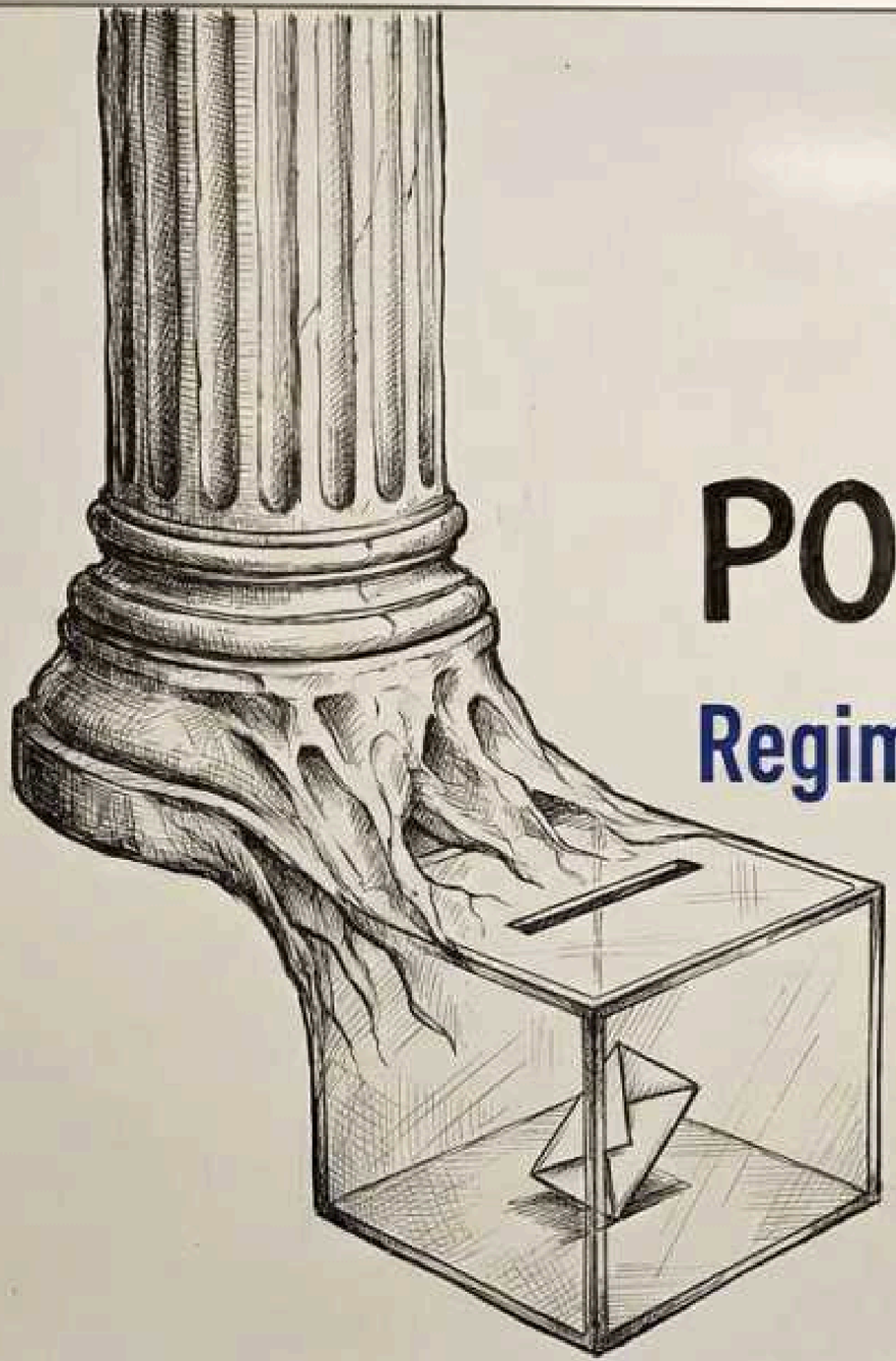


POLS 101 B Lecture 3

Regimes: Democracy and Its Alternatives

Regimes = the basic rules about who rules and how.

¶ 3.2

Regimes

1

Ancient Classifications

- Aristotle's 3-by-3 Matrix: (One/Few/Many) vs. (Good/Corrupt)
  - Monarchy vs. Tyranny
  - Aristocracy vs. Oligarchy
  - Polity vs. Democracy (Mob Rule)
- Focus: Rule for common good vs. self-interest



2

Defining & Measuring Democracy







- Dahl's Polyarchy (1971): Contestation & Participation
- Minimalist (Schumpeter) vs. Maximalist (Substantive) Definitions
- Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Indices
- Key Metrics: Free & fair elections, Civil liberties, Accountability
- Data points: V-Dem Liberal Democracy Index (LDI) scores

3

Authoritarian & Hybrid Regimes







- Authoritarian Spectrum: Monarchy, Military, Personalist, Single-Party
- Hybrid/Competitive Authoritarianism (Levitsky & Way)
- Characteristics: Uneven playing field, limited pluralism, manipulated elections
- Red Flag: State institutions (courts, media) as tools of power

4

Democratic Survival





- Modernization Theory (Lipset): Economic development correlates with survival
- Political Culture: Civic engagement, trust, democratic values
- Institutional Design: Parliamentarism vs. Presidentialism, Electoral systems
- International Factors: Diffusion, external support/pressure
- Key Data: GDP per capita thresholds for stability

5

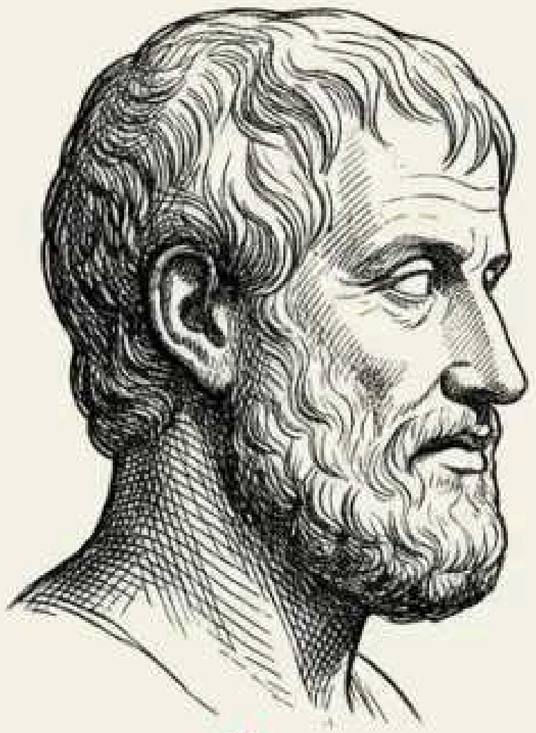
Democratic Backsliding







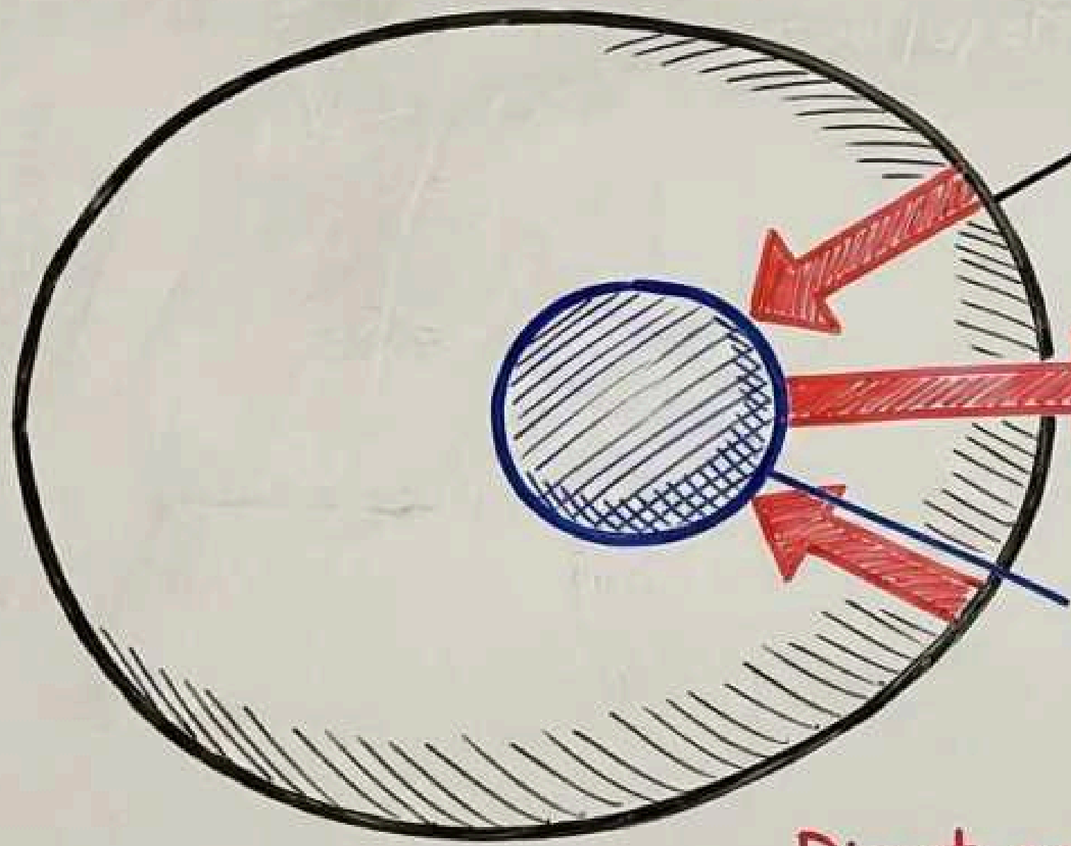
- Incremental erosion, not sudden coups
- Executive aggrandizement (weakening checks)
- Polarization & Degradation of norms (forbearance, legitimacy)
- Assault on free press & civil society
- Critical Warning: Weaponizing legal systems against opposition



Regime = fundamental rules & norms determining who holds power & how it is used.

How many rule? \ In whose interest?	Common Good	Rulers Alone
Rule by One	Monarchy	Tyranny
Rule by the Few	Aristocracy	Oligarchy
Rule by the Many	Polity	Democracy

Demos (People) + Kratos (Rule) = Democracy



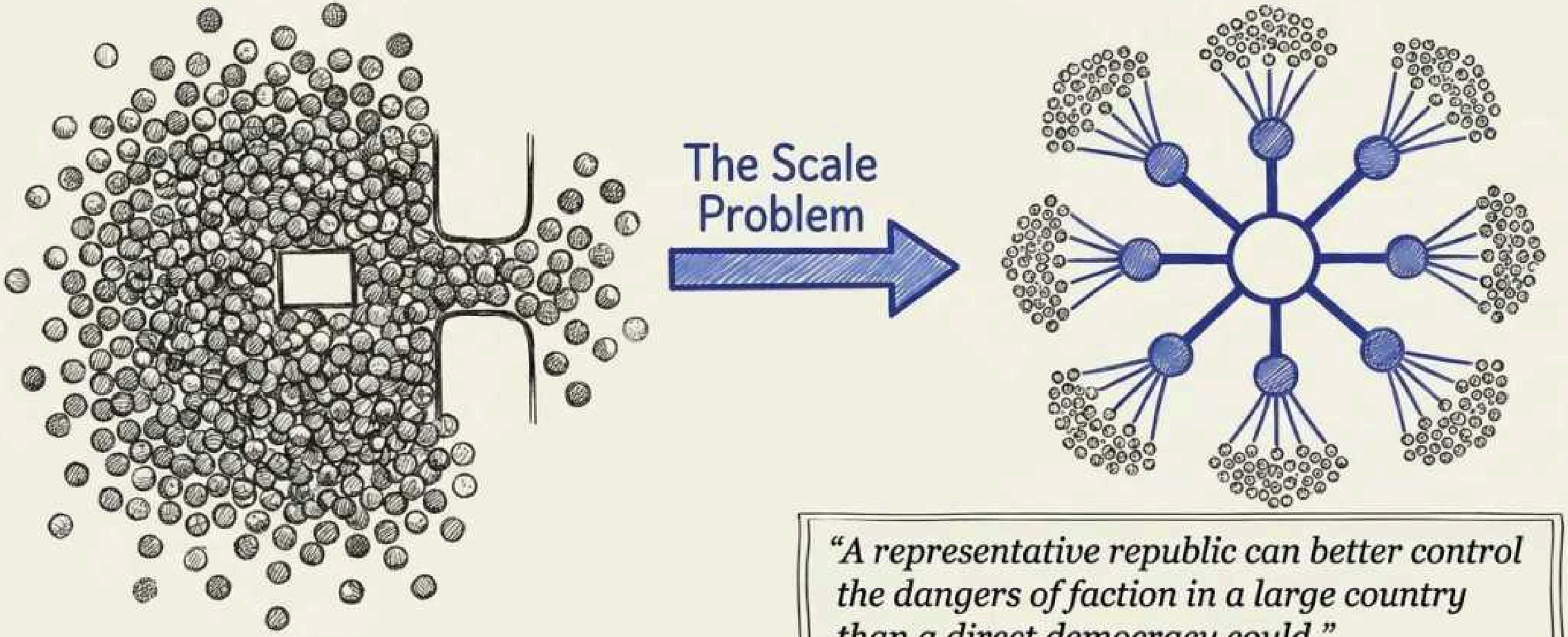
Total Population in 5th Century BC Athens

Excluded: Women, Slaves, Foreigners

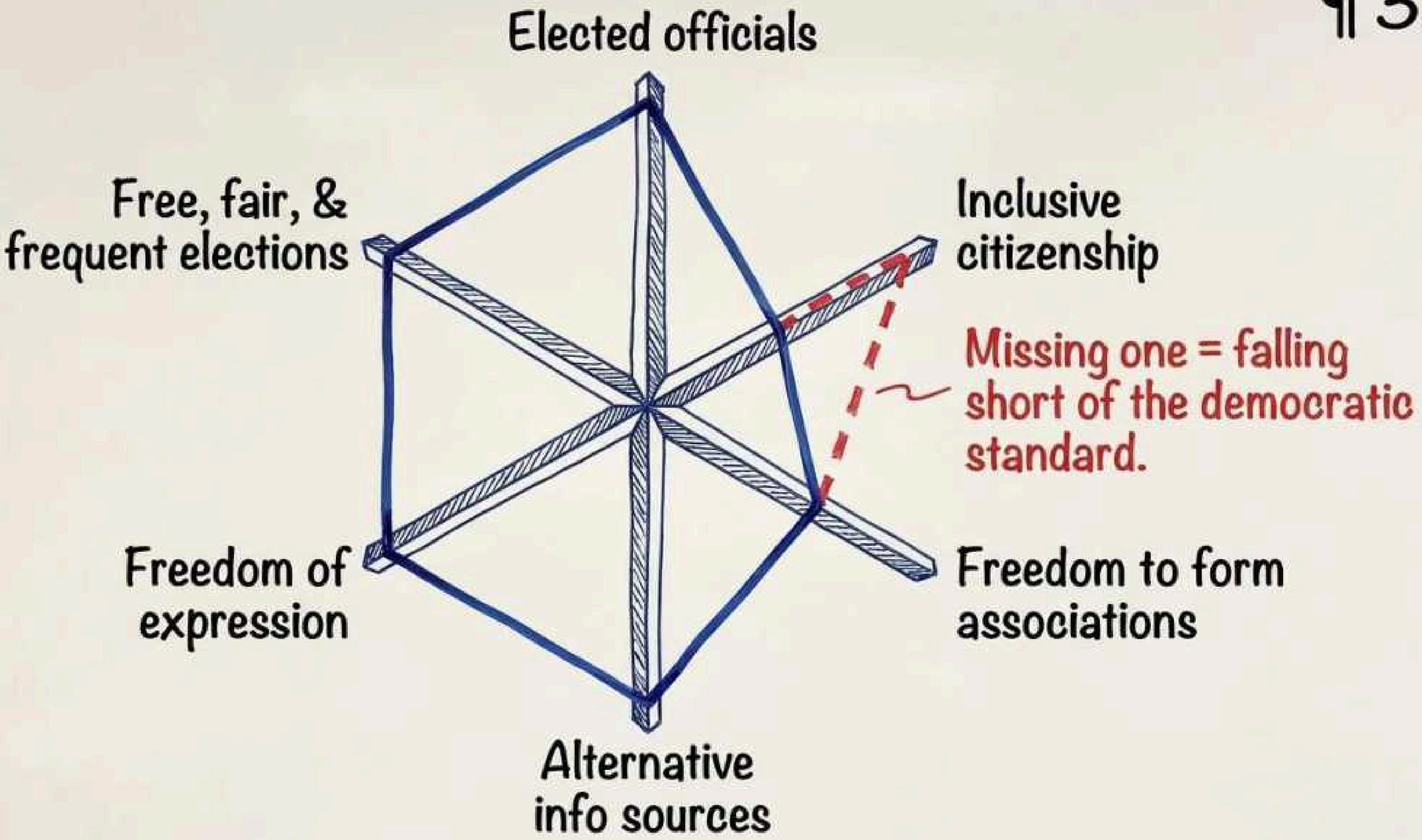
Assembly Citizens (Decide directly / lot)

Direct, small scale, and non-inclusive.

The Shift to Representative Democracy



> *"A representative republic can better control the dangers of faction in a large country than a direct democracy could."*
> — James Madison, *Federalist* No. 10 (1787)


Elected officials
Free, fair, & frequent elections
Inclusive citizenship
Missing one = falling short of the democratic standard.
Freedom of expression
Freedom to form associations
Alternative info sources

How demanding should the definition be?

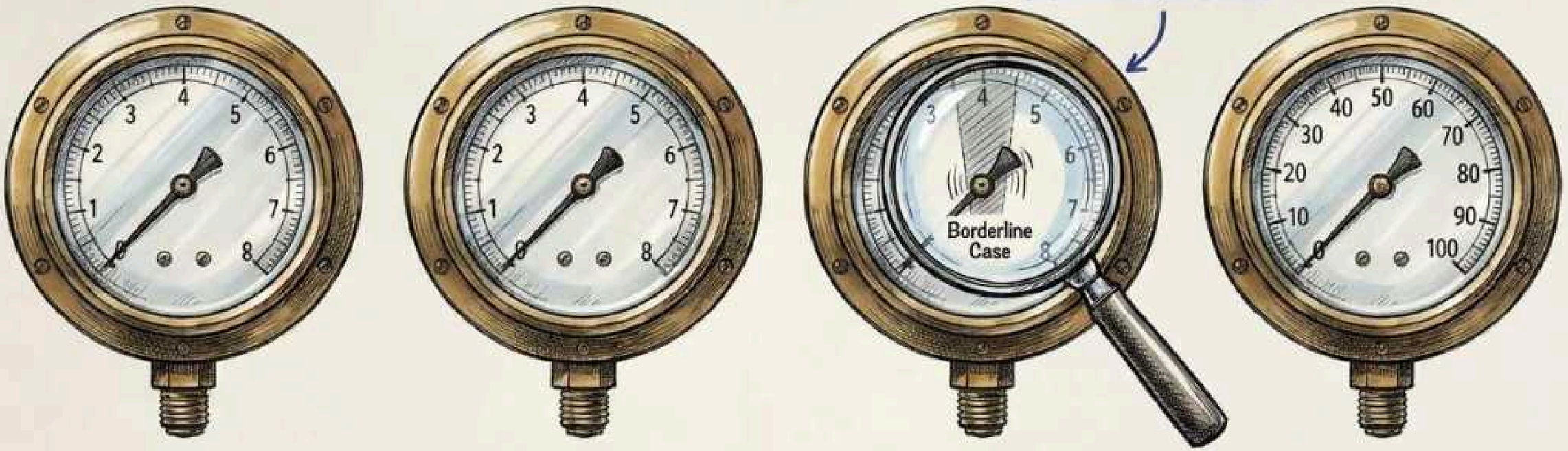
$$D_{minimal} = \text{Competitive struggle for votes}$$

Electoral Democracy (Schumpeter, 1942)

$$D_{liberal} = D_{minimal} + \text{Rights} + \text{Rule of Law} + \text{Limits on Majorities}$$

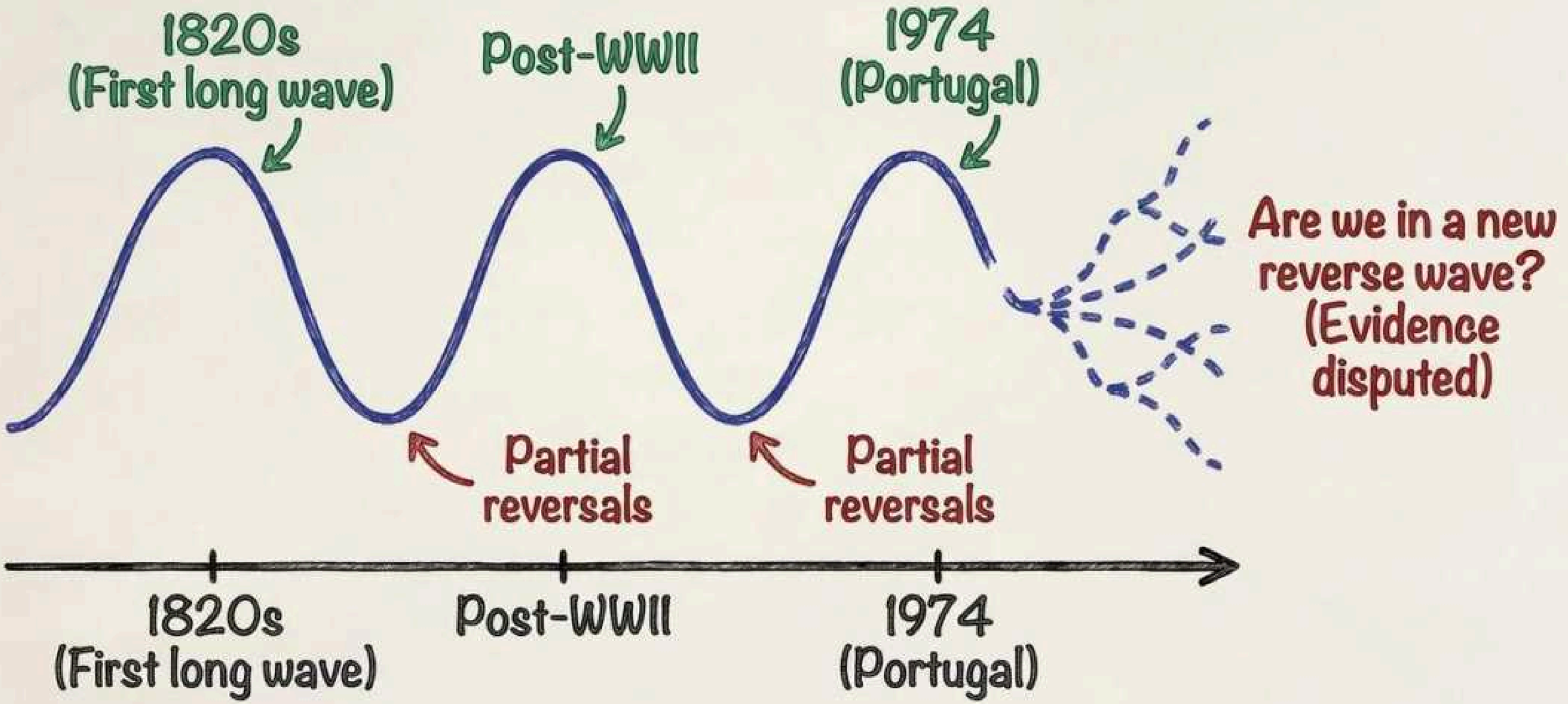
Liberal Democracy

¶ 3.8

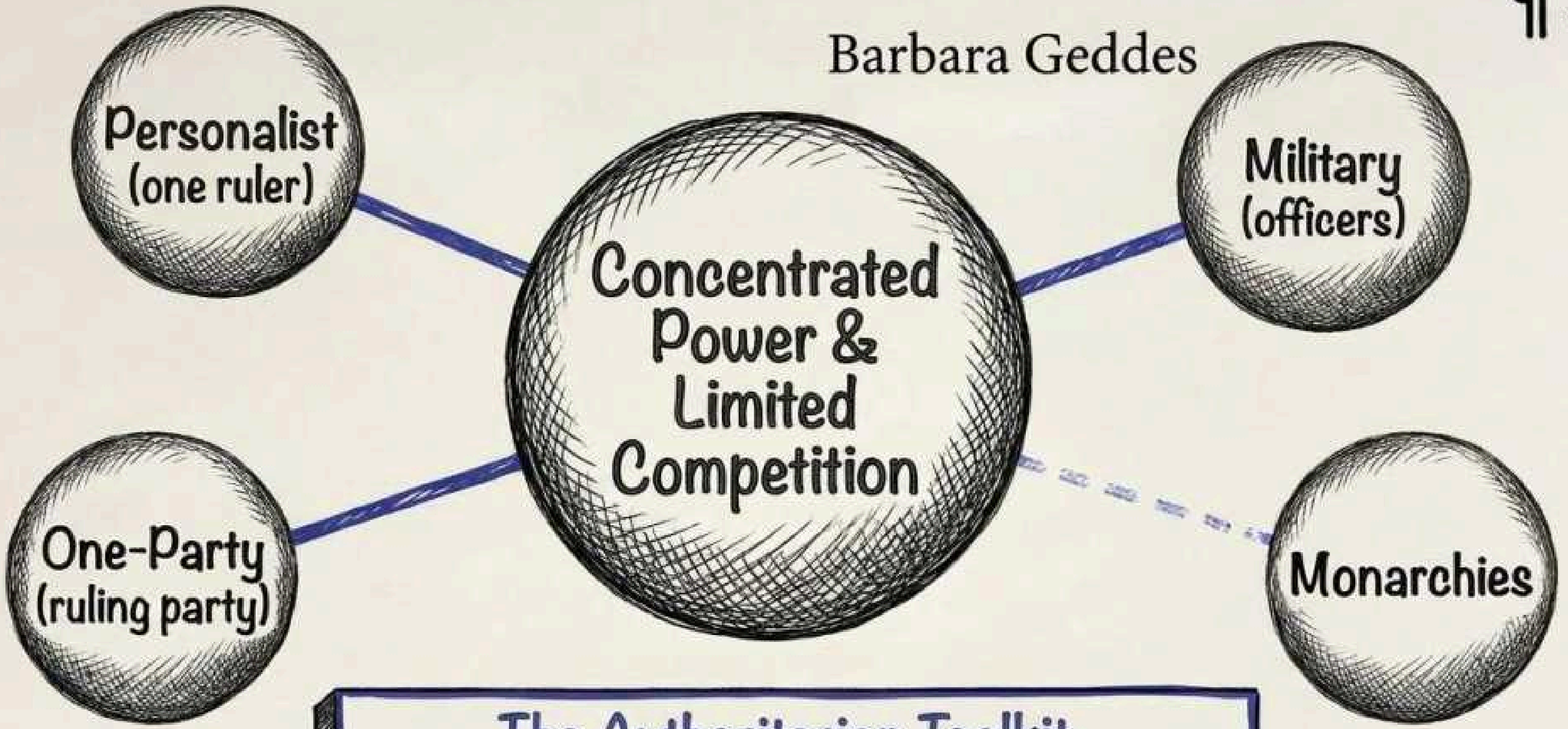


When viewing a ranking, always ask:
Who scored it? With which criteria? How?

Huntington's The Third Wave (1991)

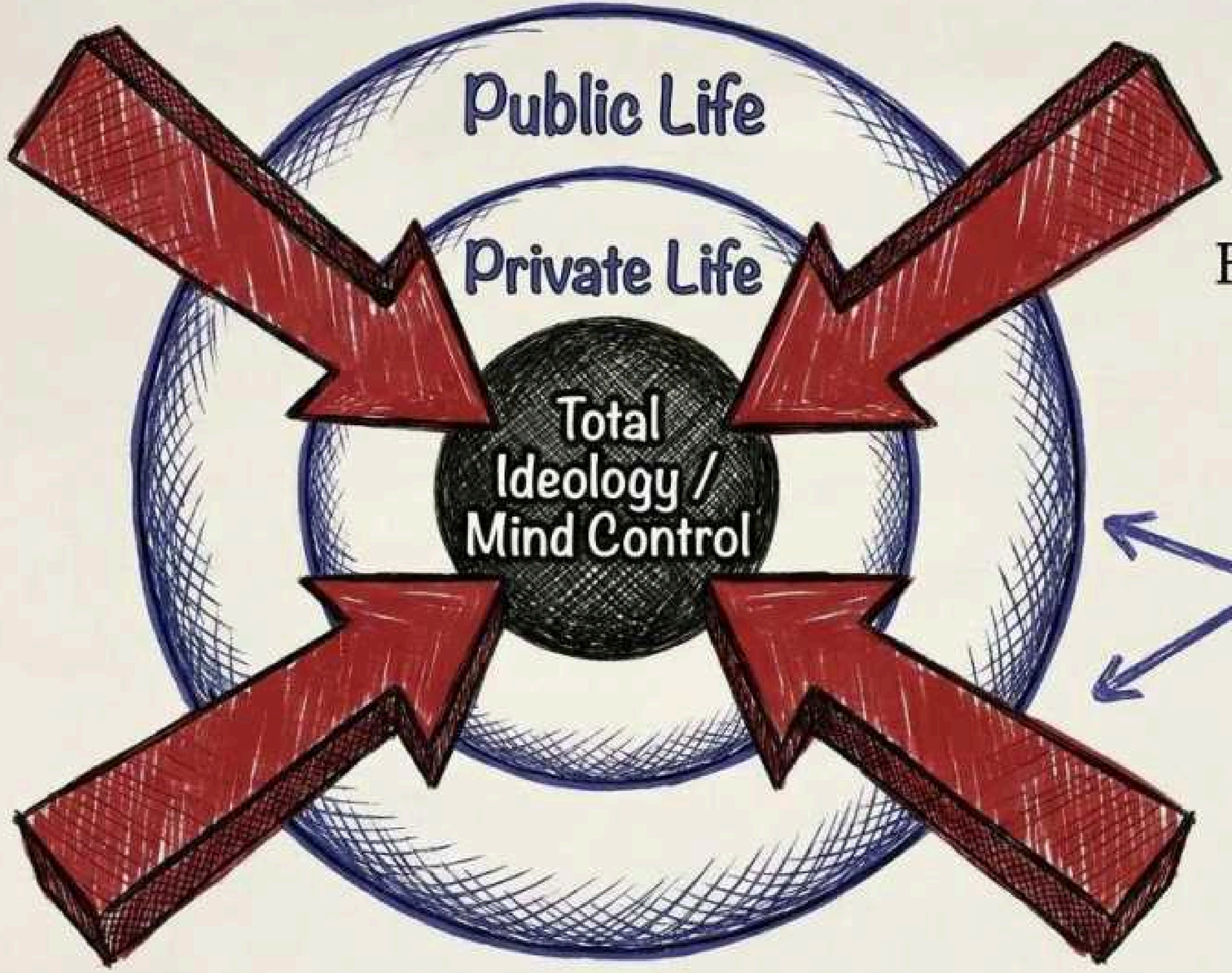


Barbara Geddes



The Authoritarian Toolkit

- Repression
- Co-optation
- Rewards for supporters
- Propaganda
- Controlled elections

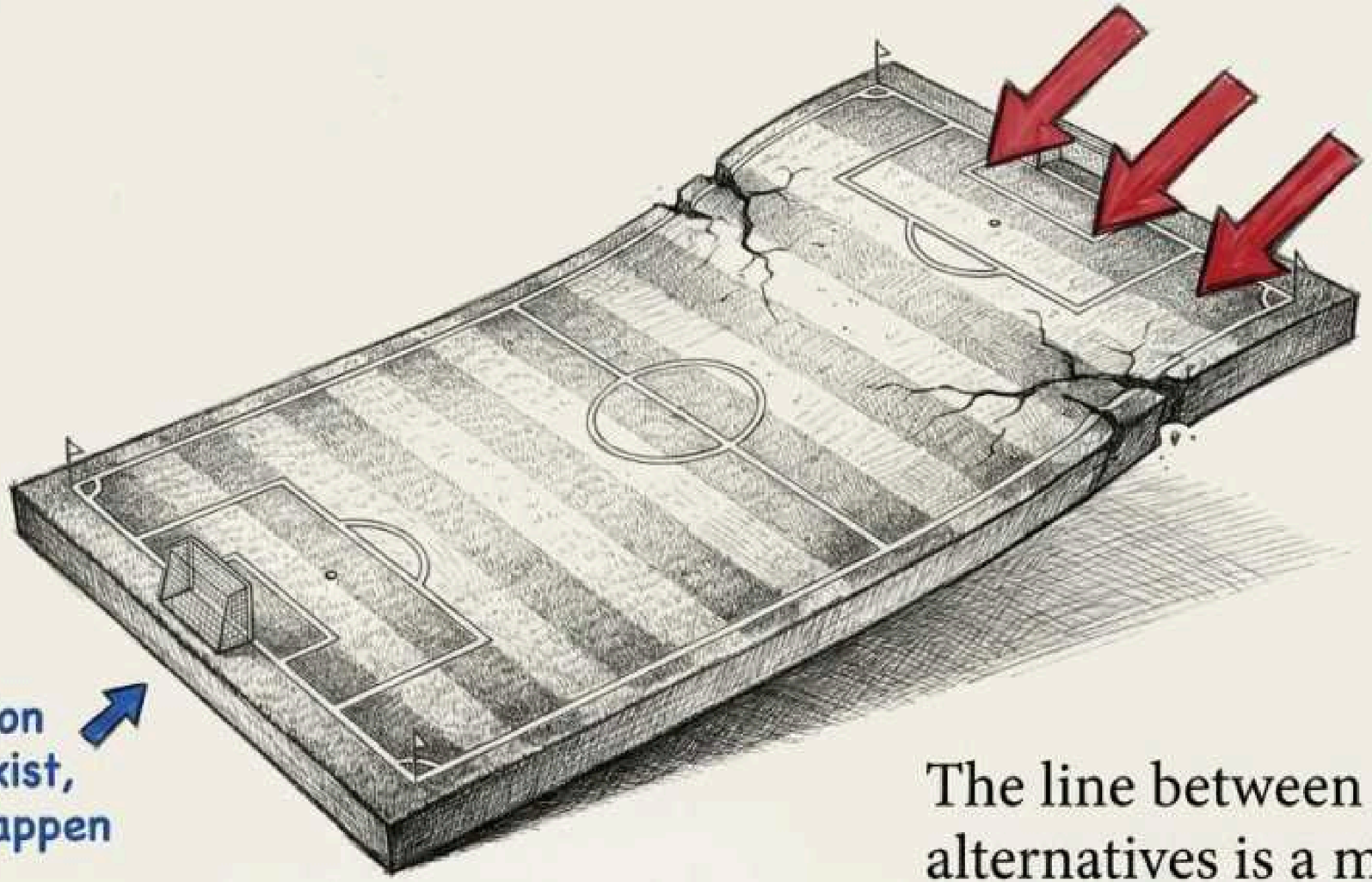


Hannah Arendt,
The Origins of Totalitarianism
(1951)

Nazi Germany
&
Stalin's USSR

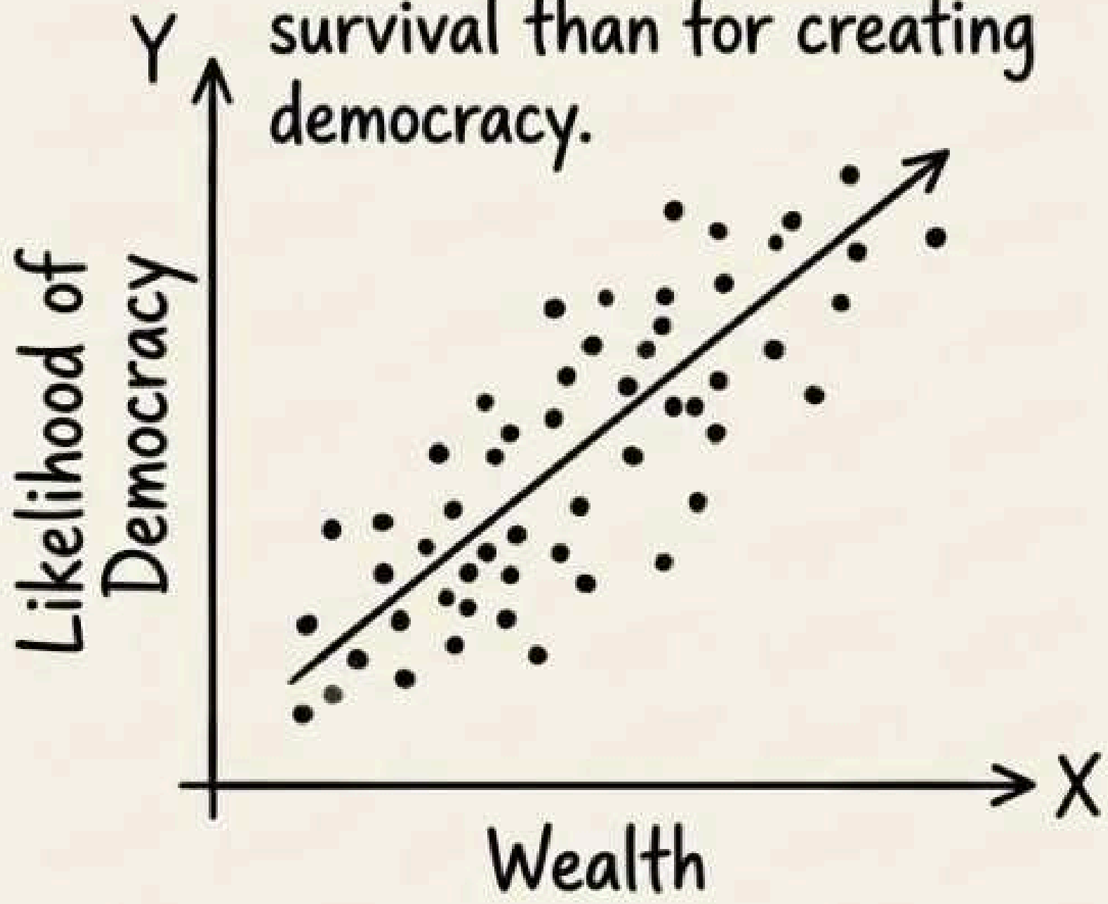
Extreme, rare, mass terror—ambition far beyond standard authoritarianism.

Hybrid Regimes / Competitive Authoritarianism (Levitsky & Way)



The line between democracy and alternatives is a matter of degree.

Wealth matters more for survival than for creating democracy.



Seymour Martin Lipset (1959)

Survival = f(Elite Bargains, Strong Civil Society, Low Inequality, Shared Power)

⚠ Resource Curse

(Oil/Minerals → Authoritarian Durability)

Democracies rarely fight wars against each other.

¶ 3.14

Immanuel Kant, Perpetual Peace (1795)

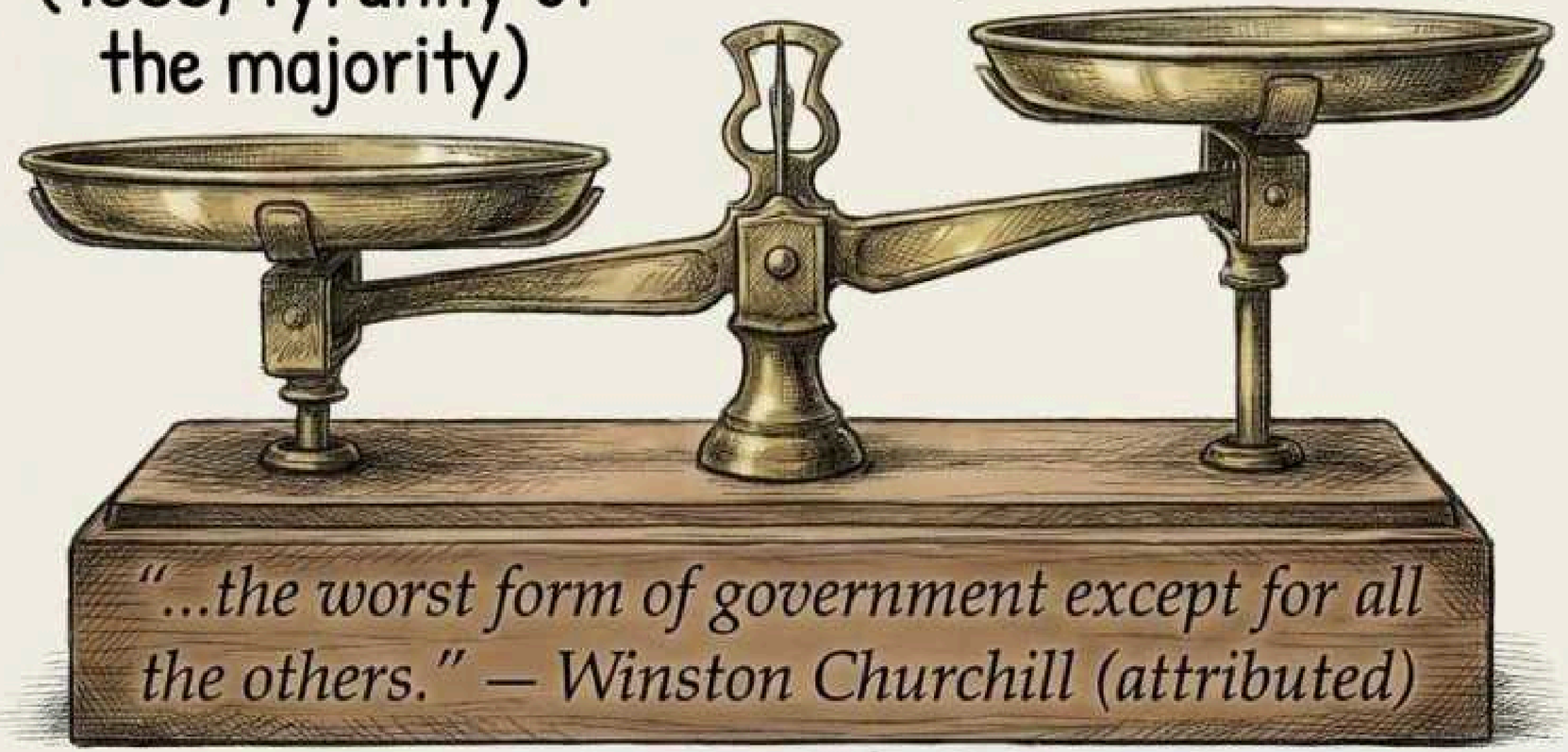


⚠ A claim to examine, not an absolute law.
Critics question definitions & causal stories.

Plato
(distrust of the uninformed)

Tocqueville
(1835, tyranny of the majority)

Accountability, mood., peaceful change of leaders, protection of rights

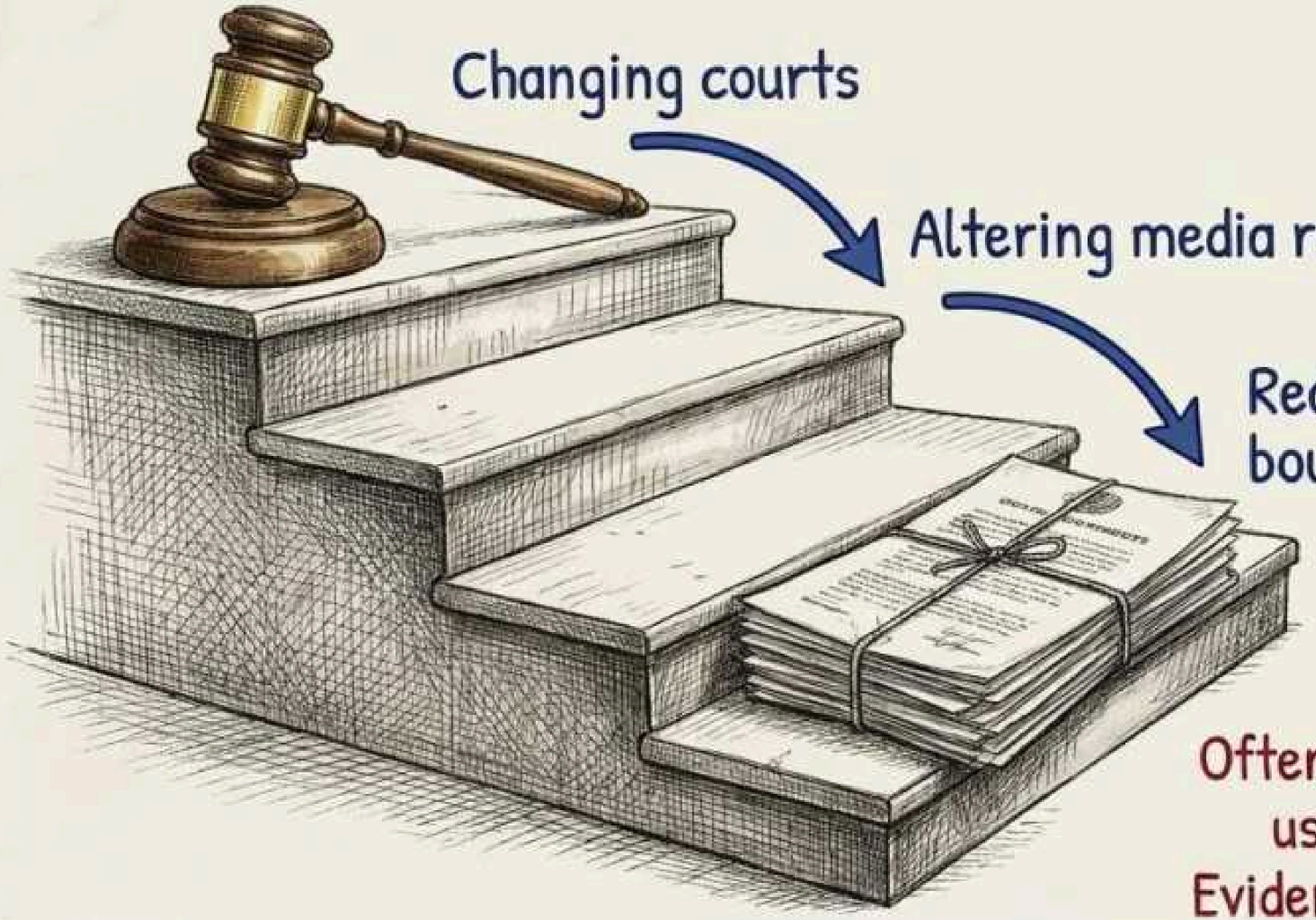


"...the worst form of government except for all the others." — Winston Churchill (attributed)

Democratic Backsliding: Gradual Weakening

¶ 3.16

Levitsky & Ziblatt, How Democracies Die (2018)



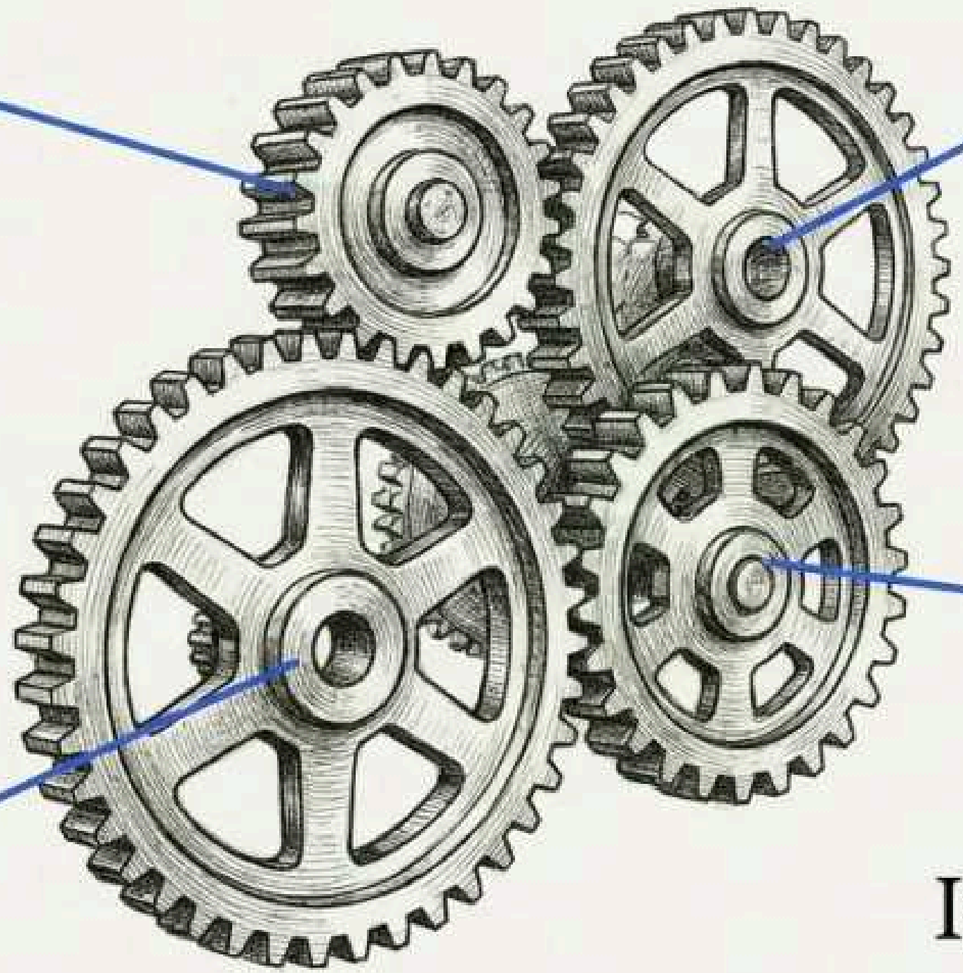
Often executed by elected leaders using "legal-looking" steps. Evidence & causes heavily debated.

Pick a country you know well.

	Clearly Has (✓)	Weaker (X)
Elected officials		
Free/fair elections		
Free expression		
Alt. info		
Free association		
Inclusive citizenship		

Does this make it a democracy, authoritarian, or hybrid? What evidence convinces you?

Looking Ahead



In Lecture 4, we look inside the machinery.