



Mirroring and then eclipsing the third wave of democracy, the world has seen a sustained shift towards decentralization. Arguments for shedding responsibilities and powers to subnational governments are numerous, including subnational government being more responsive to local needs, more democratic and closer to the people, sensitive to local ecological and social conditions, and national governments simply wishing to jettison responsibilities. Another reason for empowering subnational governments is to better represent minority groups, allowing subnational governments to serve those with limited voices in national politics.

For some minorities, this is insufficient. Among ethnic minorities that see themselves as nations, there are demands for special, more powerful regional governments, or else demands for independent statehood that host states respond to with forms of autonomy. The result has been an underappreciated, undertheorized growth of territorial autonomy—of asymmetrical powers granted to special governments representing minorities. A rejection of uniform, one-size-fits-all models of governance, territorial autonomy has grown across world regions and regime types. Autonomy has been championed as more representative and democratic for distinctive minorities, and has become the default option for managing separatism. This said, it has inspired limited dedicated research, mired by overlapping terms and siloed literatures. This paper, then, seeks greater clarity, charting the varied purposes and forms of territorial autonomy, but also their limitations. How does territorial autonomy adapt to suit varied contexts? What are some different forms of territorial autonomy? What do they have in common, how do they vary? What can different forms of minority self-government realistically accomplish, and what are some potential pitfalls?

This paper identifies six forms of territorial autonomy, each approached largely through separate literatures and featuring different goals, powers, and shortcomings. Democratic autonomy, as found in Québec and Scotland, sees regional parties empowered through the ballot box to challenge national governments and rule their homeland, with government capacities evolving gradually. Post-conflict autonomy is different, typically created by peace agreements, with regional leaders linked to armed groups providing often illiberal rule amidst ongoing threats of violence. Examples include Northern Ireland and Aceh. A third form, administrative autonomy, is approached very differently, with capital regions and special economic zones created for economic and administrative efficiency. A fourth, emerging form is indigenous autonomy, minority self-government for autochthonous communities. This may entail cultural protection, control over land and resources, migration controls, and decentralized authority, evident in Nunavut, Greenland, Panama, and Nicaragua. A fifth form of autonomy is nested, or third-order autonomy, where smaller governments are empowered to represent minorities. Examples of third-order autonomy are found

throughout India, Russia, and China, with a handful of cases such as Val d’Aran in Catalonia featuring autonomy within autonomous regions. Finally, among the least appreciated types is authoritarian autonomy, as in Chechnya and Tibet. Because it is considered illegitimate and a tool of central control, authoritarian autonomy is too often written off as meaningless, its provisions seen as having no effect because they are not genuine.

The first section of this paper provides some conceptual foundations. Here, I define territorial autonomy and the idea of minority nations, examine the tremendous range and potential scope in self-government powers, and address how autonomy is approached in scholarly literatures. Part II lays out six major forms of territorial autonomy, analyzing their logics, literatures, and examples, as well as key concerns such as eventual independence and treatment of minorities. Part III analyzes other potential types and some cases that straddle categories before concluding with some implications for future research.

### **Understanding Territorial Autonomy**

A middle ground between independence and incorporation, and a form of decentralization, territorial autonomy provides self-governance for territorially concentrated minorities. For Yash Ghai (2013, 5), autonomy refers to “the ability of a region or community to organise its affairs without interference from the central government.” Technically, any federal or decentralized political system involves territorial autonomy. Territorial autonomy, then, refers to asymmetrical, ‘special’ powers to governments representing distinctive minorities.

Territorial autonomy aims to protect and empower not just minorities, but often ethnic minority nations. For some, the term nation may be confusing or even threatening. Scholars still refer to nation-states as haughty synonyms for countries or states, overlooking the fact that many countries define themselves as multinational, refusing the conservative impulse that all peoples require their own sovereign country and that countries should be home to one ‘people’.<sup>1</sup> A nation is not a country, referring to a people united through common descent, culture, or beliefs inhabiting a territory or country and represented by a set of laws or government (or aspiring to it) (Smith 2002). That a group identifies as a nation does not mean that all members of the group do, or that all agree on the nation’s contours, or that they aspire to sovereign statehood. Host states may balk at referring to minority groups as nations for fear of eventual independence, preferring to see them as minorities. An ethnic minority refers to named groups with distinctive cultures, languages, religions, myths of common descent, and collective identities that distinguish them from dominant groups in a given

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<sup>1</sup> Connor (1978, 382) estimates that 10% of countries feature sufficient homogeneity to be considered nation-states.

polity (Smith 1996, 447). For an ethnic minority group to be seen as a minority nation, it requires a political ‘edge’—recognized territory, perhaps a history of sovereign statehood or distinctive laws, and an existing or aspirational government. Territorial autonomy entails self-government, defined territory, borders, symbols, and state programs. Almost by definition, ethnic minorities with widespread, sustained demands for self-government through independence or territorial autonomy can be seen as nations.

In essence, territorial autonomy is intended to help minority groups see themselves not just as national minorities, but as regional majorities able to manage their own affairs. In debates regarding how to best manage ethnic diversity, where integrationists demand aggregative, cross-cutting institutions while accommodationists build around identity, territorial autonomy is squarely within the latter, suited to cases where identity is already highly salient (Anderson and Choudhry 2019). Autonomy provides self-governance but not independence, stopping short of sovereignty. This allows minorities to self-govern and imagine themselves as majorities, but within existing borders.

Territorial autonomy is a global institution. Modern autonomy began with a 1920 League of Nations-brokered agreement regarding the Åland Islands, an ethnic Swedish island within Finland. Finland agreed to self-government for Swedish speakers, with migration restrictions, no conscription or military presence, and distinctive cultural rights (Suksi 2011). In the 1946 Paris Agreement South Tyrol was recognized by Austria as part of Italy, with stipulations ensuring equality for German and Italian speakers, German language education, and bilingual regional governance, powers amplified in subsequent years in response to unrest (Peterlini 2013). However, it would be a mistake to view autonomy as a Western institution, as various empires encouraged self-rule by distinct communities, such as the Ottoman Millet System, in which religious communities were responsible for their own laws and taxes (Hannum 1990, 50). Autonomous regions are often relatively disadvantaged, with minorities resenting exclusion or exploitation by majorities and national governments, but some are not especially disadvantaged (Scotland, Québec) and others (South Tyrol, Catalonia, Flanders, Hong Kong) are especially developed. Further, autonomy may be stated but be limited in reality (*de jure*) or may exist without a formal pronouncement (*de facto*). Autonomy may be constitutionally entrenched, or it may exist in myriad laws and norms. In these and other ways, we see that territorial autonomy is a highly varied, flexible institution (Suksi 2011).

Scholars have shown that autonomous governments tend to be highly active in their societies, developing interventionist states aimed at elevating their nations (Béland and Lecours 2008). Autonomous regions typically enjoy economic powers such as budget transfers, control over resource revenue, the ability to collect and set taxes, and separate budgets. Some autonomous regions can

negotiate international loans, manage regional debt, set loan rates, and feature their own currency—a special mintage of a national currency (Scotland and Northern Ireland) or their own (Macau, Hong Kong). Politically, autonomous regions may join or participate in international organizations, establish consular offices abroad, feature distinct parties and electoral systems, manage domestic and international migration, and more. Most autonomous regions take up broad cultural powers, overseeing language laws and education, religious affairs, cultural traditions and values, and symbols such as flags and anthems. In addition to powers of self-government, autonomy may involve special powers at the national level, with features of shared governance including vetoes, influence over national education, and consociational representation. The powers of autonomous governments also depend on the level of government being empowered. Autonomous governments are typically second-order (provinces, states), but may also be third-tier, existing within a province or state. As a result, it is important to utilize precise language, as we should not refer to ‘local’ governments, since this residual term can mean very different things across contexts.

The powers enjoyed by autonomous governments clearly matter. A region with a history of self-government and decades of struggle may not settle for symbolic powers. However, scholars also recognize the importance of process, namely whether autonomy is simply pronounced and implemented by central government authorities or instead negotiated with legitimate minority leaders (Barter and Wangge 2022). Much depends on who governs, whether the reins of self-government are held by those loyal to the central government or are popular in the region. Along with powers and process, relative power is also important—how ‘special’ autonomy is. Minority nations are likely to understand their power in comparison to other subnational units, demanding that their homeland has more power than neighbouring, ordinary provinces. For example, Québec enjoys substantial self-government, but in a federation where Ontario enjoys similar competencies. Meanwhile, in Nicaragua, the Mosquito coast enjoys fewer formal powers, but in a highly centralized country, making autonomy more special (Sánchez 2007). Autonomy also varies temporally, as it may be seen as a fixed, one-off agreement, or else a dynamic, ongoing dialogue adapting to new challenges. Observing sustained unrest in Scotland and Catalonia compared to Flanders or South Tyrol, Lecours (2020, 1) argues that “the key to autonomy regimes weakening secessionism is their capacity to adjust and expand over time.”

Territorial autonomy thus varies considerably, with different definitions, names, and powers making it difficult to study. The scholarly literature on autonomy is similarly divided. Most concretely, autonomy is approached as a form of decentralization, as it delivers power to subnational governments. Autonomous regions thus make their way into datasets measuring decentralization,

existing as asymmetrical outliers (Rodden 2004; Shair-Rosenfield et al 2021). Autonomous regions are also discussed as cases of federalism and ethnofederalism. The vast majority of dedicated books on autonomy are collections of case studies, with dozens of titles providing conceptual overviews and then rich case analyses, mostly on Western examples (Keating and McGarry 2001; Saffrain and Máiz 2000)). Territorial autonomy is studied by scholars with a wide array of interests, including studies of decentralization and federalism, ethnic politics, multiculturalism, conflict resolution and peace studies, economic development, indigenous studies, and authoritarianism. This suggests the importance of research on self-government, but its fragmentation, as autonomy is pulled in different directions and lacks dedicated scholarly discussion.

Despite fears from host states, no country has ever gained independence through meaningful special territorial autonomy. This represents a strong claim, but one supported by considering newly created countries. Although ethnofederalism aided in creating new countries from the former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia, leading scholars to note the danger of delineating internal borders and power by ethnic nations (Roeder 2007). However, these cases involved the collapse of the national government and the failure of ethnofederalism, not special regional autonomy. Post-colonial cases may involve special status or powers for colonized regions (i.e., dominions or commonwealths), but this is in the context of overseas, non-contiguous colonial rule. The world has never seen a region enjoy meaningful special autonomy en route to independence. Independence for East Timor, South Sudan, Bangladesh, and Eritrea were consequences of a refusal to recognize minorities and/or deliver promised autonomy. Although referenda in Scotland and Québec came close, and polls in Catalonia and Bougainville suggest a desire for independence, territorial autonomy does not breed independence. Looking forward, it seems that Greenland or Bougainville may become the first modern autonomous regions to gain independence, but for now, there are no such instances.

Although granting territorial autonomy may calm tensions and lead to greater unity, demands for more powers and eventual independence rarely go away. Autonomy thus manages rather than resolves separatism and intergroup tensions. It works, though, as allowing autonomy may put the host state in a positive light, reduce perceived threat by minorities, force separatists to govern, and expose divisions among minority groups (Mietzner 2007). Another potential criticism relates to minorities within autonomous regions. Most groups attain autonomy through protracted struggle. Once in power, most autonomous governments embark on something resembling nation-building, developing their identities after years of suppression (Keating 1996). Autonomous governments may thus have an ethnic mission and encourage ethnic revivals. This may then threaten regional ‘second-

order' minorities, including indigenous and migrant groups, but especially regional minorities that are national majorities (Barter 2018). Although protecting minorities at one level, autonomy may threaten minorities at another, in effect transferring assimilationist politics, exclusion, and ethnic tensions to a smaller administrative level.

Clearly, territorial autonomy is an important political system through which to accommodate ethnic, linguistic, religious, and other minorities, especially territorially concentrated groups. This is a global, growing institution that may involve a broad range of powers. However our knowledge of territorial autonomy remains limited, largely because it is approached in various scholarly literatures. There is a real need to better understand the many forms, benefits, and dangers of territorial autonomy as a political system.

### Types of Territorial Autonomy

To demonstrate the value and diversity of territorial autonomy, as well as to make sense of its varied goals and scholarly literatures, this paper delineates six major forms. Democratic autonomy is the most extensively researched, but is often conflated with post-conflict autonomy, which sees different powers, governments, problems, and prospects. Overlooked in the literature is administrative autonomy, intended to deliver efficiency or economic growth. In very different contexts, we see indigenous autonomy, forms of self-government for diverse autochthonous peoples. A fourth form is nested autonomy, involving different layers of self-government that include third-tier units, sometimes allowing autonomy for minorities within autonomous regions. Finally, we see authoritarian autonomy, cases that are well known but undertheorized. Here, regional governments may enjoy large budgets and embark on cultural renewal, a centripetal arrangement in the service of the central government, not self-government. It would be a mistake to dismiss authoritarian autonomy as unimportant for understanding governance simply because it is illegitimate. These six major forms of autonomy are laid out below in Table 1, which provides some key traits and examples for each type.

**Table 1: Major Types of Territorial Autonomy**

Types	Features	Scholarship	Examples
<b>Democratic</b>	Evolves slowly, negotiated Western cases Regional parties compete with national parties Cultural protection, nationalism, illiberalism Threatens independence through referenda May threaten regional minorities	Decentralization; Federalism; Democracy; Multiculturalism	Québec; Catalonia; Scotland; Åland; South Tyrol; Wales; Flanders
<b>Post-Conflict</b>	Created by peace agreements, external actors Global cases Regional leaders tied to former combatants	Decentralization; Peace Studies; Conflict Resolution	Northern Ireland; Basque; Aceh; Mindanao; Bougainville

	Illiberal democracy, regional nationalism Threatens independence and return to violence Threatens regional minorities		
<b>Administrative</b>	Created through administrative declaration Special powers for economic efficiency Urban areas, global cases Capital Cities, Special Economic / Export Processing Zones Does not threaten independence May threaten migrant groups	Decentralization; Public Admin; Economic Development	Buenos Aires; London; Tokyo; Jakarta; KL/Putrajaya; Labuan; Cheju; Various EPZs and SEZs
<b>Indigenous</b>	Slow negotiations, court rulings Rural, remote regions Powers related to culture, natural resources Decentralized authority, diverse nations Smaller, nested, third order governments Does not threaten independence May threaten regional minorities	Indigenous Studies; Case Studies	Nunavut; Greenland; RAAN and RAAS Nicaragua; Panama; Chaco Bolivia; Sabah and Sarawak; Nisga'a
<b>Nested</b>	Established by regional or national government Small minority self-government within autonomous region Limited powers Does not threaten independence Protects regional minorities, threat varies by scale	Federalism; Multilevel Governance; Case Studies	Val d'Aran (Catalonia); Nunavik (Québec); Nunatsiavut (Newfoundland & Labrador) Scottish Islands; Paku Alam (Jogjakarta)
<b>Authoritarian</b>	Created by national governments Authoritarian, developing countries Strong role for national government Led by loyal local leaders Cultural revivals Controls demands for independence Threatens regional minorities	Case Studies; Authoritarianism	Zanzibar; Chechnya; Xinjiang and Tibet; Papua

### *Democratic Autonomy*

When we think of special autonomy, the cases that come to mind, and those most thoroughly researched, tend to be in Western, developed, democratic countries. This includes the two early examples of Åland (Finland) and South Tyrol (Italy), both featuring minorities speaking the dominant languages of neighbouring countries enjoying special rights. The three most prominent examples of democratic autonomy are probably Québec (Canada), Catalonia (Spain), and Scotland (United Kingdom), with other examples including Flanders (Belgium), Wales (United Kingdom), Faroe Islands (Denmark), the Azores and Madeira (Portugal), and Galicia (Spain).<sup>2</sup>

Democratic autonomy emerges when ethnic minorities with histories of self-rule mobilize to demand recognition and political power. Often against the backdrop of exclusionary and assimilationist states, minorities may criticize the host government and demand independence. In a

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<sup>2</sup> Potential other cases include Corsica (France), which formally is autonomous but lacks significant powers, and Gagauzia (Moldova), which has limited democracy or development.



democratic context, radicalism and violence may be less attractive, and channels may exist to expand political power and organize referenda. The threat of independence may lead reluctant host governments to grant new powers to appease minority groups. Democratic autonomy may expand slowly through numerous agreements, laws, and ongoing negotiations. Such systems typically feature regional parties whose platform includes protecting local culture and regional nationalism. Examples include the Parti and Bloc Québécois; Scottish National Party; Catalonia's Convergence and Union (CiU); and the New Flemish Alliance (N-VA) and People's Union (VU) in Flanders.<sup>3</sup> These parties may face competition from national parties, or their regional affiliates. Democracy in such regions may appear illiberal in some aspects, especially given missions to protect national identity, but such governments also typically provide various social services, intervening in social and economic issues. Béland and Lecours (2008, 5) argue that social policy "has become a central focus" for nationalist movements, used as "an identity building tool" in democratic, industrialized societies.

Most books on territorial autonomy are edited volumes, with chapters focusing mostly on core Western cases (see Ghai 2000; Keating and McGarry 2001; Safran and Máiz 2000, Ghai and Woodman 2013). Other, single-authored studies of autonomy compare a handful of these cases, such as Keating (1996) and Greer (2007). Thematically, cases of democratic autonomy are included in studies of decentralization, as with most forms of autonomy, but are especially likely to be approached in studies of federalism as instances of asymmetry or ethnofederalism (Burgess 2006; Zuber 2011). Democratic autonomy is also analyzed in studies of minority rights and multiculturalism. For political Kymlicka (1995, 52), autonomy helps a minority group "sustain a life of its own", developing competencies to engage with majorities in a more equal footing. Elsewhere, Kymlicka (2007, 72) describes a growing set of principles of self-government for national minorities emerging from Western democratic contexts, although territorial autonomy has not become a recognized right for minority groups.

Even in democratic autonomy, one may see tensions between regional majorities and their minorities, especially as regional governments protect and promote regional identity. Barter (2015) refers to pressures against second-order (regional) minorities within autonomous regions. These may be small, isolated groups or dominant national groups, which threaten autonomous regions with migration and settlement. That regional governments empowered with autonomy embark on nation-building and pressure their minorities is perhaps understandable, especially given their distinctive

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<sup>3</sup> In Wales, the autonomous government is dominated by Welsh Labour (Llafur Cymru), which has won ever elections since WWI. Welsh Labour is considered a branch of the British Labour Party, similar to Scottish Labour. The pro-independence nationalist party, Plaid Cymru, has endured for decades but has never formed government, although as a leftist party, briefly joined a coalition with Welsh Labour.

status and legacies from assimilationist host states. In democratic contexts, minorities may have recourse to national courts and rights mechanisms, but it remains likely that they will struggle to maintain their identities. This said, Keating (1996) suggests that nationalism in democratic autonomous regions need not be exclusionary and ethnic, but may instead be civic, tolerating local minorities and encouraging integration, although not recognizing minority identities (see also Breton 1988). Barter (2018) finds that Scotland has rejected ethnic nationalism, embracing second-order minorities in contrast to conservative British governments. Even in Québec, many Francophone Québécois have chafed at the more xenophobic, anti-migrant elements of separatist parties (Patriquin 2014). Developed, democratic autonomous regions may thus mitigate regional nationalism that threatens regional minorities. However, Québec has seen the rise of a more conservative, anti-multicultural, nationalist party, Coalition Avenir Québec, as well as calls to limit migration and assimilate minorities, sentiments common in democratic autonomous regions. Among the more extreme parties is Vlaams Belang in Flanders, a far right, anti-multicultural party demanding greater autonomy and independence from Belgium.

To date, territorial autonomy has successfully managed separatist sentiment in democratic, industrialized countries. This said, in no case has autonomy extinguished regional nationalism or the prospect of independence. Scotland continues to pressure for independence, especially post-Brexit, while Catalanian voters have shown support for independence. There is always a possibility that an autonomous region will gain independence at some point, but if so, this will be carried out through a referendum as well as drawn-out legal battles. For the most part, democratic autonomy seems to satisfy separatism. Dion (1996) observes that secession has been avoided in democratic contexts because independence requires majority support and due process, allows opposition groups to govern, protects minority rights, and results in more reasonable national governments. He suggests that while democratic rule makes independence easier in some ways, “it also decreases the sense that secession is likely” by reducing fears among minorities (Dion 1996, 281).

#### *Post-Conflict Autonomy*

Autonomy has emerged as a go-to option for overcoming violent separatist conflict, providing a compromise between state unity and independence (Weller and Wolff 2005). Post-conflict autonomy may resemble democratic autonomy, especially when post-conflict contexts feature elections and regional parties. Further, many democratic cases have featured moments of violence, somewhat blurring the lines between the two types. There are, though, important distinctions. Post-conflict autonomy is typically created as part of a peace agreement rather than evolving more slowly, often involving external mediators. Post-conflict autonomy tends to be

especially illiberal, as leaders may be former combatants or have extremists and spoilers looking over their shoulder. Autonomous governments may be tasked with postwar reconstruction, perhaps with international support. And post-conflict autonomy is approached through a different scholarly literature, of interest to peace and conflict studies. While democratic autonomy is found mostly in the West, post-conflict autonomy is global, with examples including the Northern Ireland (United Kingdom), Basque region (Spain), Aceh (Indonesia), Mindanao (Philippines), Bougainville (Papua New Guinea), Palestine (Israel), and the Kurdistan Region (Iraq). We might also see Kashmir (India) as an example prior to India rescinding Kashmiri autonomy in 2019, as well as various ethnic states in Myanmar, where active conflicts wax and wane.

Post-conflict autonomy is typically established through peace agreements, negotiated by state and rebel representatives, often with third-party mediators. Autonomy is thus designed rather than evolved, and may be difficult to tweak going forward. Negotiations for the autonomous region typically involve unelected rebel forces, who might design self-government for their own benefit. One example of autonomy as a peace agreement is the Memorandum of Understanding, signed between Acehnese separatists and the Indonesian government, overseen by former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari, which contained the provisions for a new autonomous government (Aspinall 2005). Others include the 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (Philippines, involving Malaysia), the 1998 Good Friday Agreement (United Kingdom, involving the United States), the Oslo Accords (Israel-Palestine, involving Norway and other countries), and the Bougainville Peace Agreement (Papua New Guinea, involving Australia and New Zealand). As violence declines and conflicts end, autonomous governance begins, typically with former fighters at the helm. Regional governments may benefit from international support, but face numerous challenges, since they may lack experience governing, must oversee reconstruction and demobilization, and confront extremists and spoilers wishing to return to war. We might see parties linked to armed groups, as with Sinn Féin in Northern Ireland, or parties battling extremists, such as the Basque Nationalist Party (Irvin 1999). We should expect post-conflict autonomy to be illiberal, as former combatants may govern with a strong hand and dominate the opposition, seeing autonomy as their reward for years of war and unaccustomed to liberal politics. Post-conflict autonomy is unlikely to see much political turnover, with rulers creating one-party systems. They may use government budgets as a sort of peace dividend, paying off former fighters through demobilization programs, and former commanders involved in corrupt state contracts (see Lyons 2016).

The study of post-conflict autonomy overlaps with democratic autonomy. Many case-driven edited volumes feature both types, although others focus on conflict cases (Weller and Wolff 2005).

The study of post-conflict autonomy is also approached through conflict and peace studies. Conflict scholars may see the creation and implementation of autonomy as an extension of longer conflict processes. For example, authors may study the legacies of rebel groups on governance, perhaps explaining patterns of authoritarian elections and corruption in terms of wartime behaviour (Aspinall 2009a). Peace studies scholars may approach autonomy as an outcome, the endpoint of peace efforts (Shaykhutdinov 2010; Rothchild and Hartzell 1999). For Schulte (2020), successful conflict resolution through territorial autonomy is a result of international mediation and a recognition of minority groups as part of the host country. A danger in the peace studies approach is that autonomy may represent an end-point or dependent variable rather than a political system, with limited regard to the new system put into place. This said, scholars also look beyond autonomy as an agreement to end war, and towards how it may sustain peace. Jarstad and Nilsson (2008) show that peace accords detailing territorial autonomy are more likely to endure than other forms, as autonomy represents a serious commitment and can be difficult to take back. Cederman et al (2015) show that power-sharing indeed reduces conflict, finding positive effects of territorial autonomy on long-term violence.

The dangers for second-order minorities are especially severe in post-conflict autonomy (Barter 2015a). During separatist conflicts, regional minorities are often afforded limited attention; when they are discussed, it is when they mobilize militias, seen as proxies for national governments rather than mobilizing for local reasons. Regional minorities are typically excluded from peace talks and the creation of autonomous zones, and the centralized, illiberal nature of post-conflict autonomy may afford little role for them. The political economies, electoral competition, and nation-building efforts of post-conflict governments typically serve regional majorities. This may leave minorities within autonomous regions with few options, and may generate violence. Examples of minorities in post-conflict autonomous regions include Lumad in Mindanao (Paredes 2015; Perez 2021), Javanese and Gayo in Aceh (Barter 2015b), Buka Islanders in Bougainville, Christians in Palestine, and Assyrian Christians in Kurdistan (Kruczek 2021). Ill treatment of such minorities by regional governments may trigger violence, perhaps justifying intervention by national governments, and with it a potential return to war.

In democratic autonomous regions, there remains the potential for independence through successful referenda, something less likely to occur in post-conflict autonomy. Paths to independence may exist when peace agreements include provisions for a referendum.<sup>4</sup> For instance,

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<sup>4</sup> East Timor nearly fits this category, but never enjoyed territorial autonomy. The 1999 referendum provided East Timorese options of autonomy or independence, with over three quarters of voters rejecting autonomy.

the 2000 Bougainville peace agreement promised a referendum within 10-15 years. When it was finally held in 2019, the result was nearly unanimous support for independence. This has not, however, led to the creation of a new state, as the Papua New Guinea government always viewed the referendum as non-binding (Ghai and Regan 2006, 600). It is possible that, with time, post-conflict autonomy may develop into democratic autonomy, where liberal host governments allow for independence votes. It is at least as likely that autonomy will fail, shattering fragile peace agreements and returning to separatist violence. This may occur if states claw back provisions of self-government, as occurred in the 1970s in Aceh and Mindanao, or else when regional crises or violence spark national intervention. Examples include Mindanao in 2001, when the leaders of the autonomous government rebelled and then fled, and Kashmir in 2019, when Prime Minister Modi used regional violence as a pretext to invade and unilaterally revoke autonomy. For post-conflict autonomy, collapse and a return to war are very real threats, and as a result, illiberal but stable rule is often tolerated.

#### *Administrative Autonomy*

While distinctive, the lines between democratic and post-conflict autonomy may blur, and the two are often compared in scholarly work. A third form of autonomy is different, with unique features, and is rarely discussed as a form of autonomy. In administrative autonomy, self-government does not involve ethnic minorities or a threat of separatism, but instead exists for the purposes of administrative and economic efficiency. This is the lone type that violates the definitional trait of autonomy representing distinctive ethnic minorities. As a form of asymmetrical, territorial decentralization to distinctive territorial governments, it should be discussed as a form of autonomy.

Administrative autonomy can take many forms. First, there are governments with special powers in national capital regions. These city governments may be provided with higher budgets, greater revenue generating capacities, distinctive electoral systems, stronger executives, and more. Capital cities are empowered due to their distinctive administrative challenges (density), symbolic importance, and revenue capacities. Scholars approach national capital regions from varied perspectives, including the role of public employment in elevating wages, tax revenues, and public expenditures (Turner and Turner 2011). Special capital regions are studied in terms of urban planning and development (Gordon 2006), as well as ethnic representation (Jacobs and Swyngedouw 2003), but mostly through detailed case studies rather than comparative work. Capital cities with special powers include Tokyo, whose metropolitan category is distinctive in Japan's otherwise uniform administrative system (and Osaka regional parties hope to emulate) (Hein and Pelletier

2017), Seoul (the Seoul Capital Area), Jakarta (*Daerah Khusus Ibukota*, Special Capital Region), the Naypyidaw Union Territory (Myanmar), Kuala Lumpur / Putrajaya (*Wilayah Persekutuan*, Federal Territory), Buenos Aires (*Ciudad Autónoma*, Autonomous City), London (the Greater London Authority), the Federal District of Brasília (Brazil), and more.<sup>5</sup> Rule in special capital regions tends to be executive-driven, perhaps corporate. Malaysia's Putrajaya special region is administered by the Putrajaya Corporation / Putrajaya Holdings, an unelected body tasked with development and management. The Greater London Authority has been seen as pragmatic over ideological, responsive to business leaders and offering innovations through market-like competition (Thornly et al 2005). Special capital districts, such as Washington DC (the United States), Brussels Capital Region (Belgium), Copenhagen (Denmark), Niamey (Niger) and the Australian Capital Territory, among many others, tend not to have enhanced political powers, but instead enjoy or aspire to the status of second-order governments (i.e., states and provinces).

Administrative autonomy exists largely for economic reasons, aimed at welcoming foreign investment and increasing production. In Malaysia, Labuan is a federal territory, governed by the national government through an appointed corporation, existing as an offshore economic financial centre. In South Korea, Jeju is a special self-governing island province, gaining powers in 2006 partly for geographical and cultural reasons, but largely for economic growth, initiating the Jeju International City Development Project (Kim 2020). Other examples include various Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and Export Processing Zones (EPZs), as in Mexico, India, the Philippines, and China (Farole and Akinci 2011). Often, such zones are third tier administrative units such as cities, such as China's Shenzhen, the country's first SEZ, but others are second-tier administrations, such as Hainan. Some zones straddle international borders, making for unique, powerful governments, as in the SIJORI (Singapore, Johor, Indonesia) growth triangle, and an export-oriented Batam city government. Studies of SEZs focus almost entirely on economic output, as well as on environmental impacts and labour, with very little attention to governance. An exception is Hidayat and Negara's study of SEZs in Indonesia, which shows how provincial executives lead regional councils and enjoy considerable discretionary power, as well as lucrative revenue. The authors argue that SEZ governance is top down and executive-led, with powerful SEZ councils acting autonomously from government programs to pursue personal goals and ignore local interests (Hidayat and Negara 2020, 272). Most SEZs feature state-led market economies, and may be seen as somewhat authoritarian developmental states with democratic deficits.

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<sup>5</sup> It is expected that the new Indonesian capital, Nusantara, will be similarly defined as a special capital district.

Most administrative autonomous areas are capital regions or special economic zones. There exist a few autonomous cities for political or other reasons. Historically, Danzig was a free city under the League of Nations from 1920-39, and today, Brčko is an autonomous city between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska. Some special regions have distinctive powers for historical reasons, such as Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta (Indonesia), which gained autonomy due the Sultan's contributions to Indonesian independence from the Dutch.

Unlike all other forms of autonomy, administrative autonomy rarely involves ethnic minorities or separatism, more concerned with effective administration and economic productivity. As a result, scholarship on such zones is limited, studied in terms of economic development as well as public administration. There is a possibility, though, of SEZs restricting in-migration, and undocumented migrants may be seen as political threats or expendable labour. In Jakarta, the Betawi Brotherhood is a nativist, criminal group working with the local government against migrants to the capital region (Wilson 2015). Economically-oriented administrative regions might exploit migrant workers from rural areas, establishing an ethnic hierarchy and depriving migrants of social services, as we see in SEZs in coastal China and India. The governments overseeing special capital regions and special economic zones maintain considerable, distinctive powers, interesting but undertheorized forms of territorial autonomy.

### *Indigenous Autonomy*

A fourth type of territorial autonomy, indigenous autonomy has grown through the ongoing mobilization of indigenous peoples and revived treaty processes. Rarely framed as a form of territorial autonomy, indigenous autonomy seeks to restore sovereignty to indigenous peoples, wrestling with histories of betrayal, rural poverty, paternalistic governance, and piecemeal self-government afforded by settler governments. In a sense, most autonomous regions involve nativist sentiment, although indigenous autonomy sees a stronger emphasis on precolonial traditions among smaller communities. Indigeneity is largely defined by lacking large-scale statehood, enjoying traditional sovereignty and complex political systems, but typically in smaller scale communities. This makes indigenous autonomy challenging, an effort to maintain tradition infused with new forms of governance.

Indigenous autonomy has many distinctive elements: An emphasis on land and resource rights, truth and justice mechanisms, cultural preservation, restrictions on in-migration and property ownership by settlers, community-owned businesses, and social programs (i.e., community policing and justice). Indigenous autonomous regions often work with national governments, which may provide significant budget transfers. Although a form of decentralization, territorial autonomous

regions tend to be internally centralized, with power concentrated in the regional capital.<sup>6</sup> Indigenous autonomy is different, as indigenous nations tend to be diverse, sometimes even rivals, resulting in patchworks of highly varied, smaller autonomous regions or else larger, decentralized polities. Among many challenges faced by indigenous peoples, contemporary international borders often bisect cultural communities, meaning that efforts to restore self-government demand negotiations with multiple national governments, as in the Iroquois Confederacy, the Coast Salish, Mayan regions in Central America, and Chaco in South America.

Recent decades have seen renewed demands for meaningful self-government, with forms of autonomy negotiated in several regions, including Greenland (Denmark), Nunavut (Canada), and the Mosquito Coast (Nicaragua). Greenland is the largest and most powerful indigenous autonomous region. After 30 years of home rule, including exiting the European Community in 1985, the 2009 Self-Governing Act provided Greenland with powers related to currency, language, symbols such as flags, mining, and the ability to hold an independence referendum. For Kuokkanen (2017, 191), “Greenlanders have achieved one of the most far-reaching self-determination arrangements of all Indigenous peoples worldwide.” These achievements have inspired efforts among neighbouring peoples. After years of advocacy, Canada’s Nunavut territory was separated from the Northwest Territories in 1999 to represent Inuit peoples. Nunavut saw new powers provided to various agencies and corporations, with governance shared between the territorial government and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, which serves Inuit people (Rodon 2014).<sup>7</sup> Consistent with other indigenous autonomous regions, Nunavut’s control over resources promises long-term revenue, but the rural territory remains dependent on federal transfers. Unique for an autonomous region, but consistent with indigenous autonomy, Nunavut is decentralized, reflecting local traditions and geographic distance (Henderson 2007, 108). In Nicaragua, we see a country weighted towards the mestizo Pacific, with the Atlantic ‘Mosquito’ coast featuring Afro-indigenous peoples. After years of struggle, the country created two Atlantic coastal autonomous regions (*Región Autónoma de la Costa Caribe Norte* and *Región Autónoma de la Costa Caribe Sur*). The regional governments recognize indigenous rights and languages, collective land ownership, local education, resource management, and economic powers (Sánchez 2007).

Despite the above examples, indigenous autonomy often unfolds through smaller, third-tier units. Greenland and Nunavut have been able to become indigenous autonomous regions because

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<sup>6</sup> One of the few exceptions is the Basque region, where autonomous powers are shared by the three Basque provinces and Navarre, a product of the region’s historical fragmentation (Lecours 2007).

<sup>7</sup> This brings up an interesting issue in indigenous autonomy, and for autonomy more generally, as there may be special agencies serving titular ethnic groups parallel to territorial governments serving all residents.



their climates thwarted colonial settlement, while the Moskito coast is geographically isolated from Nicaragua. The reality for many indigenous peoples is in-migration and fragmented territories. Third-tier autonomy represents one potential, imperfect response. Scholars have noted that indigenous autonomy claims have grown despite indigenous communities being small and spread out, rarely controlling a state or province (Papillon 2011, 290). Throughout the Americas, we have seen a shift from top-down rule and dependency towards new forms of nation-building, economic development, and self-rule (Cornell and Kalt 2007). In Canada, several dozen indigenous nations have expanded governmental powers, including the Haida and Nisga'a in British Columbia, Dakota Ojibway in Manitoba, Nipissing in Ontario, the Cree and Nunavik in Québec, and many others. In the United States, indigenous communities were dubbed domestic dependent nations, managed under the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Communities have negotiated new competencies through protest and court battles, including special rights related to gambling revenue, taxation, courts, culture, and land ownership. The US is home to over 300 indigenous reservations, with the Navajo nation ruling extensive territory and nearly 200,000 people. The Navajo have strong judicial traditions, with Navajo courts seeking to heal communities through mixed common law traditions (Austin 2009). Latin American countries have also seen autonomy granted to small indigenous communities, evident in Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, and Mexico (González 2015). A mixed system is found in Panama, which features six *comarca indígenas*—four second-order and two third-order units (Postero and Tockman 2020).

The Americas have seen the greatest shift towards indigenous autonomy, although indigenous peoples around the world have struggled for similar arrangements. Australia has largely lacked indigenous self-government, with the partial exception of the Torres Strait Regional Authority, the competencies of which have remain limited (Sanders 2000). New Zealand has also seen limited progress in terms of territorial autonomy, with Māori communities more likely to demand non-territorial group rights (Hill 2016). In the 'old world' countries in Europe, Africa, and Asia, indigeneity unfolds in different contexts. Many ethnic majorities are also 'native', tracing their roots to the territory. Meanwhile, many communities in highlands or otherwise at the edges of lowland states have embraced being 'indigenous', especially following the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Baird 2019). Small autonomous governments exist in Finland (the Sámi Domicile), Russia (the Sakha Republic and four autonomous *okrug*s), various subnational monarchies and tribal areas in Africa and northern India (especially Assam). The Philippines, one of few Asian countries to recognize indigenous rights, saw a failed effort to establish an autonomous highland Cordillera region (Bertrand 2011). In Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak have long enjoyed

unique state-level powers, namely in terms of limiting migration from Peninsular Malaysia to maintain indigenous majorities, but also in terms of resource management, cultural institutions, political parties, and development policies (Salleh, Puyok, and Bagang 2019). Sabah and Sarawak have seen their powers decline over time (Ostwald 2017), but the states have retained central positions for native groups. The Borneo states thus blend democratic and indigenous forms of autonomy.

Scholars of decentralization and autonomy have only rarely examined indigenous autonomy. It is typically approached through case studies, examined in terms of multilevel governance and indigenous studies (Papillon 2011; Rodon 2014). Indigenous Studies scholars are, perhaps justifiably, skeptical of autonomy. Informed by critical theory as well as legacies of broken promises, many indigenous scholars reject recognition, reconciliation, and limited self-government. For Coulthard (2014, 3), this approach “promises to reproduce the very configurations of colonialist, racist, patriarchal state power that Indigenous peoples’ demands for recognition have historically sought to transcend.” Clearly, indigenous communities feature diverse attitudes towards self-government. It is true that autonomy will not undo centuries of colonial expansion and disregard for indigenous cultures. But the potential for self-government tailored to specific circumstances seems like a useful step forward for indigenous communities in various contexts, including Hawaii and Alaska, the interior of Taiwan, the Ainu of northern Japan, and Aboriginal communities in Australia.

Like other forms of self-government, indigenous autonomy may threaten second-order minorities. Critics may cite the presence of settlers within indigenous regions to scuttle autonomy. Concern has been expressed for gender minorities, as indigenous governments are often ruled by elder male leaders with conservative church affiliations (see Eisenberg and Spinner-Halev, 2005). Potential responses include recourse to national rights mechanisms and social change within empowered indigenous communities. From the perspective of host states, independence is not a major concern for indigenous autonomy, especially for smaller, third-order units. While democratic and post-conflict autonomy feature self-rule for ethnic nations, indigenous groups are often especially diverse, lacking a single culture, language, or leadership structure to mobilize for independence. Indigenous peoples typically feature small-scale communities and tremendous diversity, with divisions often exacerbated through colonial rule. Greenland seems to be the most likely candidate for eventual independence given its size, resources, limited migration, and geographical separateness, but even here, many indigenous peoples seem more concerned with implementing and expanding autonomy.

### *Nested Autonomy*

To possess sufficient scale and clout for meaningful self-government, autonomous regions are typically found among second-tier administrative units, i.e., states and provinces. With indigenous autonomy, we began to discuss devolving power to smaller administrative units, which while lacking some formal power, can nonetheless play important substantive and symbolic roles in governance. Throughout this paper, we have discussed the tendency of regional majorities to use self-government to protect and enhance their national identities, often threatening regional second-order minorities. All minorities have their own minorities, meaning that autonomy is never straightforward. A fifth form of territorial autonomy provides one way to manage these tensions, as nested autonomy allows for second-order minorities to attain limited self-government within autonomous regions.

The idea of nested autonomy might face a critique of infinite regress, with autonomy provided in subsequent tiers. With each administrative tier, powers will diminish, and at least in this paper, we will not go beyond third tiers. Nested autonomy may refer to third-tier self-government within ordinary second-tier administrative units. More interesting is autonomy within a special autonomous region. This borrows from work on nested federalism, or what Wilson (2001) and others refer to as ‘Matryoshka federalism’ in Russia, where autonomous *okrug*s are federal units while also existing in regions, akin to nesting dolls. For nested autonomy, we see forms of self-government for small minorities within self-government for national minorities / regional majorities. Much depends on whether third-order autonomy is granted by the regional or national government; if the latter, nested autonomy may be used to undermine autonomous regions.

There are only a handful of examples of nested autonomy, since the universe of cases is limited to regions already enjoying special autonomy. In India, Russia, and Myanmar, we see second and third-tier autonomous regions, but not autonomous regions within autonomous regions. China is home to the Ili Kazakh autonomous prefecture within the Xinjiang autonomous region. The clearest examples are found in Catalonia, Scotland, Yogyakarta, and Québec. In Catalonia, Val d’Aran is a remote mountainous region with its own Occitan language. In 1990, Val d’Aran was recognized as an autonomous region within Catalonia by a regional government led by Catalan nationalists. Val d’Aran’s autonomy has slowly expanded, with its language gaining official status and trilingual education. In Scotland, recognizing limited support in the outer islands, the Scottish National Party has allowed autonomy for the Hebrides, Orkneys, and Shetlands. The SNP, while popular throughout much of Scotland, has always struggled in the islands, which have different economies (offshore oil and fishing) as well as distinctive cultural traits (Gaelic and Norse). In 2013, Scotland First Minister Alex Salmond’s Lerwick Declaration initiated limited autonomy, creating councils and cultural rights for outlying islands. Resulting ‘island-proofing’ legislation requires

consultation with island councils on Scottish bills that impact island communities. In Catalonia and Scotland, we see regional nationalists opt for an inclusive approach, recognizing regional diversity and attempting to court support from smaller groups. Another case of nested autonomy is in Yogyakarta (Indonesia), where the principality of Paku Alam maintains special status within the Sultanate, its prince standing as a hereditary Vice Governor alongside the region's hereditary Sultan / Governor (Dwiyanany and Wardhani 2019).

Canada is also home to nested autonomy. With the creation of Nunavut and a climate of indigenous activism, Canada is the site of many forms of indigenous autonomy. For instance, in Newfoundland and Labrador, Inuit communities mobilized to demand autonomy, creating Nunatsiavut in 2005. These, like the Inuvialuit Settlement Region in Yukon and Northwest Territories, are examples of third-tier, indigenous autonomy. Within Québec, the Nunavik region continues to move towards self-government within an autonomous province. Québec sovereigntists have long had tense relations with provincial minorities, with Anglophones and migrants perceived as tools for assimilation. This has led Québec's leaders to criticize Canadian multiculturalism and to create their own "interculturalism", where minorities are encouraged to integrate and accept core "Québec National Values" (Bouchard 2015). Indigenous peoples represent a challenge for sovereigntists, possessing prior claims to land and cultural protection. In 1978, the Cree and Inuit gained some autonomy with the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, which created the Kativik Regional Government along with the Makivik Corporation to serve Inuit communities. With funding from federal and provincial authorities, as well as resource revenue, this brought education in indigenous languages, control over hunting grounds, and local resource rights, but limited political authority. Indigenous communities have remained an obstacle for Québec independence. The James Bay Cree threatened to separate immediately if Québec left Canada, as did the Inuit of Nunavik, with an informal vote suggesting that 96% would wish to leave Québec (Wilson, Alcantara, and Rodon 2020, 59). A 2011 Nunavik referendum to create an autonomous regional government failed, as locals felt it lacked sufficient powers (Rogers 2011). In December 2020, the provincial government announced plans to create a new autonomous region of Nunavik, which will represent a clear example of nested autonomy.

There exist few studies on nested autonomy, with little research on concepts or cases. This is in part because they are small, but also because it can be difficult to envision minority rights within minority rights, since for many, the regional majority is *the* minority. It is also that there are few cases of autonomous regions within autonomous regions. The paucity is due to a refusal by regional autonomous majorities to allow autonomy for their minorities, even though doing so aligns with the

principle of recognition and minority empowerment that their own autonomy is based upon. However, smaller minority groups can represent an ideational threat to regional identities, and those ruling autonomous regions fought hard to attain power. Several second-order minorities would benefit from self-rule, groups that have often opposed separatism and regional nationalism. This includes the Ladin minority in South Tyrol, Pemba islanders in Zanzibar, Gayo in Aceh, and Lumad in Mindanao. However, nested autonomy may benefit regional majorities, since the treatment of minorities represents a means through which national governments may interfere in regional affairs, be it through courts, carving off new provinces to reward loyal groups (i.e., West Papua province), or to rescind autonomy completely (i.e., India using violence against Pandits as a pretext for incorporating Kashmir). Nested autonomy has the potential to help special regions manage internal diversity and sustain self-rule.

#### *Authoritarian Autonomy*

A final form of autonomy features well known examples, but has escaped scrutiny as a form of autonomy. Authoritarian autonomy consists of non-democratic states granting special status to minority regions. Authoritarian autonomy is rarely considered a form of autonomy because it does not allow for meaningful self-government. Authoritarian autonomy is intended to tether the minority region to the center, a centripetal force rather than a centrifugal one. However, just because it is not genuine does not mean it lacks political consequences.

Authoritarian autonomy has its roots in the early Soviet Union, with communists recognizing minority nations and ruling through local allies in authoritarian, top-down systems (Brubaker 1994). Many historical empires did similarly, from Ottoman millets to British colonizers elevating loyal local leaders for indirect rule. Many examples of autonomy discussed in previous sections were, at one time, examples of authoritarian autonomy, i.e., Aceh and Mindanao. This shows the fluidity of these types, but also that authoritarian autonomy may evolve. Contemporary examples of authoritarian autonomy include Tibet, Xinjiang, and Macau (China); Chechnya, Dagestan, and other ethnic republics (Russia); Karakalpakstan (Uzbekistan); Gorno-Badakhshan (Tajikistan); Zanzibar (Tanzania); Puntland (Somalia); various states in Myanmar; and perhaps Patani (Thailand) and Ethiopian states. Authoritarian autonomy can also exist in third-order governments, such as several in China, including Sipsongpanna autonomous prefecture for ethnic Thais in Yunnan.

Because authoritarian autonomy is often regarded as fake, it is rarely studied as a form of autonomy or as a set of distinctive institutions. One exception is Henders' comparative study of Catalonia, Corsica, Hong Kong, and Tibet. Henders observes that authoritarian autonomous regions are not studied in terms of power-sharing or self-government, seen as "formalities, offering minority

communities no meaningful self-rule” (2010, 3). She agrees that we should be skeptical of authoritarian autonomy, but cautions that we should not dismiss it. One potential area of research is the growing literature on comparative authoritarianism, where scholars have opened the black box of non-democratic rule and the effect of different institutional designs. Reviewing this literature, Pepinsky (2014) observes that authoritarian institutions present an important area of research, but these arrangements may at any time be bypassed by central authorities unhampered by the rule of law. This is a useful reminder for approaching authoritarian autonomy, as formal rules may be undercut by personalist, perhaps random interventions by ruling regimes.

Authoritarian autonomy is typically an effort to coopt minority resistance rather than eliminate it. It does not typically involve direct rule by the center, but instead indirect rule through minority elites loyal to the center. This is a key element of authoritarian autonomy—rule takes place through representatives from the titular group. Authoritarian rulers cultivate classes of regional elites invested with considerable resources to lead cultural revivals. Examples are found in New Order Indonesia and Marcos-era Mindanao. In Aceh, the New Order did not rule through Javanese elites or seek to assimilate the rebellious province. Instead, it invested in local universities, developing networks of ethnic Acehnese leaders and elevating Acehnese culture through state-led celebrations and publications. For Aspinall (2009b, 35), the New Order celebrated “Aceh’s distinctive history and identity” while simultaneously emphasizing “its special place in the Indonesian nation.” Similarly, the Philippines ruled Mindanao through Christian migration, but also through Moro political elite that were loyal to President Marcos. As one of several examples, Ali Dimaporo was a long-time friend who defended the President through various scandals and named his son after the President. When Marcos declared Martial Law, Dimaporo was an ally against Muslim separatists, appointed Governor of Lanao del Sur and head of the local university. Dimaporo would amass a large personal army and looted state budgets, but ensconced his warlordism in local culture, promoting himself as Sultan, with pageantry and historiography serving as a “vivid illustration to his remarkable accumulation of power” (Bentley 2002, 58).

Today, Chechnya vividly illustrates the dynamics of authoritarian autonomy. Here, Ramzan Kadyrov professes intense personal loyalty to Putin and Moscow, rewarded with considerable power. After years of conflict, Putin pursued a strategy of Chechenization in the 2000s, empowering local allies to lead the fight against separatism. Scholars have remarked on the power held by Kadyrov and his circle, who have overseen “somewhat of a reassertion of national and cultural identity” (Russell 2011, 1073). Kadyrov’s rule is marked by brutal oppression and a personality cult, but also by programs to deepen religion such mosque construction, Islamic festivals, a local version of Sharia

Law, Koran recitals, and more, as well as programs promoting Chechen culture, language, traditional wrestling, and equestrian. Authoritarian autonomy features regional vassals empowered to promote local identity alongside fidelity to the capital. In Tibet, it is not that Han administrators rule the autonomous province, nor do oppositional nationalists. Instead, Tibet is governed by ethnic Tibetan administrators, often educated in Beijing, who promote local culture within the Chinese system. Instead of simply suppressing Tibetan Buddhism, China has cultivated its own version and leaders, with central and provincial authorities investing in temples (Powers 2017). China seeks to control rather than eliminate Tibetan Buddhism, evident in the communist government recognizing its own Panchen Lama. Yang (2017) details how China's Minzu University for ethnic minorities cultivates ethnic leaders, most notably Tibetan administrators, teaching them official versions of their cultures and needs.

Authoritarian autonomy may thus open some space for cultural expression, and leaders can wield considerable power, but in the service of the central government. It is not genuine self-rule, but has important political, economic, and cultural consequences. In terms of independence, it seems that authoritarian autonomy can place regions in a sort of holding pattern, as resistance is rarely extinguished, but may be contained. There is always a danger that, in the event of a national crisis, rebel nationalists may come to the fore to criticize local cronies and demand independence, as in Aceh during the fall of Suharto. Authoritarian autonomy seems stable, but threatens to burst into violence. An especially important aspect of authoritarian autonomy relates to the position of second-order minorities. As pro-state regional elites promote local identity in partnership with the central government, and rebellious or exiled counter-elites are also nationalists, neither have much space for smaller groups outside of these visions. Sometimes, smaller minorities make for easy targets for rebels or scapegoats for autonomous governments. Examples include disproportionate violence against ethnic Chinese Muslims (Hui) in Xinjiang (Côté 2015), Jews and Christians in Dagestan, and Christians and LGBTQ+ groups in Chechnya and Dagestan. Second-order minorities face persecution from multiple sides in authoritarian autonomy, as national and regional governments seek to elevate regional identity in a bid for legitimacy.

### **Analysis & Implications**

This paper has analyzed territorial autonomy as a widespread and varied institution, a tool to manage the demands of distinctive minority nations. It has illuminated some less researched forms of autonomy, placing administrative, indigenous, nested, and authoritarian autonomies alongside the better understood democratic and post-conflict cases. These types vary in their origins, character,

content, research, threats of independence, and treatment of minorities. While all examples of special territorial governance for distinctive regions, it is useful to disaggregate different types of autonomy.

No typology is perfect, leaving potential alternative types and misfit cases. Other potential categories might include de facto autonomy among occupied regions, such as Crimea, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Transnistria, the Spanish Sahara, and Turkish Cyprus. One could refer to marginal autonomies, places with limited formal powers such as Rotuma (Fiji); Nakhichevan (Azerbaijan); the Canary Islands (Spain); Svalbard (Norway); Corsica (France); Norfolk or Christmas Island (Australia); the Cook Islands and Niue (New Zealand); and the Isle of Man, Jersey, and Guernsey (Britain). One distinctive case is Mount Athos in Greece, an autonomous region that stands as the monastic center of the Greek Orthodox Church (and completely bars entry to women). A large set of potential cases may be colonial autonomy, where non-contiguous colonies have minimal special governance powers, such as Bermuda. The Cayman Islands, Gibraltar, and the Falkland Islands (United Kingdom); Guam American Samoa, and the US Virgin Islands (United States); French Polynesia, Réunion, Martinique, Guiana, and New Caledonia (France), and others. Although the six forms of autonomy cover considerable ground and the categorization has analytic value, one could expand it and identify other types.

Many important, interesting cases do not fit neatly into the six-fold categorization presented in this paper. Taiwan, southern Thailand, Crimea, Kashmir, and others are difficult to place. One deceptively complex case is Papua. Although Indonesia has enjoyed over two decades of democratic rule and has overcome many conflicts, Papua remains stuck. Home to a long-standing separatist conflict, Indonesia unilaterally divided it into two provinces just after granting autonomy, violating its own laws. Papua has elections and national parties, existing in a democracy, but the nature of its autonomy is top-down, cultivating a class of Papuan politicians amidst ongoing conflict and large-scale protests (Barter and Wangge 2022). Papua and West Papuan provinces sit between democratic and authoritarian autonomy, with indigenous elements. Also in Indonesia, Yogyakarta (*Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta*, DIY) features a hereditary Sultan serving as Governor, largely due to the Sultanate's contributions to the independence struggle. It can hardly be called democratic, but is also not post-conflict or other forms, instead being more of a symbolic nod to an historical role. In Hong Kong, we see an autonomous region struggling to uphold self-government and democracy within an authoritarian host state. The former British colony retains real autonomy, with its own currency, passports, migration restrictions, language policies, and political system. However, China has worked to rein this in, controlling dissent and elections while cultivating its own supporters (Fong 2017). It is thus between democratic and authoritarian autonomy. Another 'misfit' case is Puerto Rico.



Although the term ‘autonomy’ is rarely used, the island has its own language policies, weights and measures, political parties, political system, taxation and more, possessing the trappings of autonomy but without using the term. Many commentators focus on what the island lacks, namely representation in federal politics, framing Puerto Rico as a US colony (Lluch 2014). Of course, all American states are products of colonialism, and many autonomous regions can be understood as products of imperialism. It seems that Puerto Rico could be approached as democratic autonomy, but also a colonial case.

Having established a useful typology and highlighted some underappreciated forms of territorial autonomy, there are several avenues for further research. Most obvious is to look more directly at the less-studied forms of autonomy. This means approaching special administrative and authoritarian governments as forms of territorial autonomy, and further research on indigenous and nested autonomous regions. Comparative work on indigenous politics remains somewhat rare, especially including reference to Asian and other old-world cases. It might also be useful to empirically assess and compare the powers of different forms of territorial autonomy, perhaps using data from the Regional Authority Index (RAI). The RAI analyzes the powers of subnational units rather than the decentralization of a country, making it an excellent source to assess asymmetric subnational governments such as autonomous regions.

Although meaningful territorial autonomy has never led to independence, it rarely eliminates separatist demands. The aspirations of minority nations require ongoing dialogue rather than an expectation of a permanent, fixed agreement. Territorial autonomy, specifically its more dynamic forms (see Lecours 2020), can play this role. A related concern is the status of minorities. It should be expected that minority nations, especially those that have endured exclusion, violence, and assimilation, will use self-government to develop their national identities. This may have a conservative edge and threaten regional, second-order minorities, perhaps repeating history with national minorities ruling as majorities over their minorities. This paper has framed minority rights as a perennial issue, but has also identified mitigation strategies, namely national rights mechanisms and nested autonomy. All told, autonomy represents a valuable tool to overcome conflict and empower distinctive, territorially concentrated minorities.

This paper has provided glimpses into dozens of cases, but the world features many regions that might be better off with self-government: the Tuareg region (Mali), Okinawa (Japan), Patani (Thailand), Donbas (Ukraine), Khalistan (India), Rojava (Syria), Turkish Kurdistan, indigenous regions in Hawaii and Alaska, and many more. This is not to mention the numerous existing autonomous regions where self-government has been stunted. Hopefully, a better understanding of

the many forms of territorial autonomy can be useful in tailoring different forms to specific contexts. For example, with concerns over migration, preserving traditional culture, but also fragmented national identities, Papua (Indonesia) might best be approached with indigenous forms of autonomy. It may be useful to document instances of nested and indigenous autonomy to help convince national and regional governments to establish systems that can better support their minorities. Hopefully, as Québec moves forward to recognize Nunavik, the experiences of similar regions will be useful in crafting appropriate powers. Autonomy represents a varied, complex institutional response to difference, one that can be better refined and has the promise to empower minority nations.

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