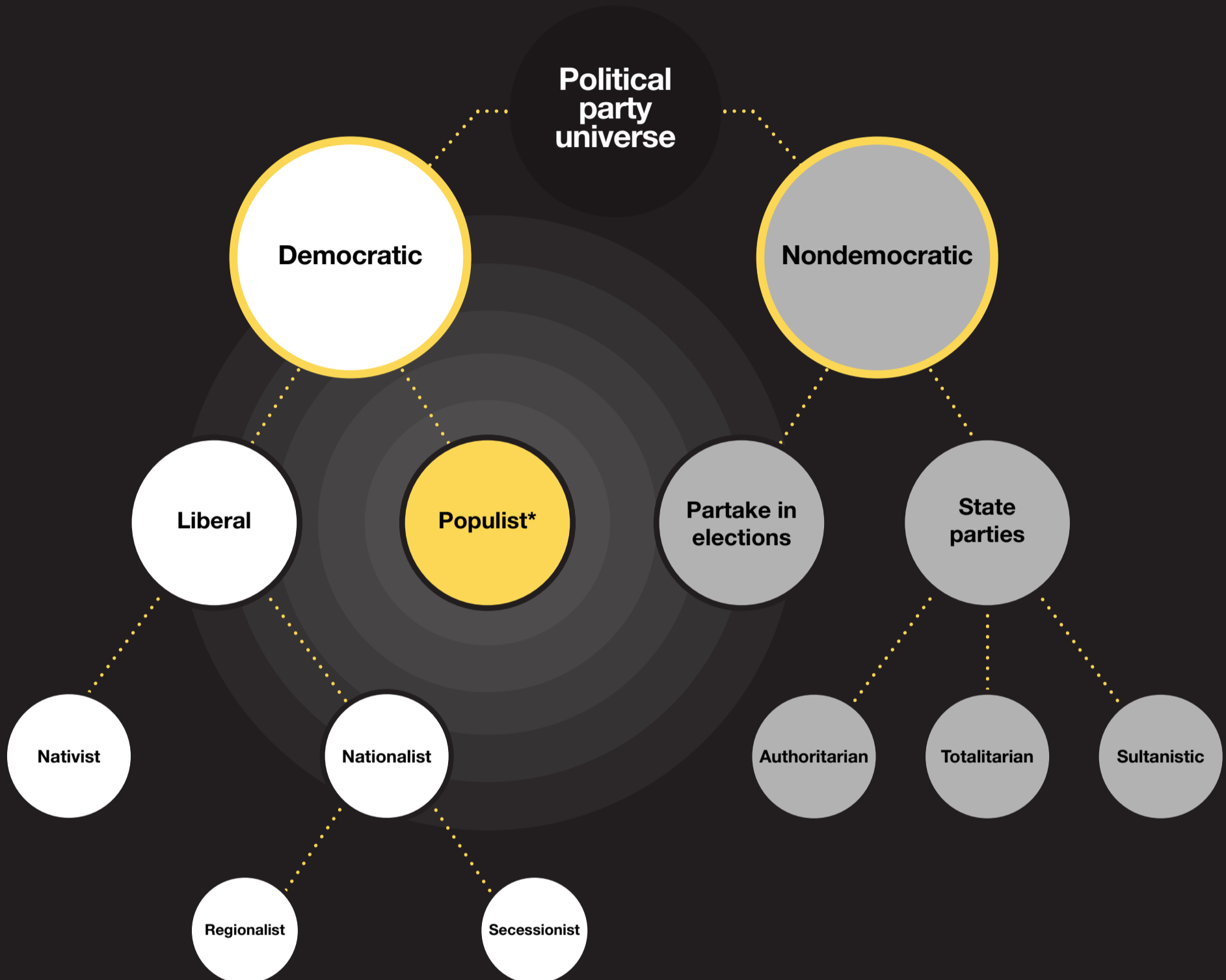


# Spot the populists!

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As long as the term “populism” remains ill-defined, and its use has spun out of control, it is hard to distinguish populist from non-populist parties. Here’s why academics, journalists and politicians routinely confuse populists with autocrats, nativists, nationalists and more. This infographic pinpoints populist parties within the party universe. Based on the method known as per *genus et differentiam*, it presents a hierarchical systematization of all parties into clearly defined types that are mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive. Populists are now easy to identify because they combine two core characteristics: adherence to electoral democracy and opposition to liberal democratic principles. It also results in an uncomplicated minimal definition of modern populism as “democratic illiberalism”.



## Party types defined

**Democratic:** Compete in adequately free and fair elections; once defeated, incumbents leave office peacefully / **Nondemocratic:** Oppose parliamentary democracy even if they partake in elections; incumbents hold power by force / **Liberal:** Both democratic and abiding by rule of law while also protecting the rights of minorities / **Populist:** Democratic and illiberal, prioritizing the interests of an oversoul “people” over impersonal institutions and rule of law / **Nondemocratic contestant:** Participate in elections with the aim to topple parliamentary democracy even if by force / **State parties:** Control state power, usually led by strongmen and virtually unopposed / **Nativist:** Essentially liberal, but championing the interests of native-born citizens against those of alien populations or cultures / **Nationalist:** Advocate their nation-state’s sovereignty from other states or supranational organizations / **Secessionist:** Seek the independence of a people and its territory from a unionist state / **Regionalist:** Demand greater autonomy of a geographically defined region and its people from a centralist nation state / **Authoritarian:** Rule by controlling interventionist and ideological states, but allowing certain social and economic freedoms / **Totalitarian:** Single-party states ruled by strongmen and exercising total control over citizens’ lives / **Sultanistic:** Differ from totalitarian parties in that they are led by a single ruler and his family members and courtiers.

\*There are two subtypes of populist parties, *pre-liberal* and *post-liberal*. Pre-liberal populism pertains to premodern democracies devoid of liberalism (Zakaria 1997) while post-liberal populism applies to modern democracies with a previous record of liberalism (Pappas 2019).

### Sources

T.S. Pappas, [Populism and Liberal Democracy: A Comparative and Theoretical Analysis](#) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), esp. 31-5 and 57-78. By same author, “[The Specter Haunting Europe: Distinguishing Liberal Democracy’s Challengers](#)”, *Journal of Democracy* 27:4 (October 2016), 22-36. To identify Europe’s various party types, see the infographic “[A Typology of Parties in Contemporary Europe, 1990-2020](#)”. Fareed Zakaria, “[The Rise of Illiberal Democracy](#)”, *Foreign Affairs* 76:6 (1997), 22-43.



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