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**To cite this article:** Guido Panzano (19 Oct 2023): Do mutually reinforcing cleavages harm democracy? Inequalities between ethnic groups and autocratization, Democratization, DOI: [10.1080/13510347.2023.2264196](https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2023.2264196)

**To link to this article:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2023.2264196>

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 Published online: 19 Oct 2023.


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# Do mutually reinforcing cleavages harm democracy? Inequalities between ethnic groups and autocratization

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## ABSTRACT

Do mutually reinforcing cleavages harm democracy? Evidence from specific cases suggests that autocratization can be related to the predicament of ethnic groups, if ethnicity is politicized and involves resource distribution. However, we know little about whether this is a cause of autocratization more broadly. The article demonstrates that, with increasing inequalities between ethnic groups, a country experiences a decline in its level of democracy and higher propensity to start autocratizing. The analysis thus advances previous contributions, focusing on individual inequalities and power-sharing institutions as explanations of democratization or democratic quality, in two ways. First, isolating autocratization as downturns in democracy levels and the onsets of related timespans (autocratization episodes), and comparing the impact of (economic, political, and social) types of inequalities between ethnic groups. Second, adopting a global sample of (democratic and non-democratic) countries since 1981, with an original data collection integrating expert surveys with survey data. Quantitative evidence confirms most expectations, particularly on economic inequalities between ethnic groups, and – although less precisely – economic, political and social dimensions combined. The findings have important implications for political regime and ethnic studies, showing that preventing the mutual reinforcement of sociocultural and economic cleavages is key to stabilize democracy.


**ARTICLE HISTORY** Received 27 March 2023; Accepted 25 September 2023

**KEYWORDS** Autocratization; ethnicity; inequality; democracy; ethnic groups

## Introduction

A longstanding debate in comparative politics tackles the interplay between democracy and ethnicity. Disproving previous commonsense, Lijphart's groundbreaking studies have demonstrated how democracy can thrive in segmented societies, with inclusive institutions and accommodative elites. However, the impact of increasing inequalities between ethnic groups on democratic decline remains less studied. The article suggests that autocratization can be connected to the predicament of ethnic groups, if ethnicity is politicized and involves resource distribution.

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 Supplemental data for this article can be accessed online at <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2023.2264196>.

This observation derives from the context of countries that are currently autocratizing the most,<sup>1</sup> and present increasing inequalities based on ethnic, national, regional, religious, or linguistic cleavages. That is the case of Brazil, where despite Bolsonaro's defeat in 2022, the disparities between racialized groups and the predicament of indigenous populations, sensibly poorer than the white or mixed majority, destabilize the most populous democracy in Latin America. It is the case of India, where in 2019 the Parliament approved Modi's citizenship reform, granting a special channel to Indian citizenship for Hindu minorities from neighbouring countries, while refusing the same pathway to Muslim refugees, most of them facing religious persecution and a further deterioration of economic conditions. Similarly, authoritarian leaders, from Erdoğan to Putin, often implement ethnic nationalism as legitimization strategy against disempowered ethnic minorities. Across other political regimes, from Sub-Saharan Africa to Israel/Palestine, we can witness how inequalities between ethnic groups, i.e. when class divisions overlap with sociocultural identities, can be dangerous for democracy.

We might wonder whether these cases represent a comparable pattern. The paper builds on prominent contributions on horizontal inequality and democratic breakdown<sup>2</sup> and on the impact of power-sharing institutions on democracy.<sup>3</sup> On one hand, research on the interplay between social relations and regime developments brings mixed results. The findings of the literature on inequalities and democratization are contradictory, often depending on the adopted measurements and considering individual rather than group inequalities. On the other, the literature showing how power-sharing institutions increase post-conflict democratic survival and quality does not address democratic decline. Therefore, the article advances such contributions, by specifying autocratization as downturns in democracy levels and onsets of related time spells (autocratization episodes), and comparing the impact of economic, political, and social inequalities between ethnic groups. Clearly, I do not argue that autocratization is *necessarily* connected to ethnicity. Or that democracy is impossible in divided societies. Yet, I claim that it is crucial to study *inequalities between ethnic groups*, as one of the structural determinants of autocratization.

The article hypothesizes that, when inequalities between ethnic groups increase, a country will experience a decline in its democracy level and a higher propensity to start autocratizing. With rising economic inequalities between ethnic majorities and minorities and augmenting the salience of ethnicity, would-be authoritarians may find fertile soil to restrict democratic safeguards for the benefits of their associates, once in power. In turn, this process may be encouraged by majoritarian institutions or practices of social exclusion on ethnic grounds. In order to demonstrate this empirically, the analysis matches expert surveys on political regimes<sup>4</sup> and ethnic groups<sup>5</sup> with an original dataset triangulating individual-level survey data on ethnic group belonging and economic situation since 1981 until today across a global sample of democratic and nondemocratic countries. A couple of previous contributions adopted a similar focus.<sup>6</sup> However, they contain fewer countries, data at an aggregate level, often do not find a direct effect of horizontal inequality on democratic breakdown, are not updated and, most importantly, lack clear criteria on how different ethnic group lists are aggregated across different sources. As demonstrated recently,<sup>7</sup> sources on ethnicity can hardly be comparable and the findings of these analyses are difficult to be replicated. This is the case because different sources often adopt different ethnic group lists. I correct for this bias, by following *a single ethnic group list* for each

country and proposing a more precise measurement of economic inequalities between ethnic groups, built directly on individual-level data.<sup>8</sup>

Quantitative evidence at the ethnic-group and country level confirms most expectations: controlling for economic, institutional, or ethnic-based confounders, rising inequalities between ethnic groups, particularly in the economic sphere – and, although less precisely, with economic, political, or social dimensions combined – are associated with declining levels of democracy and the onset of autocratization episodes. These findings have implications for political regime and ethnic studies and broader ramifications: preventing the overlapping of ethnic cleavages and inequalities seems key to stabilize democracy.

The article proceeds as follows: the theory section locates the analysis into the literature on autocratization and inequalities between ethnic groups and introduces the main definitions, mechanisms and hypotheses; the second one discusses the data and the results of the quantitative analysis, and offers thoughts for further research.

## Theory

### *Autocratization as democratic downturns and episode onsets*

After decades of democratization studies, scholars have started re-examining its opposite: autocratization. Pathway contributions initially focused on inter-war Europe and Latin America.<sup>9</sup> More recent ones questioned the so-called “democratic optimism” or “transition paradigm”,<sup>10</sup> considering every regime transformation as democratization. From this starting point, scholars concentrated on the problems of those transitional regimes,<sup>11</sup> defined as “hybrid”,<sup>12</sup> while others explored more nuanced considerations on the “quality” of the regime.<sup>13</sup> Recently, the literature turned the spotlight on “reverse democratization processes” more directly.<sup>14</sup> With a plethora of categories – democratic regression,<sup>15</sup> erosion or decay,<sup>16</sup> de-democratization,<sup>17</sup> backsliding<sup>18</sup> – scholars (re)devoted their attention to regime transformations towards authoritarianism. To overcome the scepticism about the “pessimistic” considerations of every regime development under a “flat democratic backsliding paradigm”,<sup>19</sup> experts have thus proposed new frameworks to scrutinize autocratization, or democratization in reverse.

However, scholars often tend to disagree on the conceptual framework. In short, contemporary conceptualizations of autocratization lie mainly on “negative” definitions, such as “any move away from full democracy”<sup>20</sup> – clustering all regime movements away from democratic “golden” standards. Contrariwise, others adopt “positive”, and more conceptually intensive, considerations of autocratization as processes of regime change towards autocracy.<sup>21</sup> With diverse definitions and measurements, knowledge cumulation is at its outset: existing comparative analyses register autocratization trends or modalities<sup>22</sup> or confront theories on democratization,<sup>23</sup> while contributions on the causes of (different types of) autocratization are still scarce.

Following the operationalization introduced by Teorell,<sup>24</sup> the article adopts the most general (and continuous) definition of autocratization as *any negative change in the country’s level of democracy* across the regime spectrum, compared to the previous year of measurement. As crude as this operationalization can be, it measures the *relative* negative variation, or “democratic downturns”, that a country can experience. Also, if a focus on within-regime change might be problematic as quantitative

degrees can be subject to fluctuations, crisp distinctions may also produce different results under different thresholds.<sup>25</sup> Also, many autocratization processes today are observed within regime categories, such as losses of democratic quality or accountability in democracies and deepening of autocracies.<sup>26</sup> Either leading to a regime change or not, these phenomena are worth analysing. Therefore, even though for some authors autocratization overlaps with *inter-regime change* – as an umbrella term for democratic regression (from liberal to electoral democracy), democratic breakdown (from democracy to autocracy), or autocratic deepening (from electoral to close autocracy) – the article analyses more nuanced variations in democracy levels, as *intra-regime transformations* towards autocracy. This is a methodological choice to find explanations for autocratization at its general level, as any negative variations of democratic quality.

A similar approach considers autocratization “episodes”, bounding substantial and durable variations in democracy levels within time spells or intervals – regardless of whether a regime change occurs.<sup>27</sup> This operationalization borders that of democratic downturns, even though it is more restrictive, as I will describe. Certainly, it is useful for examining the differences between autocratization episodes leading or not to a regime change, different episode durations, etc. However, its empirical applications are still scarce.<sup>28</sup> Also, when episodes are considered as dependent variable in statistical analysis, they require models for categorical data. Additionally, the article includes episode-based models, looking at autocratization *onset* (first year). This is useful for at least two reasons. First, it represents a robustness check with a categorical measure, improving an analysis based on a single measurement that can be influenced by noise in the data: if autocratization episodes always involve democratic downturns, that does *not* apply to the opposite, because episodes entail a durable and minimum variation of democracy levels – as I will explore in the empirical analysis. Second, we can understand the structural causes of the initiation of an autocratization process, which in turn does not necessarily equate with a regime change.

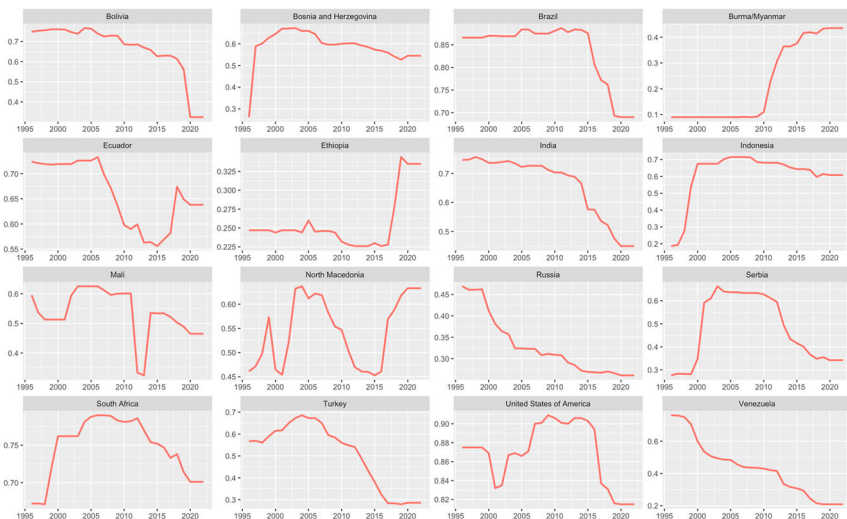
### ***Inequalities between ethnic groups and autocratization***

Since Lijphart’s studies,<sup>29</sup> we know how democracy can thrive in segmented societies, if elites are accommodative and institutions inclusive. However, we may ask whether, with mounting inequalities between ethnic groups, democracy deteriorates.<sup>30</sup> This question is relatively uncharted. True, core contributions on how society influences the political regime are centred on inequality and redistribution,<sup>31</sup> and find how political elites are less willing to “concede” democratization to the masses if they fear resource reallocation.<sup>32</sup> However, despite theories on collective actors, these contributions adopt individualistic measures, disregarding group boundaries. I thence argue that, among the structural causes of autocratization, scholars are sometimes missing a key aspect: *inequalities between ethnic groups*.

As mentioned, we may affirm that some of today’s most autocratizing countries resemble ethnically unequal or deeply divided societies: political regimes where ethnic, national, regional, religious, or linguistic identities are salient in politics, e.g. manifested through parties, associations, or leaderships.<sup>33</sup> We have case-based evidence showing how increasing inequalities between ethnic groups may endanger democracy. In fact, scholars have connected the erosion of democratic quality observed in the US to rising inequalities and voters’ polarization, (re)widening the gap in economic, political and social capital between the white majority and minorities of Latinos,

African-Americans and Indian Americans in the last decades.<sup>34</sup> For ethnically divided democracies in Latin America, similarly, from a past of melting pot, research demonstrates that small variations in darker skin tone, or an indigenous background, are associated with significant change in income levels in more or less recent cases of autocratization, from Bolivia, Venezuela and Brazil to Peru and Ecuador.<sup>35</sup> Looking at Southeast-European democracies experiencing autocratization (often after a democratization phase, e.g. Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina’s Republika Srpska, Turkey, pre-2017 North Macedonia), studies report high salience of ethno-nationalist issues, often combined with discrimination of minority groups, which are increasingly overlapping with class differences.<sup>36</sup> In the world’s most populous democracy, India, the policies enforced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, targeting Muslims and non-Hindu citizens, on average poorer than the rest of the population, constitute enormous threats to the state of Indian democracy, for some already an electoral autocracy.<sup>37</sup>

We may also affirm that augmenting inequalities between ethnic groups undermine the emergence of minimally democratic institutions in electoral autocracies. The case of Myanmar can demonstrate this, where the struggle of the majoritarian Bamar ethnic group against the insurgencies of other, poorer groups at the borders – culminated in the Rohingya genocide – first undermined the democratic credentials of the National League for Democracy and then fractured the civic reaction to the 2021 military *coup*, according to analysts.<sup>38</sup> Also, examinations on the crucial case of Russia throughout the last two decades report how the salience of ethnic issues proceeds in parallel with the country’s autocratic deepening and represents part of the elite’s justification of the invasion of Ukraine.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, at the origin of instable democratic institutions in the African continent, across electoral democracies and autocracies, scholars have examined contrasts between different tribes, clustered in ethnic “families”, politicized and inheritors of inequalities shaped during the colonization era, from Nigeria, South Africa and, recently, Mali and Ethiopia.<sup>40</sup>



**Figure 1.** V-Dem Electoral Democracy Index in ethnically unequal societies.

Figure 1 visualizes this case-based evidence – roughly sketched here – by plotting the V-Dem Electoral Democracy Index for some of the abovementioned countries.

### **Definitions and hypotheses**

Following the seminal studies of Frances Stewart,<sup>41</sup> I define ethnic (or horizontal) inequalities as inequalities between ethnic groups (instead of vertical inequalities between individuals). Overlapping or reinforcing cleavages mean social divisions between groups characterized by a specific sociocultural identity *and* relatively uniform economic, political and social conditions.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, if virtually every country has ethnic cleavages or economic classes, that does not necessarily apply to ethnic inequalities. Unfortunately, most studies underrate these complexities, i.e. when using the fractionalization indexes,<sup>43</sup> which are criticized by ethnic politics experts as unprecise, “primordialistic”,<sup>44</sup> and not empirically connected to specific outcomes.<sup>45</sup> After decades of research, however, there are more appropriate and context-sensitive data on ethnicity, as I will mention afterwards. Ethnic inequalities should then be considered as a multidimensional concept, echoing Tilly’s suggestion to study “categorical” inequalities (meaning inequalities incorporating different cleavages), among the causes of what he called “de-democratization”.<sup>46</sup> From seminal studies on electoral behaviour,<sup>47</sup> we know that, when multiple cleavages reinforce each other or overlap, rather than crosscut, we should expect a greater influence of structural conditions on the regime. Some contributions already focused on inequalities between ethnic groups<sup>48</sup> and their impact on democracy.<sup>49</sup> However, I refine their analyses, by differentiating between different types of inequalities and presenting more coherent and robust quantitative evidence. In what follows, I will describe the main dimensions of ethnic inequalities the analysis will look at, as well as the specific causal mechanisms (elaborated from existing literature) according to which they should lead to autocratization.

In the article – although I also examine other components of ethnic inequalities – I look primarily at *economic* inequalities between ethnic groups. They are associated to differences in “access to and ownership of assets”<sup>50</sup> or in income levels between ethnic groups. Such inequalities have been studied as correlates of civil war,<sup>51</sup> or public good provision.<sup>52</sup> How can they explain autocratization? Extending the reasoning of previous literature, I expect that the reinforcing of sociocultural and economic cleavages is detrimental for democracy for two reasons. First, this is the case because economic inequalities between ethnic groups can offer valid incentives for richer groups or majorities to restrict political pluralism, in line with the literature on democratization. Second, for disadvantaged groups or minorities, they can originate grievances which, in turn, can push groups to engage in conflicts for the conquest of resources – that is what conflict studies suggest.<sup>53</sup> However, differently from individual inequalities, both mechanisms imply the increase of the salience of ethnic boundaries and the transformation of political competition in an “ethnic census”,<sup>54</sup> where economically homogeneous groups compete for state resources in a (perceived) zero-sum game and group members prioritize their interests over democracy. Compared to other forms of inter-personal differences, inequalities between ethnic groups can be more dangerous for democracy, as groups can have a more direct influence on politics than individuals. However, research on economic inequalities between ethnic groups is scarce, with non-univocal results, and often conceives autocratization only as regime



change. At the best of our knowledge, the only quantitative test by Houle<sup>55</sup> finds that economic inequalities between ethnic groups, (only) at lower levels of inequalities *within* ethnic groups, explain higher probabilities of democratic breakdown. However, Houle did not find a *direct* impact of economic inequalities between ethnic groups on democratic breakdown, and the external validity of the analysis has been contested recently by Leipziger.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, the results do not necessarily address autocratization in general and need to be re-tested. This leads to the first hypothesis:

- H1.A: When economic inequalities between ethnic groups within a country increase, the level of democracy declines.
- H1.B: When economic inequalities between ethnic groups within a country increase, the likelihood of an autocratization onset is higher.

The article integrates this first hypothesis with other two. Another approach suggests that *political* rather than economic inequalities between ethnic groups, such as those generated by majoritarian institutions, might influence regime developments.<sup>57</sup> Based on Lijphart's tradition, power-sharing or consociational institutions have been analysed by scholars in order to explain peace settlements, post-conflict democratization and positive variations in (aspects of) democratic quality.<sup>58</sup> However, these analyses are not bridged directly to autocratization studies. In fact, we still do not know whether declining levels of power-sharing (or increasing political inequality between ethnic groups, how it will be conceptualized below) are connected to democratic downturns or autocratization episodes. We should thus ask whether majoritarian institutions in ethnically divided societies might pave the way for illiberal tendencies by majority groups. With hardly mutable identities, institutional majoritarianism can encourage minority exclusion and power concentration by would-be authoritarian elites. Accordingly, countries with more majoritarian institutions (and politicized ethnic groups) could be more prone to experience democratic decay. This is because, under such institutional setup, political contestation gets higher stakes as there is limited room for minority forces to resist the actions of the winning majority. If ethnic boundaries are perceived as rigid, and there are less "floating" votes between opposing camps also in politics, institutions based on the principle of majority rule may permanently exclude minorities and negatively affect democratic quality. Nonetheless, as these claims remain either only theoretical<sup>59</sup> or focused on specific cases<sup>60</sup> and are not yet examined systematically, the article asks whether:

- H2.A: When political inequalities between ethnic groups within a country increase, the level of democracy declines.
- H2.B: When political inequalities between ethnic groups within a country increase, the likelihood of an autocratization onset is higher.

Additionally, the article considers *social* inequalities between ethnic groups, meaning those differences in "services, such as education, health, care and housing"<sup>61</sup> manifested in informal practices related to ethnic relations. That is to say, the practical and often informal exclusion of ethnic minorities from decision-making, even if not related to economic disparities or formal institutions, can still



be bad for democracy. This exclusivity, if permanent and pervasive, may affect the possibility for every citizen to influence the democratic cycle. Nonetheless, societal exclusion on ethnic grounds has been reported as one of the “defects” of democratic regimes<sup>62</sup> and not as a cause of autocratization and should be re-examined:

- H3.A: When social inequalities between ethnic groups within a country increase, the level of democracy declines.
- H3.B: When social inequalities between ethnic groups within a country increase, the likelihood of an autocratization onset is higher.

To conclude, as inequalities between ethnic groups are structural variables, therefore changing slowly in a country’s trajectory, we might add that their effect on the political regime should be more relevant if different dimensions are also changing. This can occur in two ways. First, we should wonder whether the impact of one main dimension of inequality changes in relation to others and, second – and what the analysis will look at – what we should expect whether ethnic groups combine different aspects of inequalities:

- H4.A: When multiple types of inequalities between ethnic groups within a country increase, the level of democracy declines.
- H4.B: When multiple types of inequalities between ethnic groups within a country increase, the likelihood of an autocratization onset is higher.

## Analysis

### *Data and methods*

This section applies regression techniques in order to estimate the impact of inequalities between ethnic groups on autocratization. I first present the operationalization and measurement of the outcome and explanatory variables, before discussing the modelling strategies.

The operationalization of autocratization (dependent variable) is twofold and based on the Electoral Democracy Index (EDI, 0-1) from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)<sup>63</sup> and the Episodes of Regime Transformations (ERT).<sup>64</sup> The EDI measures the electoral component of democracy, aggregating V-Dem indicators on freedom of association, freedom of expression, free suffrage, free and fair elections, and popular elections for chief executive and legislature.<sup>65</sup> From the EDI, I elaborated a measure of autocratization at its highest level of abstraction: democratic downturns.<sup>66</sup> They are country changes in democracy levels compared to the previous year of measurement, with positive values set to zero. They reflect the general understanding of autocratization as any transformation towards autocracy or away from democracy in a continuous way: in other words, they measure the extent to which the level of democracy of a country declines. Also, since the analysis is not conflated with positive changes in democracy levels, it allows for causal asymmetry between predictors of autocratization and democratization.<sup>67</sup>

However, not every negative sign of the delta might be an instance of autocratization. To avoid problems of overestimating yearly noise in the data and to investigate whether the regressors explain the initiation of a more substantial and durable

democratic decline, I adopt another specification of the outcome: autocratization episodes. They are yearly events coded by the ERT if a country has an initial decrease of  $-0.01$  of the EDI and total decline of at least  $-0.10$  throughout the whole episode, ending in the last year of negative change, which should be less than or equal to the initial decrease. The second part of the analysis addresses autocratization onsets, meaning the episode's first year, omitting the years that follow until that episode ends. I consider onsets because: first, explaining the beginning of a process is more in line with an analysis centred on structural conditions; second, most contemporary autocratization episodes are ongoing (right-censored).

The analysis has three main independent variables, one each for economic (core), political and social inequalities between ethnic groups. For the first, I conducted an extensive data collection to compute an original measurement triangulating data on individual ethnic affiliation and economic situation. This effort was necessary because existing measurements are biased and not comparable, with limited coverage in time and space. In fact, implemented measures such as proxies from nightlight emissions or territorial GDP risk being unreliable in countries where groups do *not* live in separate areas.<sup>68</sup> Also, other variables based on an expert-assessment of exclusion by social groups (such as that encoded in the V-Dem dataset) might not refer to ethnic groups. Therefore, I follow the approach attempted by Baldwin and Huber, and Houle,<sup>69</sup> extending their temporal and geographical coverage. It consists of matching individual-level data on respondents' economic situation and ethnicity from cross-national surveys. The waves from the World Value Surveys,<sup>70</sup> Comparative Study of Electoral Systems,<sup>71</sup> Latinobarometro,<sup>72</sup> Latin American Public Opinion Project,<sup>73</sup> Afrobarometer<sup>74</sup> and Asian barometer<sup>75</sup> were selected if containing questions both on the ethnicity *and* on the economic situation of the respondent (income percentile compared to the country average).

This aggregation – including democratic and nondemocratic regimes – coherently sticks to the Ethnic Power Relations (EPR)<sup>76</sup> ethnic group list, counting groups which are politically relevant (meaning with any political representation) *or* anyway discriminated by the government. It has been conducted manually, combining lists reported by these surveys with that of the EPR, through desk research.<sup>77</sup> This procedure finally overcomes a fundamental problem when merging different sources on ethnicity: the fact there is *no* guarantee that authors of different datasets rely on the same ethnic group list.<sup>78</sup> With an average income (or percentile of income, henceforth GDP for simplicity) per ethnic group in every country included in the waves, I calculated an indicator of economic inequality between ethnic groups, based on Cederman and colleagues' formula developed for civil war research:<sup>79</sup>

$$\text{Economic inequality between ethnic groups} = [\log(g/G)]^2$$

where  $g$  is the GDP of an ethnic group, and  $G$  is the GDP per capita in the country (here the GDP average of all its ethnic groups). This measure is computed at the ethnic-group level and is *relational*: it equals 0 if an ethnic group has an income close to the country average (low economic ethnic inequality) and, *symmetrically*, increases (maximum of 2.324) if a group is richer *or* poorer than the country average. This indicator *economic ethnic inequality* is easier to interpret than Gini coefficients, which are not elaborated for groups and hide a myriad of combinations. When more than one wave covers the income of a given ethnic group in the same time point,

I compute the mean. For a full report of the data collection process (waves used, countries and ethnic groups covered) see the online [Appendix](#).

Secondly, to address H2 on political ethnic inequalities, operationalized as institutional majoritarianism, the analysis adopts an existing measure of power-sharing institutions from the Constitutional Power-Sharing Dataset (CPSD).<sup>80</sup> The CPSD is based on the EPR list and has group-level indicators: thus, it is *directly* comparable to that on economic inequality. From the CPSD, I used the *ps1h* index, which aggregates variables on horizontal power-sharing institutions following Lijphart's conceptualization: it measures whether, for a specific ethnic group, the constitution of the country prescribes its formal inclusion in the central government through an executive grand coalition, proportional representation in the electoral system, or veto rights.<sup>81</sup> As *ps1h* is based on power-sharing, the opposite of majoritarianism, I reversed it. Therefore, *political ethnic inequality* ranges from 0 to 0.98 with values close to 0 if inclusionary institutions are mandated by law and increasing if majoritarianism is rather the prevalent principle in the country's institutions.

To measure *social ethnic inequality*, from the EPR dataset I included the *n-star* indicator.<sup>82</sup> It measures the informal relations between included and excluded ethnic groups, based on the EPR coders' classification of ethnic group status as hegemonic, dominant, power-sharing senior (majorities) or junior (minorities) partner, discriminated, or powerless.<sup>83</sup> This variable is more appropriate than the fractionalization indexes because it considers power dynamics, is relational and based on the same ethnic group list of other measures.<sup>84</sup> It refers to the *country* level and it ranges between 0 and 1: increasing if the country contains more, or more numerous, excluded groups. To get a better sense of the data structure, [Table 1](#) reports for the case of the US the variation of the V-Dem EDI (from which I operationalized democratic downturns and autocratization episode onsets) and the main independent variables (economic, political and social inequalities) for each ethnic group included in the analysis.

To avoid spurious correlations, the analysis includes various controls. First, I account for other (types of) individual inequalities at the country level, in order to rule out that indicators on ethnic inequalities are reflecting more general phenomena not related to ethnicity. The models add variables on the country's average of education years and education inequality, the log of the GDP per capita and inflation rate, together with the log of country's income deriving from natural resources. These are key confounders, about economic factors and shocks, that can have an impact on ethnic inequalities and the outcome. Secondly, the models include indicators on political institutions, such as the V-Dem "divided party control" and the "division of power" indexes, measuring the country's institutional inclusiveness in the government or in the territory – in order to control for the effect of other, non-ethnic, institutional setups. I also added other contextual variables such as the presence

**Table 1.** The structure of the dataset (US).

Year	EDI	Ethnic groups	Economic inequality	Political inequality	Social inequality
2010	0.906	African Americans	0.0014104	0.786	1.10E-09
	0.906	Latinos	0.0011376	0.786	1.10E-09
	0.906	Whites	0.0001066	0.606	1.10E-09
2020	0.815	African Americans	0.0097647	0.786	0.02921351
	0.815	Latinos	0.0014449	0.786	0.02921351
	0.815	Whites	0.0004213	0.606	0.02921351

of a civil war, the log of the total population, and its number of politically salient ethnic groups.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, the analysis has another control at the group level – the relative size of the ethnic group – to rule out that the results are produced by demographics. These variables come from either the V-Dem or EPR datasets.<sup>86</sup>

Concerning the regression strategies, I present two sets of models, one with the unit of analysis at ethnic group-country-year and another at the country-year.<sup>87</sup> Following an ethnic-group analysis is in line with the theoretical framework and fits the empirical strategy, by isolating the impact of inequalities *between ethnic groups*, not cumulating fine-grained data or underestimating small groups. Therefore, with this strategy I estimate whether ethnic groups which are more unequal are also those more frequently living in autocratizing countries. With the models at the country-level, instead, I examine whether countries with increasing ethnic inequalities are the ones autocratizing the most. Even though the rationale of the case selection is to include as many cases as possible, it is still based on available survey data used for developing the measurement on economic inequality between ethnic groups. Thus, the maximum sample includes 97 countries, covering democracies and nondemocracies inhabited by up to 439 politically relevant ethnic groups. Most of missing countries (see Appendix Table A.1) have no politically relevant ethnic groups (or just one) and should not bias the results. The time points depend on the available survey waves for the indicator on economic inequality between ethnic groups: it is an unbalanced panel dataset between 1981 and 2021, with a minimum of one-year observation and a maximum of 37. Missing values have been extrapolated and interpolated for the controls and the indicators on political and social inequalities between ethnic groups.<sup>88</sup>

## Results

### *Ethnic inequalities and democratic downturns*

Table 2 summarizes the models with democratic downturns as outcome. They include one-year lagged independent variables, two-way fixed effects for ethnic group or country (depending on the unit of analysis) and time, and clustered standard errors at the country level to correct for inverse relationship, unobserved factors at group-/country- and time-levels, and autocorrelation of the errors. The Table presents models with each of the main independent variables of interest, with all the three variables and, finally, an overall index. Assuming substitutability between dimensions of ethnic inequalities, I calculated their mean.<sup>89</sup> The models refer to either the ethnic-group or to the country level as unit of analysis. For country-level models, in each country I have calculated the sum of the indicator on economic inequality between ethnic groups, divided by the overall number of groups. This was not necessary for the other indicators on political and social inequalities between ethnic groups, also containing a variable related to the country. Across different specifications, we should see *negative coefficients* of the predictors, being the outcome (negative variations in democracy levels) a delta with positive values set to 0. That means, when ethnic inequalities increase, I expect higher downturns, or higher variations with the negative sign.

Results support H1.A (the core expectation) and, although less precisely, H4.A. Other conditions being equal, when the GDP of an ethnic group is more distant from that of other groups, the democracy level of its country declines (Model 1). Similarly, when a country has increasing inequalities between ethnic groups, it would



N	3246	869	3246	745	3254	842	3254	562	3254	562
Unit of analysis	Group	Country	Group	Country	Group	Country	Group	Country	Group	Country
Ethnic groups	418	-	418	-	426	-	426	-	426	-
Countries	95	91	95	92	95	84	95	72	95	72
Years	35	35	35	31	35	36	35	30	35	30
R2	0.243	0.244	0.232	0.279	0.232	0.237	0.243	0.381	0.239	0.345
R2 Adj.	0.116	0.105	0.104	0.123	0.103	0.098	0.115	0.225	0.110	0.183
FE: year	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
FE: country		X		X		X		X		X
FE: ethnic group	X		X		X		X		X	

<sup>+</sup> $p < 0.1$ , \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ . Country-clustered standard errors in parentheses; independent variables at  $t - 1$ ; autocratization as democratic downturns: delta between democracy level at time  $t$  and  $t - 1$  with positive values set to 0.

experience more severe democratic downturns (Model 2). On H2.A and H3.A, the coefficients on political and social inequality maintains the expected negative sign (Models 3, 4, 5, and 6), although their significance is above conventional thresholds. When all independent variables are considered together, economic inequality between ethnic groups is the most robust: negative and statistically significant (Models 7, 8). The combined index of ethnic inequality (H4.A) also predicts a decrease in democracy levels, even though its statistical significance is between  $p$ -value = 0.103 and 0.132 (Models 9, 10).<sup>90</sup>

Overall, the results suggest that: the three dimensions of inequality have an independent effect from each other; economic inequality between ethnic groups is the most robust in predicting democratic downturns; if these dimensions are combined, they also explain a decrease in democracy levels, even though less precisely.

Related to previous studies, two points are worth noticing. First, these results confirm the relation between economic inequalities between ethnic groups and democratic breakdown, finding a *direct* effect on democratic downturns.<sup>91</sup> Second, however, I find mixed support (correct sign, though statistically insignificant coefficients)<sup>92</sup> on the impact of political and social inequalities between ethnic groups. Therefore, although previous contributions demonstrated a positive association between power-sharing institutions and democratization or democratic quality,<sup>93</sup> this does not necessarily mean that institutional majoritarianism or increasing political inequalities between ethnic groups lead to larger democratic downturns on average. Although this point would warrant further theoretical reflections, I hypothesize some possible explanations: the indicator on political inequality is unprecise because it only considers formal institutions and not their implementations; it has no sufficient variation in time; the impact of political and also social inequalities between ethnic groups might be mediated by another factor more proximate to the outcome. Future research should address these issues.

Moreover, as reported by Table A.2, the dependent variable has a maximum of 0, a minimum of  $-0.266$  and a standard deviation of 0.022, in the dataset at the ethnic-group level: the coefficients' magnitude is thus relevant: one-unit variation in the variable of economic inequality between ethnic groups explains slightly less than one standard deviation of the outcome (Model 1). Also, other coefficients across the models – except for the ones on population<sup>94</sup> – do not reach parallel levels of magnitude nor statistical significance.

As robustness tests, Appendix Table A.4 replicates the baseline models without controls and Table A.5 modifies the operationalization of the outcome: as the impact of structural variables might be better observed in the long run, the outcome is democratic downturns over 5 years. The findings are consistent, for H1.A and H4.A, often just slightly above conventional statistical significance. The Appendix also contains other replications with three-way fixed effects for ethnic group, country and time (Table A.6, only for group-level models), with comparable results and robust evidence for H1.A (H4.A with  $p$ -value = 0.16). Table A.7 returns to the country level, in order to test whether the results hold with a lagged dependent variable (LDV) and without fixed effects. Most coefficients (for the exception of the one of social inequality – but statistically insignificant) maintain the same signs, and H1.A keeps its statistical significance. Similar results are obtained with models having the outcome as simple the level of democracy (Table A.11, less robustly when a LDV is included). As a further specification, Table A.8 replicates the baseline models of Table 2 with random effects and panel



corrected standard errors. Since we are dealing with structural conditions changing slowly within units, I question whether between-unit differences, removed by the time demeaning of the fixed effects, overtake within-unit ones.<sup>95</sup> The coefficient on economic ethnic inequality is significant and with the expected sign. This brings further evidence for the core H1.A (though not for other hypotheses), characterizing not only changing conditions of ethnic groups and countries illustrated with fixed effects, but also different *between-unit* (group and country) effects.

### ***Ethnic inequalities and autocratization episode onset***

We have evidence supporting the claim that increasing ethnic inequalities, particularly those related to economic conditions, or when multiple dimensions are combined (although less precisely), are associated with larger democratic downturns. However, to exclude that these results are derived from data fluctuations, I estimate the effect of the same explanatory variables on the initiation of an autocratization episode. Table 3 thence presents the odds ratios from Logit models with Firth's bias reduction.<sup>96</sup> The outcome is autocratization episode onset, the independent variables are one-year lagged, the standard errors clustered per country, and in the absence of fixed effects, I included dummies for world regions and years,<sup>97</sup> plus another variable on the world average of the level of democracy. As before, for both ethnic-group and country-level analyses, the Table reports models with each variable considered alone, the three altogether, and the overall index. For these models we expect *positive* odds ratios: when ethnic inequalities increase, a country will be more likely to initiate an autocratization episode.

The results are consistent. The coefficients related to economic inequality between ethnic groups (H1.B) are significantly predicting higher changes for a country to start an autocratization episode (Models 1, 2, 7 and 8). Although we have solid evidence for H1.B, we do not have it for H2.B (with opposite directions in some models). Nonetheless, the logistic models yield some evidence for H3.B, with expected directions and statistical significance in some models (4, 6, 7, 8). The last indicator on the combined index of ethnic inequalities has the correct sign and reaches statistical significance (Model 9 and 10), proving additional evidence for H4.B. To interpret the magnitude of this association, the analysis shows that, in countries with higher economic inequalities (Model 2) and the overall index of inequalities between ethnic groups (Model 10), the odds of initiating an autocratization episode over that of remaining with a stable democracy level is between 2.7 and 8.7 times *higher*.

As robustness tests, after models without controls and year and region dummies (Table A.9 and 9.1 for ethnic-group and country-level analyses respectively, with comparable results for H1.B), in order to investigate whether this relationship is sensitive to country samples, I re-run the models excluding observations from closed autocracies (Table A.10): the results are similar to the ones reported by Table 3.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

The article has unveiled how increasing inequalities between ethnic groups, particularly in the economic dimension and when different dimensions are combined, are related to two autocratization types: declining levels of democracy (democratic downturns) and the initiation of an autocratization episode (autocratization onsets). This seems to confirm that the cases abovementioned represent a general pattern. In

**Table 3.** Inequalities between ethnic groups and autocratization episode onset.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Economic ethnic inequality	1.462*** (0.290)	2.675*** (0.388)					1.514*** (0.325)	2.667*** (0.322)		
Political ethnic inequality			-0.768 (1.369)	-1.894* (0.935)			-1.153 (1.590)	-5.116*** (0.819)		
Social ethnic inequality					1.353 (0.952)	1.541** (0.494)	1.639+ (0.994)	1.345+ (0.764)		
Combined index									3.539+ (2.120)	8.697*** (1.675)
Education average years	-0.121 (0.159)	-0.082 (0.087)	-0.118 (0.151)	0.073 (0.092)	-0.116 (0.163)	-0.007 (0.077)	-0.129 (0.166)	0.156 (0.116)	-0.112 (0.159)	0.289* (0.122)
Educational inequality	-0.015 (0.023)	-0.011 (0.011)	-0.017 (0.021)	-0.005 (0.014)	-0.016 (0.024)	-0.014 (0.015)	-0.019 (0.023)	0.020 (0.015)	-0.013 (0.023)	0.039* (0.016)
GDP per capita (log)	-1.052 (1.173)	-1.636*** (0.575)	-1.100 (1.227)	-2.721*** (0.456)	-0.946 (1.136)	-1.446** (0.507)	-1.080 (1.390)	-3.539*** (0.396)	-0.839 (1.128)	-3.251*** (0.377)
Inflation rate (log)	-0.418+ (0.229)	0.196 (0.129)	-0.410+ (0.232)	0.583** (0.201)	-0.423+ (0.236)	0.471** (0.171)	-0.326 (0.259)	0.397*** (0.120)	-0.469* (0.235)	0.371** (0.121)
Natural resource income per capita (log)	0.216 (0.208)	0.273* (0.131)	0.241 (0.214)	0.151 (0.187)	0.193 (0.206)	0.015 (0.205)	0.195 (0.206)	0.402* (0.159)	0.170 (0.220)	0.364+ (0.200)
Divided party control index	0.095 (0.234)	0.005 (0.120)	0.111 (0.234)	-0.159 (0.121)	0.093 (0.244)	0.031 (0.130)	0.059 (0.265)	-0.244* (0.109)	0.104 (0.228)	-0.374** (0.126)
Division of power index	0.463 (0.683)	0.315 (0.337)	0.356 (0.683)	0.312 (0.443)	0.584 (0.716)	0.327 (0.409)	0.737 (0.682)	0.917** (0.328)	0.570 (0.728)	0.412 (0.359)
Civil war	-0.519 (0.374)	0.079 (0.315)	-0.821+ (0.493)	-0.770+ (0.460)	-0.828* (0.398)	-0.701+ (0.382)	-0.763+ (0.462)	-0.713+ (0.397)	-0.597 (0.386)	-0.628+ (0.378)
Population	-1.196* (0.531)	-0.643* (0.312)	-1.222* (0.510)	0.088 (0.367)	-1.172* (0.516)	-0.243 (0.359)	-1.321** (0.475)	-0.641+ (0.373)	-1.070* (0.527)	-0.535 (0.370)
N relevant ethnic groups	-0.032 (0.038)	0.011 (0.017)	-0.028 (0.037)	-0.052* (0.024)	-0.032 (0.042)	-0.020 (0.023)	-0.029 (0.037)	-0.001 (0.014)	-0.043 (0.046)	-0.011 (0.016)
Group size	0.375* (0.187)		0.131 (0.153)							

% world democracy	-21.856*** (3.918)	-14.450*** (1.791)	-23.059*** (4.410)	-11.096*** (2.242)	-19.355*** (4.094)	-10.651*** (1.908)	-17.999*** (4.380)	-6.044	-19.126*** (4.986)	-5.882* (2.878)
Constant	19.181*** (3.970)	9.048*** (1.888)	20.638*** (4.185)	3.561 (3.050)	17.664*** (4.493)	2.859 (2.135)	18.575*** (5.189)	7.872* (3.318)	16.080*** (4.788)	0.992 (2.842)
N	2583	737	2583	655	2591	719	2591	493	2591	493
Unit of analysis	Group	Country	Group	Country	Group	Country	Group	Country	Group	Country
Ethnic groups	439	-	439	-	439	-	439	-	439	-
Countries	97	98	97	98	97	98	97	98	97	98
Years	36	37	36	37	36	37	36	37	36	37
Log Likelihood	-157.112	-60.001	-160.281	-59.726	-159.525	-69.542	-155.936	-43.715	-158.998	-44.115
AIC	418.224	222.001	424.561	213.452	421.049	243.085	417.872	183.430	419.996	180.231
BIC	722.8	456.7	729.1	424.2	719.9	481.1	728.4	385.1	718.8	373.5
Region and year dummies	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

+ $p < 0.1$ , \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ . Logit models with Firth's bias reduction; odds ratios are shown; country-clustered standard errors in parentheses; independent variables at  $t - 1$ ; autocratization episode onset as the first year of an autocratization episode (ERT). Dummies for world regions (Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, The Middle East and North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Western Europe and North America, Asia and Pacific) and years omitted.

short, while the impact of (individual) economic inequality on democracy is difficult to assess, the rise of (particularly, economic) inequalities between ethnic *groups* can well put democracy in danger. Even in the absence of a civil war or turmoil, when inequalities become “categorical”, and affecting many aspects of everyone’s life, from group identity to social class, a country is more prone to experience a democratic decay.

The article has three main implications for political regime and ethnic studies. First, it corroborated previous contributions on economic inequalities between ethnic groups and democratic breakdown, by finding a direct effect of the former on autocratization, with a broader analysis on different dimensions of inequalities and their effect on the magnitude and initiation of autocratization. Second, the article moved forward Lijphart’s suggestion that inclusive democracy is the only possible democracy in divided societies. That is to be corrected to consider *economic* inequalities between ethnic groups as explanations of democratic downturns and autocratization onsets. Third, concerning power-sharing literature, the article demonstrated an interesting causal asymmetry: if inclusive institutions are associated with higher democratic quality and chances of survival, it is not obvious that majoritarian institutions are related to autocratization, as this article did not find a direct impact of political and social inequality between ethnic groups on autocratization. These mixed findings remain to be confuted, with better measurements and methodological techniques, and the whole causal pattern to be further explained. In any case, in the analysis of the structural causes of autocratization, scholars should more systematically address when different cleavages, based on ethnic identities, overlap and mutually reinforce.

To conclude, the article illuminated a small piece of the puzzle of the connection between autocratization and ethnicity, and substantial room for extending the analysis remains in at least three aspects. First, structural variables often explain a small fraction of the democratic evolutions of a country.<sup>98</sup> Proximate causes, such as political actors, leaders or parties,<sup>99</sup> can operate as triggers or opponents of such trends. That means, agency-based conditions are pivotal to investigate whether, once a country starts autocratizing, it will change its regime-type. Illuminating the differences between explanatory variables of processes of regime transformations and changes remains crucial, in order to look closer at the interplay between structural conditions and causal mechanisms. Secondly, the article examines inequalities between ethnic groups. Future research shall test whether the association between autocratization and reinforcing inequalities can be related to other cleavages or groups, such as those based on gender or sexual orientation. Thirdly, and admittedly, while this article adopts a wide focus, further analysis might more in depth look at one dimension of ethnic inequality at a time, corroborated with a robust case-study examination, validating the findings within a small-N design.

## Notes

1. Boese et al., “State of the World 2021”; Wiebrecht et al., “State of the World 2022.”
2. Houle, “Ethnic Inequality”; and Stewart, “Horizontal Inequalities.”
3. Bochsler and Juon, “Power-Sharing”; Juon and Bochsler, “The Two Faces.”
4. Coppedge et al., “V-Dem Codebook V11.”
5. Vogt et al., “Integrating Data.”
6. Baldwin and Huber, “Economic versus Cultural Differences”; Houle, “Ethnic Inequality.”

7. Leipziger, "Measuring Ethnic Inequality"; Vaccaro, "Ethnic Dominance and Exclusion."
8. Vogt et al., "Integrating Data."
9. Linz and Stepan, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*; Berg-Schlosser and Mitchell, *Authoritarianism and Democracy*; Capoccia, *Defending Democracy*.
10. Carothers, "The End of the Transition Paradigm."
11. Linz and Stepan, *Problems*.
12. Bogaards, "How to Classify Hybrid Regimes?"; Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*; Schedler, *The Politics of Uncertainty*.
13. Diamond and Morlino, *Assessing the Quality of Democracy*; Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy*.
14. Croissant and Haynes, "Democratic Regression in Asia."
15. Diamond, "Democratic Regression."
16. Gerschewski, "Erosion or Decay?"
17. Bogaards, "De-Democratization in Hungary."
18. Bermeo, "On Democratic Backsliding"; Waldner and Lust, "Unwelcome Change"; Jee, Lueders, and Myrick, "Towards a Unified Approach."
19. Cianetti and Hanley, "The End of the Backsliding Paradigm."
20. Lührmann and Lindberg, "A Third Wave of Autocratization."
21. Cassani and Tomini, *Autocratization*.
22. Cassani and Tomini, "Reversing Regimes."
23. Tomini and Wagemann, "Varieties"; Diskin, Diskin, and Hazan, "Why Democracies Collapse."
24. Teorell, *Determinants*; Coppedge et al., *Why Democracies Develop and Decline*.
25. Bogaards, "Where to Draw the Line?"
26. Mechkova, Lührmann, and Lindberg, "The Accountability Sequence."
27. Maerz et al., "A Framework." Pelke and Croissant, "Conceptualizing and Measuring."
28. Boese et al., "How Democracies Prevail."
29. Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies*.
30. This does not amount to saying that in these contexts autocratization is *per se* associated with ethnicity, when the latter is politically relevant: Cianetti, *The Quality of Divided Democracies*.
31. Boix and Stokes, "Endogenous Democratization"; Acemoglu and Robinson, *Economic Origins*; Haggard and Kaufman, *The Political Economy*; and Scheve and Stasavage, "Wealth Inequality."
32. Knutsen et al., "Economic Development and Democracy"; Abdulai and Crawford, *Research Handbook*.
33. Guelke, *Politics*.
34. Wrigley-Field, "US Racial Inequality."
35. Woo-Mora, "Unveiling the Cosmic Race."
36. Günay and Dzihic, "Decoding the Authoritarian Code"; Vachudova, "Ethnopolitism"; Kapidžić and Stojarová, *Illiberal Politics*.
37. Widmalm, *Routledge Handbook of Autocratization*.
38. Maizland, "Myanmar's Troubled History."
39. Yusupova, "How Does the Politics of Fear in Russia Work?"
40. Onwuzuruigbo, "Researching Ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria"; World Bank Group, *Overcoming Poverty and Inequality in South Africa*; Benjaminsen and Ba, "Why Do Pastoralists in Mali Join Jihadist Groups?"; Aalen, "The Revolutionary Democracy of Ethiopia."
41. Stewart, *Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict*. Chandra defines ethnicity: "a subset of categories in which descent-based attributes are necessary for membership" (Chandra, "What Is an Ethnic Party?" 154).
42. In the definition of cleavage, Kriesi mentions its "structural base, political values of the groups involved, and their political articulation" (Kriesi, "The Transformation," 165). The article concentrates on the structural base.
43. Measuring the probability that two random individuals belong to different groups: Alesina et al., "Fractionalization."
44. Bochsler et al., "Exchange"; Marquardt and Herrera, "Ethnicity as a Variable"; cf. Hartzell and Hoddie, "The Art of the Possible."
45. *Contra* Gerring, Hoffman, and Zarecki, "The Diverse Effects."
46. Tilly, *Democracy*.
47. Chandra, *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed*; Lipset and Rokkan, *Party Systems and Voter Alignments*.
48. Hillesund et al., "Horizontal Inequality."

49. Houle, "Ethnic Inequality"; Stewart, "Horizontal Inequalities."
50. Stewart, Brown, and Mancini, "Monitoring and Measuring," 11.
51. Cederman, Weidmann, and Gleditsch, "Horizontal Inequalities."
52. Baldwin and Huber, "Economic versus Cultural Differences."
53. Kuhn and Weidmann, "Unequal We Fight."
54. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*; Snyder, *From Voting to Violence*. This paper affirms that it is not ethnicity *per se* that is problematic for democracy, but ethnic inequality.
55. Houle, "Ethnic Inequality."
56. Leipziger, "Measuring Ethnic Inequality."
57. Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy*.
58. Cederman, Hug, and Wucherpfennig, *Sharing Power, Securing Peace?*; Bochsler and Juon, "Power-Sharing"; Juon and Bochsler, "The Two Faces"; Hartzell and Hoddie, "The Art of the Possible"; Bormann, "Ethnic Power-Sharing."
59. Loizides, *The Politics of Majority Nationalism*; Schedler, "An Ambiguous Tool."
60. Waldner and Lust, "Unwelcome Change."
61. Stewart, Brown, and Mancini, "Monitoring and Measuring," 11.
62. Merkel et al., *Defekte Demokratie*.
63. Coppedge et al., "V-Dem Codebook V11."
64. Maerz et al., "A Framework."
65. Coppedge et al., "V-Dem Codebook V11." The EDI does not include indicators related to inequalities or ethnic groups: therefore, there is no risk of circularity between the explanatory variables and the outcome.
66. Teorell, *Determinants*.
67. Differently from a fixed-effect analysis on the EDI.
68. Alesina, Michalopoulos, and Papaioannou, "Ethnic Inequality"; cf. Cederman, Weidmann, and Bormann, "Triangulating Horizontal Inequality."
69. Baldwin and Huber, "Economic versus Cultural Differences"; Houle, "Ethnic Inequality." A similar approach has been implemented by Juon, "Inclusion, Recognition" to study satisfaction with the government and perceived ethnic discrimination.
70. WVS: <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp> (last access: March 2023).
71. CSES: <https://cses.org/data-download/csese-integrated-module-dataset-imd/> (last access: March 2023).
72. Latinobarometro: <https://www.latinobarometro.org> (last access: March 2023).
73. The AmericasBarometer by the LAPOP Lab: [www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop) (last access: March 2023).
74. Afrobarometer: <https://www.afrobarometer.org> (last access: March 2023).
75. Asian Barometer: <https://www.asianbarometer.org/> (last access: March 2023).
76. Vogt et al., "Integrating Data."
77. For Sub-Saharan Africa, I compared ethnic group lists with the help of the R package developed by Müller-Crepon, Pengl, and Bormann, "Linking Ethnic Data from Africa (Leda)."
78. The Afrobarometer does not contain an indicator on respondent's income. Following Houle ("Ethnic Inequality"), I created a variable based on respondent's ownership of one or more assets, such as a bicycle, car, telephone, etc. (ranging between 0 and the maximum number of assets).
79. Cederman, Weidmann, and Gleditsch, "Horizontal Inequalities."
80. Juon, "Minorities Overlooked."
81. Another country-level source, the "Power sharing in the world's states" dataset (Strøm et al., "Inclusion, Dispersion, and Constraint."), lacks coding criteria on its ethnic group list.
82. Cederman and Girardin, "Beyond Fractionalization."
83. The EPR categorization might be seen related to political, rather than social characteristics. However, our indicator on political inequality considers formal institutions, while that on social inequality refers to informal practices. Juon ("Minorities Overlooked") demonstrates how the two are not necessarily correlated.
84. *Ibid.*, 177. Cederman and Girardin compare the results of the fractionalization index for a country composed by two groups (Group A with 30% and Group B with 70% of the population), identical whether it is the majority or the minority that is excluded, while the *nstar* indicator varies between 0.072 if the group in power is the majority, to 0.843 if it is the minority.

- Admittedly, the measurement of social inequality between ethnic groups remains tentative. A more appropriate indicator should consider the specific services allocated to ethnic groups (such as schools or hospitals) depending on residence or identity affiliations. However, such a measure does not exist for a large-N analysis. I proxy it with the EPR indicator which, being based on informal practices, can signal a different service allocation depending on ethnicity. Further research should improve this measurement.
85. Shoup, “Ethnic Polarization.”
  86. Table A.3 reports the (either negligible or insignificant) correlations of the main independent variables.
  87. Following the set-up of Houle, “Ethnic Inequality”; and Cederman, Weidmann, and Gleditsch, “Horizontal Inequalities” for the analysis at the ethnic-group level and the most common approach in democratization research with country-year data.
  88. The CPSD dataset only contains observations until 2016 and for countries with formal constitutions.
  89. With the first indicator rescaled from 0 to 1.
  90. Models on social inequality and the overall index do not include the group size variable, already computed in the social inequality indicator.
  91. Houle, “Ethnic Inequality.”
  92. They reached significance with standard errors clustered at the group level. However, this might risk ignoring spatial autocorrelation of ethnic groups in the same country.
  93. Bochsler and Juon, “Power-Sharing”; and Juon and Bochsler, “The Two Faces.”
  94. Cf. Lührmann and Lindberg, “A Third Wave of Autocratization” for how autocratization affects populous countries.
  95. Beck and Katz, “Random Coefficient Models.”
  96. Autocratization episode onsets are 71 out of more than 2500 observations in the ethnic-group-level models. Cf. Boese et al., “How Democracies Prevail.”
  97. Beck, Katz, and Tucker, “Taking Time Seriously.”
  98. Coppedge et al., *Why Democracies Develop and Decline*.
  99. Rovny, “Antidote to Backsliding.”

## Acknowledgments

I thank Luca Tomini, Jean-Benoît Pilet and Daniel Bochsler, for their precious feedback on the paper. I also thank the participants of the 2022 ECPR General Conference panel “Authoritarianism”, 2022 SISP Conference panel “Regime convergence” and 2022 AuPSA Political Science Day panel “Democratization and Autocratization” for their useful comments. Moreover, I am grateful to Lasse Egdal Leipzig, Christian Houle, Frances Stewart and Nils-Christian Bormann, who shared manuscripts, replication data and ideas that helped me progress this research. Other readers of previous versions of the paper and my research project that I kindly thank are Felix Wiebrecht, Andreas Juon, Andrea Vaccaro, Andrea Cassani, Svend-Erik Skaaning, Seda Gürkan, Matthijs Bogaards, Gianni Del Panta and Licia Cianetti. Finally, I wish to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their excellent suggestions and generous support.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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