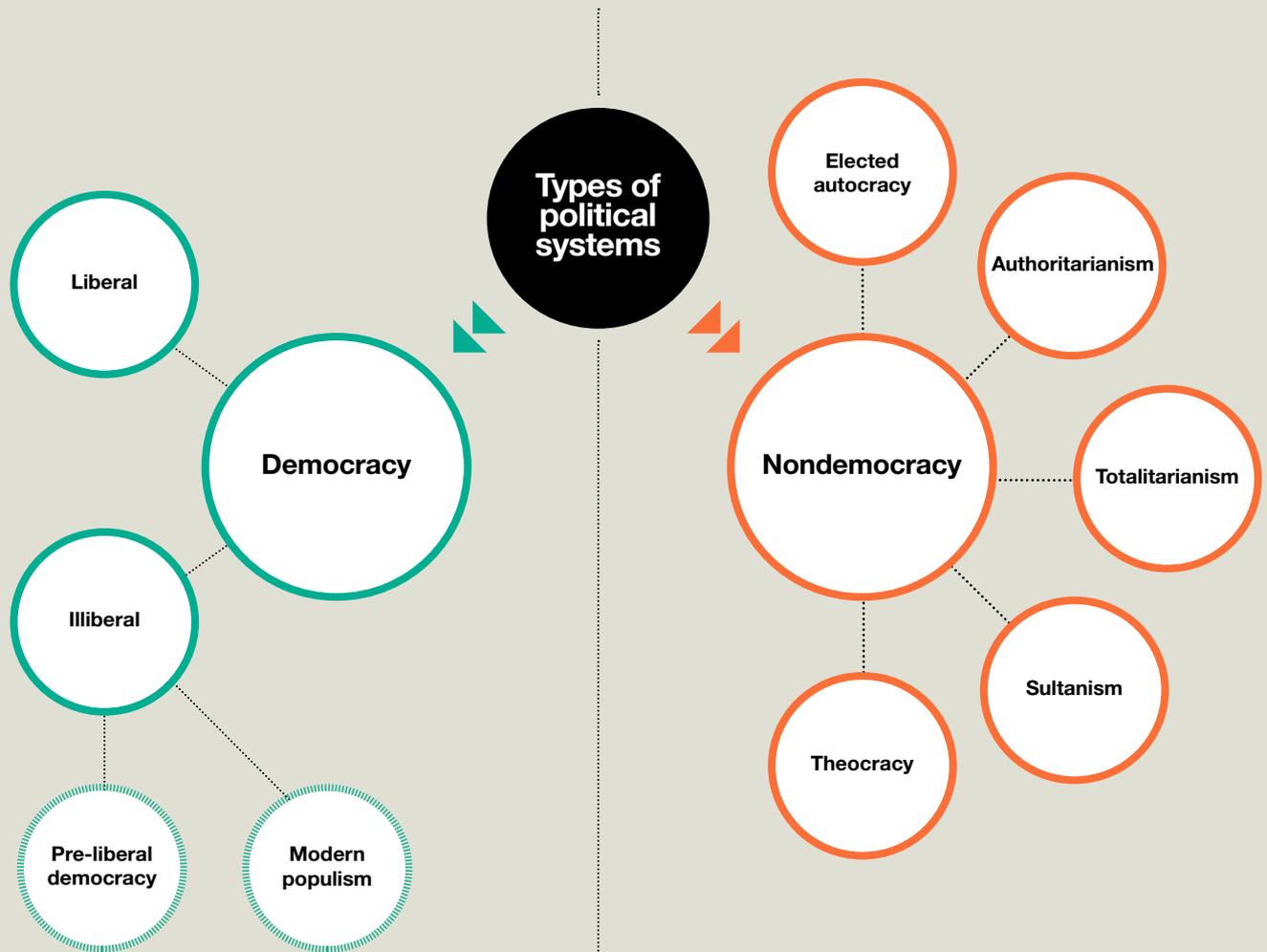


Political systems: A typology

by Takis S. Pappas*

A political system is a particular way in which a polity, or state, is organized and governed. Political systems are distinguished by the different ways they allocate political authority in the interactions that take place within them among the state itself, organized groups in society, and each citizen individually. This infographic presents a typology of all modern political systems classified into clearly defined types that are mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive. It also offers minimal definitions for each type of political system.



Democracies feature adequately free and fair elections, while incumbents leave office peacefully once defeated.

Liberal democracies abide by the rule of law while also protecting the rights of lawful minorities.

Illiberal democracies reject the principles of political liberalism. They come in two variants: Pre-liberal and populist.

Nondemocracies oppose parliamentarism even if they allow (typically rigged) elections; incumbents hold power by force and intimidation.

Elected autocracies are all but outright dictatorships featuring strong leaders running corrupt states and suppressing the opposition.

Authoritarian states are run by military supremos who grab power by coup and establish disciplined ideological and interventionist states.

Modern populism rises in secular liberal democracies by attacking the rule of law and the established state institutions.

Pre-liberal democracies, most common in states imbued with religious and nationalist ideologies, retain the trappings of democracy but operate as de facto autocracies.

Totalitarian states are ruled by non-elected strongmen exercising total control over citizens' lives. Privacy and free expression are impossible.

Sultanist monarchies, also of a totalitarian nature, are distinguished by the cult of their leader who rules by the aid of trusted family members and courtiers.

Theocracies, run by zealots ruling in the name of a god, reject secular individual and social freedoms and do not recognize human rights.

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