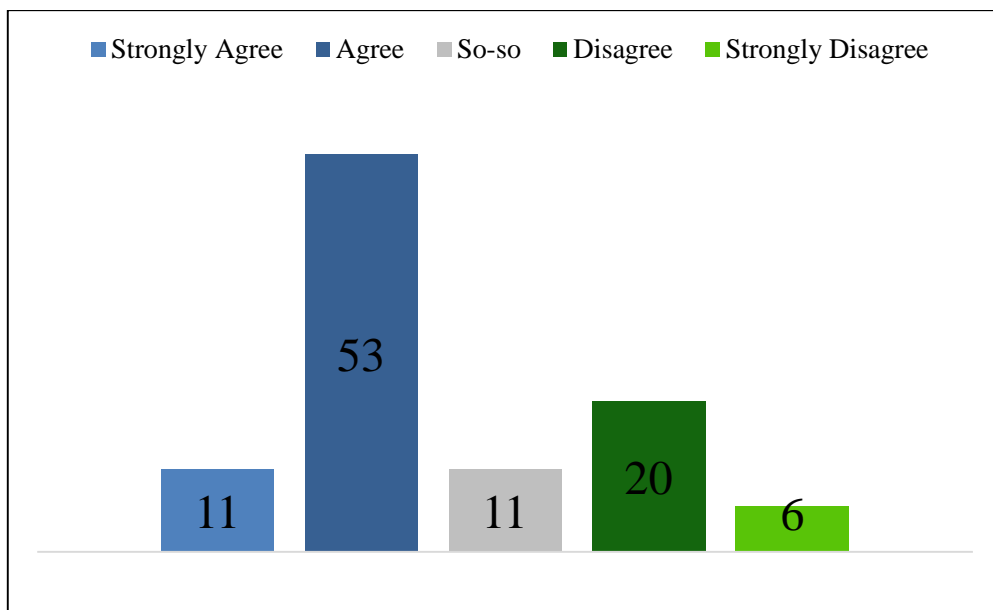


**Fig. 7 Almost all the streets in the city are clean (by district)**



In contrast to the divided opinions of street cleanliness, survey respondents generally had a positive consensus on street quality. When Yangon residents were asked how much they agree with the statement “The quality of most streets in the city is good (there are no rough places),” 53% of the respondents strongly agreed and 11% agreed. A total of 64% of the respondents said that they agreed with the statement that general street quality is good.

**Fig. 8 The quality of most streets in the city is good (there are no rough places)**

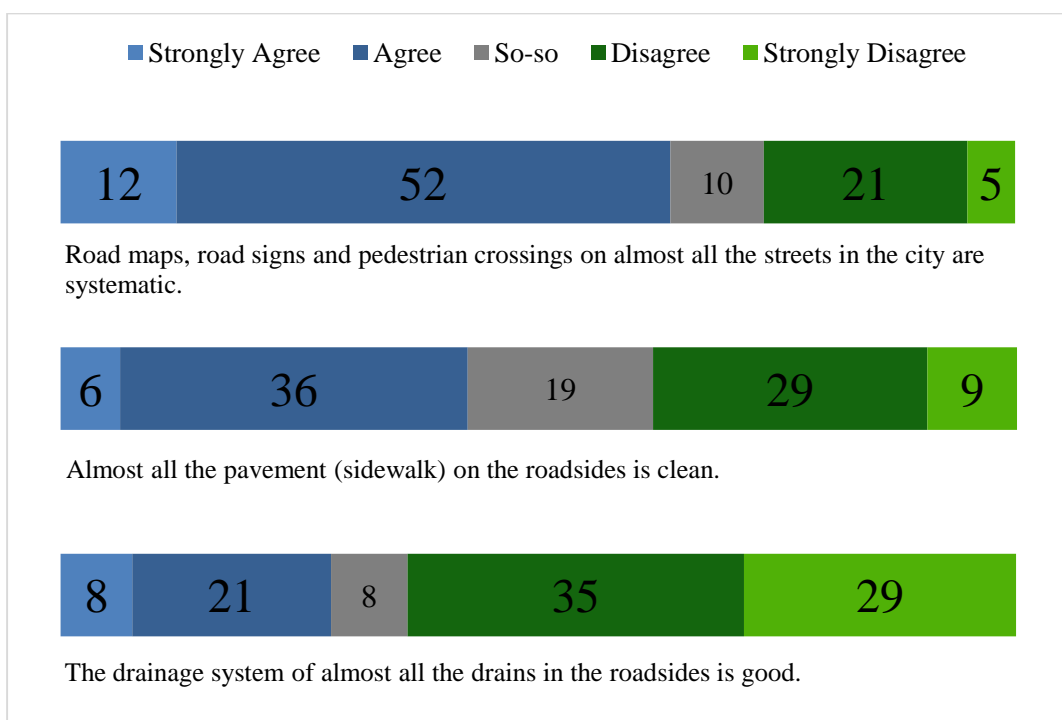


Perceptions of Street-related Infrastructure

This section presents public opinion of street-related infrastructure– the drainage system, sidewalks and road maps, signs, and pedestrian crossings. Flooding was the largest concern with regard to this type of infrastructure. People felt more positively about the cleanliness of the pavement with regard to drainage system. Furthermore, respondents were generally positive about road maps, road signs, and pedestrian crossings as compared to their opinions of the quality of other street-related infrastructure.

When respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement “The drainage system of almost all the drains in the roadsides is good,” a total of 35% of respondents strongly disagreed and 29% disagreed. Therefore, a total 64% indicated a negative opinion of roadside drainage systems. Similar to resident perceptions of street cleanliness, in response to the statement “Almost all the pavement (sidewalk) on the roadsides is clean,” public perception was balanced between positive and negative, with a slight skew towards positive. In addition, 64% of respondents reported that road maps, road signs, and pedestrian crossings on almost all the streets in the city were systematic.

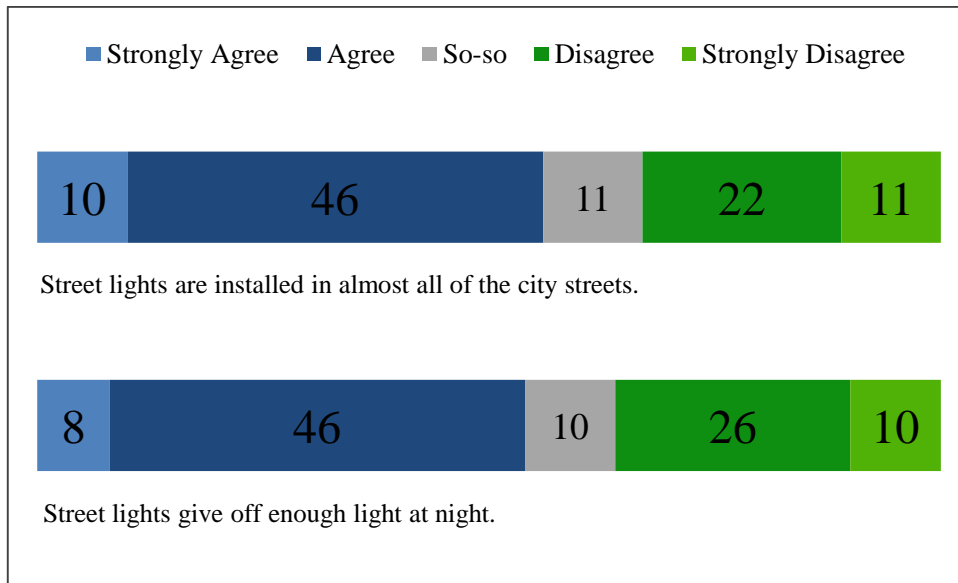
Fig. 9 Public opinion of street-related infrastructure



Perceptions of Street Lights

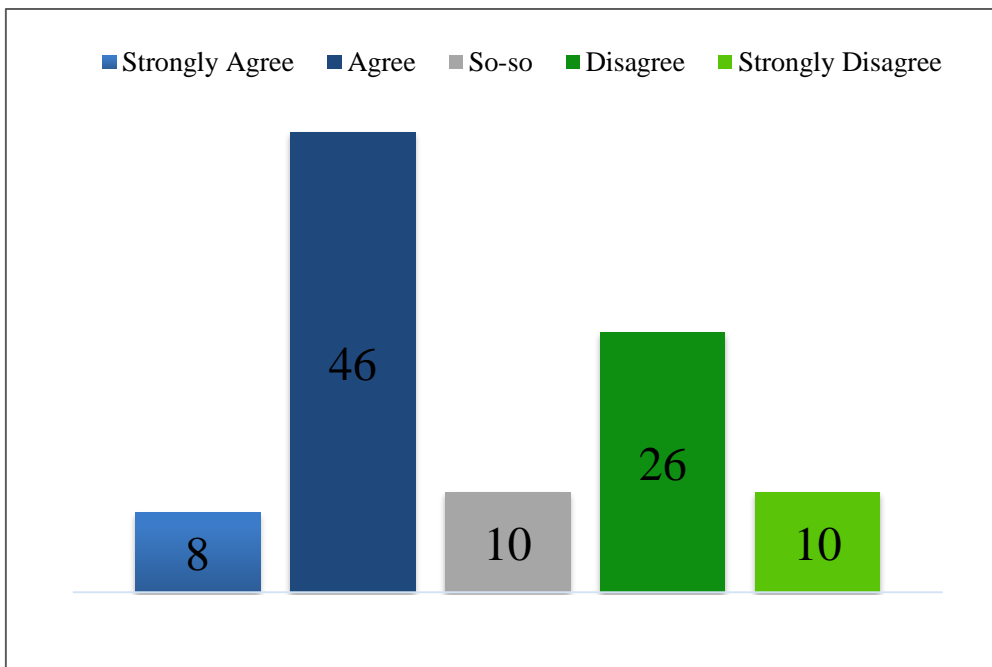
This section presents public opinion of YCDC street lights with regard to whether there is a sufficient number of street lights and whether they give off enough light. It was found that public opinion of street lights was generally positive. Fifty-six percent of respondents agreed that street lights are installed on almost all the city streets, and 54% also agreed that street lights give enough light at night. Over 30% of respondents reported that there are not enough street lights and stated that they do not give off a sufficient amount of light. One thing to be considered and analyzed is how different users experience street light services.

**Fig. 10 Public opinion of street lights**



It was considered that the safety of the city at night is connected to street lights. Therefore, when the statement “I feel safe when walking alone at night” was proposed to the residents, there was mostly a positive response, with the exception of one-third of the respondents who reported that they do not feel safe when walking alone at night.

**Fig. 11 I feel safe when walking alone at night**

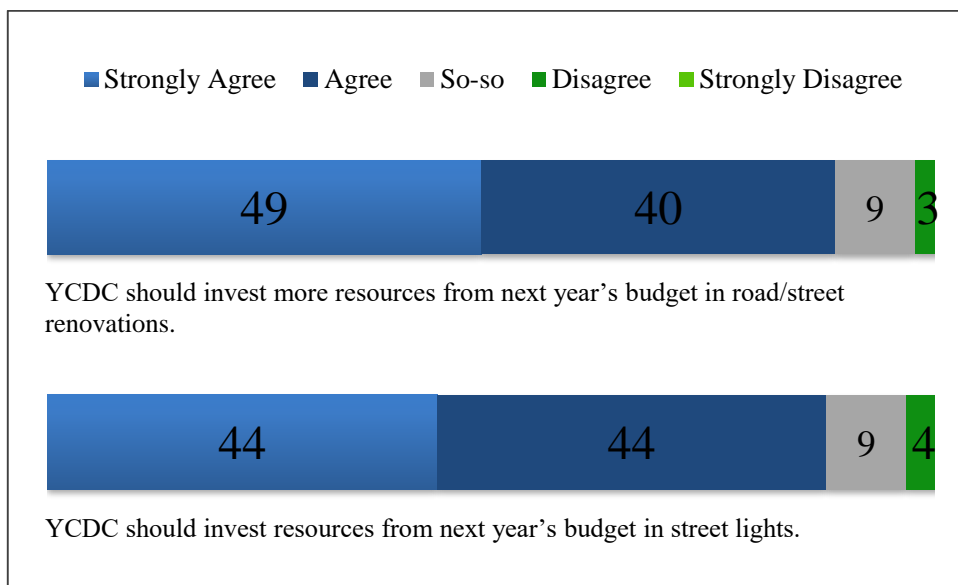




Perceptions of Taxes and Use of Revenues on Streets and Street Lights

This section presents public perceptions of the current taxation of streets and street lights and revenue distribution by YCDC, as well as the perception of residents on potential revenue mobilization. Public opinion was unanimous on the need for increased YCDC spending on street renovation and street lights in next year’s budget. Nearly 90% total respondents wanted to invest more resources in road/street renovations and street lights for next year’s budget.

**Fig. 12 Public opinion of YCDC’s resource allocation**



However, it was found that respondents were not particularly willing to pay more taxes. The percentage of respondents who wanted to pay more taxes was less than half, and the non-response rate was significantly high for statements such as “I would pay more vehicle tax if a higher tax amount was required to prepare and build new roads” and “I would pay more street light tax (property tax) if a higher tax amount was required to get more street lighting.” Nearly one-third of total respondents did not answer when asked if they would pay more vehicle taxes, and 22% of respondents did not answer when asked if they would pay more street light taxes (property tax). Specifically, most low-income individuals responded “no answer” to this question. Higher-income individuals seemed to be willing to pay more taxes for roads and street renovations, but not for more street lights.

Fig. 13 Willingness of residents to pay more taxes for streets and street lights

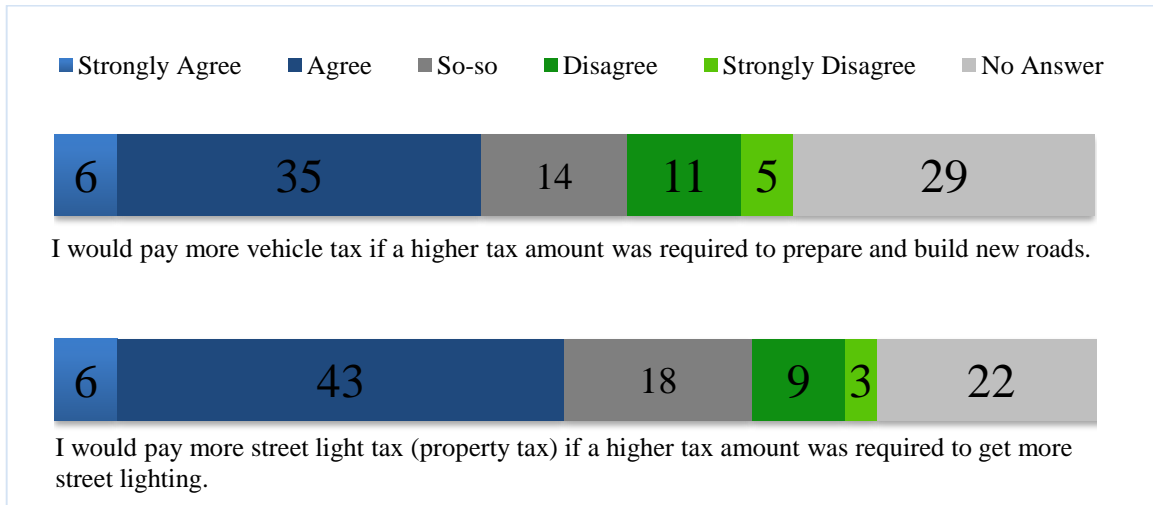


Fig. 14 Non-response rate for paying more vehicle taxes based on income level

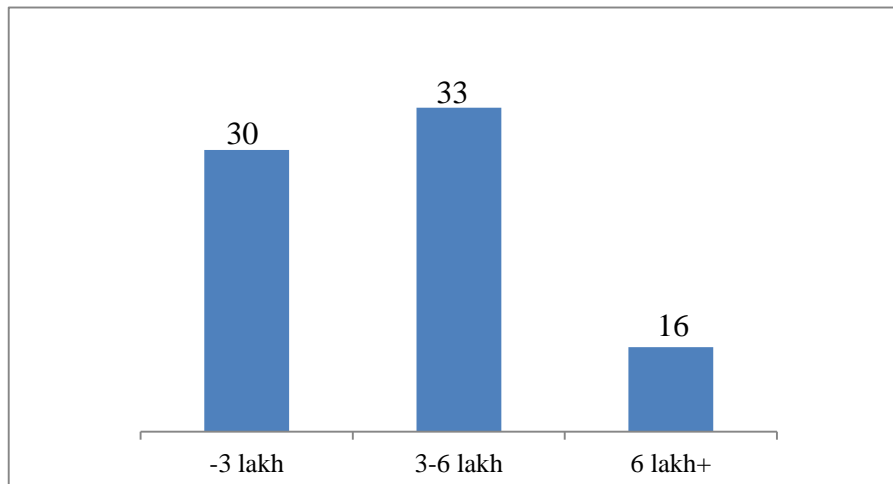
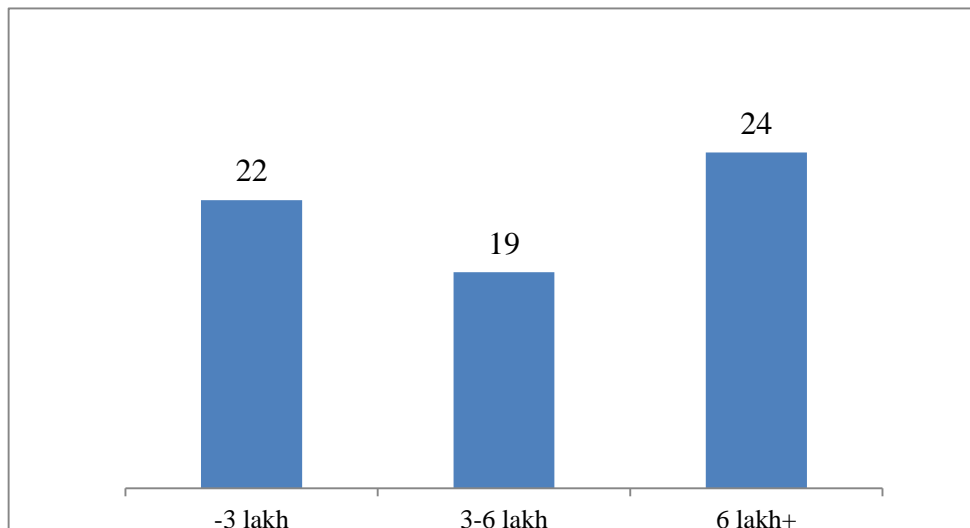


Fig. 15 Non-response rate for paying more property taxes based on income level



### Discussion and Recommendations

This section presents some recommendations based on the public opinions collected from the survey. First, public opinion of the current status of street cleanliness was generally moderate. Although there is a general consensus that the quality of streets is good, people still see street flooding as a big problem. It was found that people want more revenue allocated to maintain and build new streets. However, there is not a great deal of willingness to pay more in taxes to generate such revenue.

Second, public opinion was generally positive regarding street lights. However, citizens felt unsafe with an insufficient number of street lights. People want more revenue to be used to install new street lights. Further, while citizens understand the need to pay more taxes if more revenue to install additional street lights is required, their willingness to pay is not strong, similar to street taxes. Third, public opinion of the overall rating of the administration of streets and street lights is weak, and still fails to reach a positive majority.

To conclude, evidence of public perceptions acquired through scientific surveys should be considered in policy making for better urban planning. YCDC should be more aware of both the positive and negative perceptions of residents of the current status of streets and street lights. Furthermore, YCDC needs to target the specific issues brought up in the survey with better policy solutions, specifically increasing expenditures on streets and street lights. YCDC should also be aware that citizens are not sufficiently willing to pay taxes such that an additional tax would be a potentially uncontroversial avenue through which to mobilize revenues. ■

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■ **Yone Kyi Yar stitute** was founded by university students and active youth in Mandalay on 22nd July, 2011. At first, its main activities were weekly book clubs, group discussion and topic presentations. At the end of 2013, members of Yone Kyi Yar decided to take another step forward. Then, Yone Kyi Yar rent a building and founded a free public library and training center in Mandalay to serve the community better. Then it also expanded new activities such as intellectual talks and capacity building trainings.

Organization was started with community donations before April 2014 of NED grant. Free public library is still independent of international funding and runs only with community donations so far. Now there are 5 founding board committee members, 4 executive staffs, 6 office staffs and more than 40 volunteers in Yone Kyi Yar. Yone Kyi Yar's main functions are Trainings, Research and Policy Advocacy and Free Public Library Service.

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