



Roman Governance and People Power

Everyday Life in
Athens and Rome
(HHP4020)

Republicanism vs. Oligarchy

- Oligarchy = rule of the few
 - From extreme to moderate.
 - Usually based on wealth or land, rather than descent.
- Republicanism comes from *res publica* = “public affairs”
 - Diverse elements of the system.
 - *SPQR* – *Senatus Populusque Romanus*.



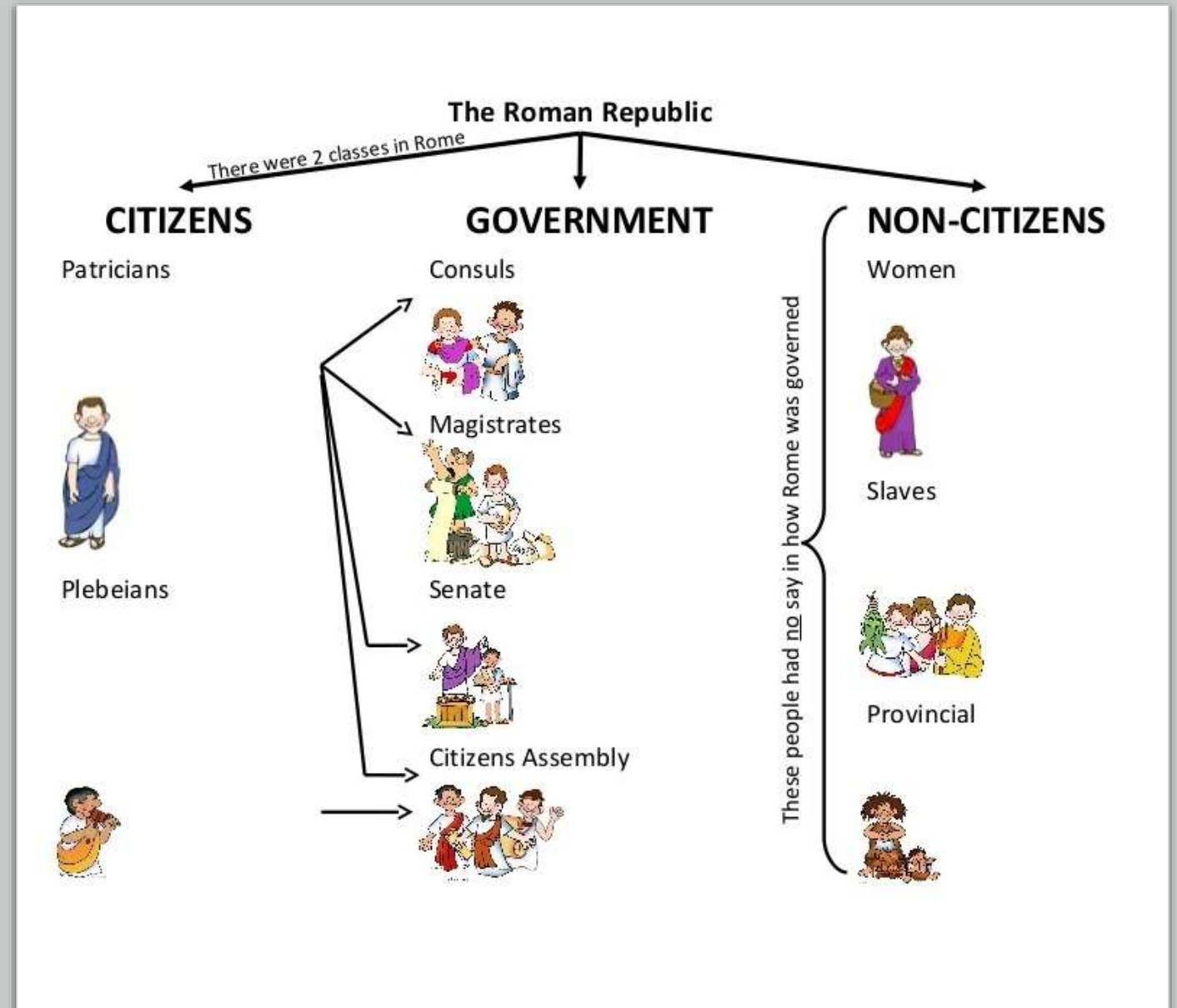
Roman Republic ca. 509 to 31/30 BC

- **Mid to Late Republic:**
 - Hannibal crosses the Alps (218 BC), his defeat at Zama (202 BC).
 - Sullan reforms (82-81 BC).
 - Julius Caesar in Gaul (50s BC), his assassination in 44 BC.



Roman system rather complex!

- Senate.
- Elected Magistracies.
- Several popular Assemblies.
 - Block rather than individual voting!



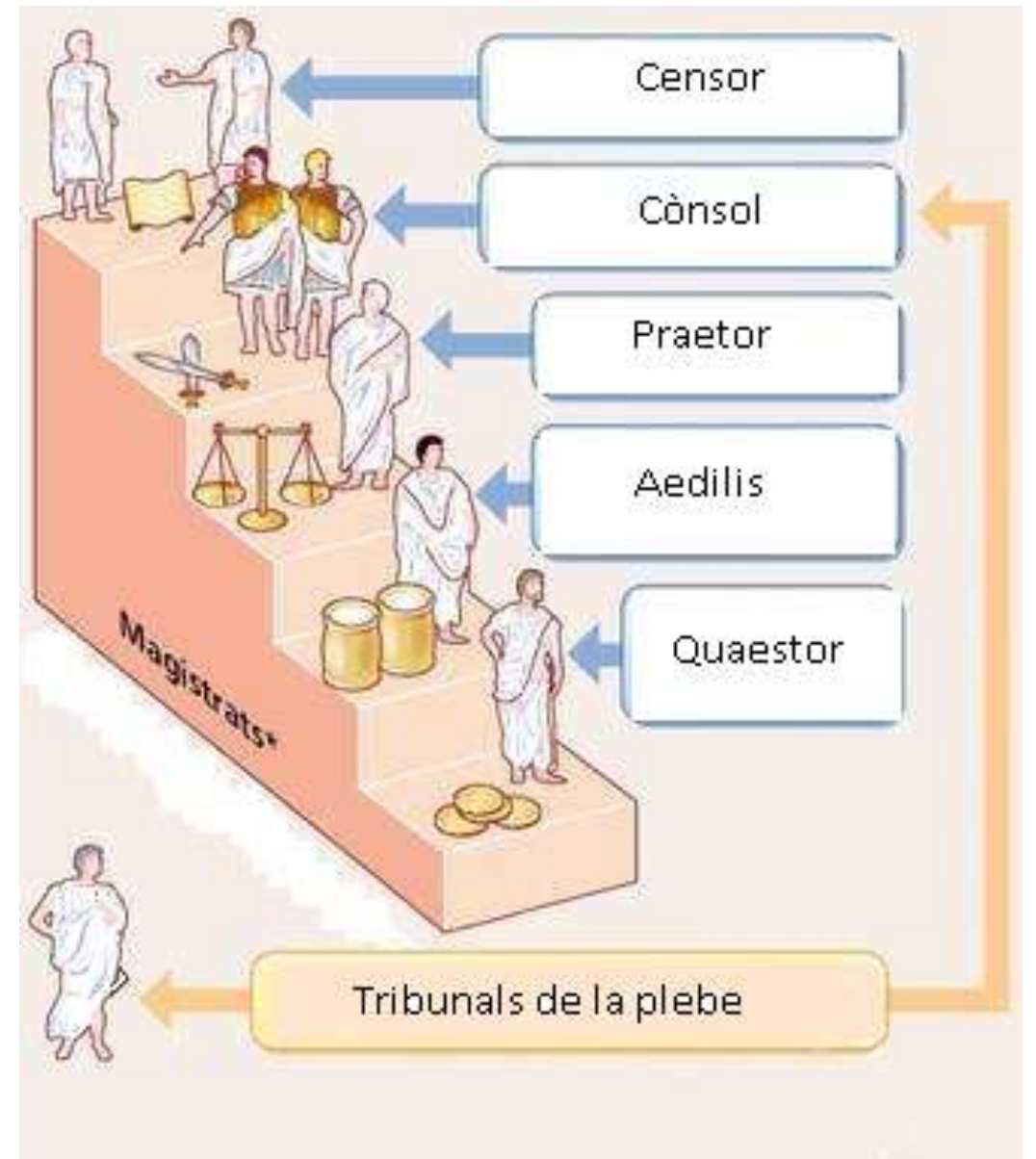
Senate: what are your perceptions of its power?

- Ca. 300 members (until 1st century BC).
- Technically advisory
 - In reality heavily consulted, in charge of finances and diplomacy.
- **Not directly elected**
 - coopted (by censors) in earlier history
 - Enrolled upon winning quaestorship from time of Sulla).



Magistrates

- Consuls: the 2 chief magistrates in charge each year.
- Magistrates elected by popular assemblies.
 - But not by 1 man 1 vote (blocks).
- You worked your way up system (notional minimum ages for roles).



Patricians and Plebeians



Popular assemblies (not debating chambers like Athenian Ekklesia)

Comitia centuriata:
voted on war, elected
magistrates with
imperium

Comitia tributa: 35
tribes – elect quaestors,
and curule aediles;
tried judicial cases
(until Sulla).

Concilium plebis
(Plebeian council):
elects tribunes and
plebeian aediles.

Also: *comitia curiata*.

Table 10.1: The Classes of the Centuriate Assembly

Type		<i>Seniores</i>	<i>Iuniores</i>	Total	Minimum property requirement (in asses)
<i>Equites</i>				18	N/A
Infantry	Class 1	40	40	80	100,000
	Class 2	10	10	20	75,000
	Class 3	10	10	20	50,000
	Class 4	10	10	20	25,000
	Class 5	15	15	30	11,000
Engineers				2	N/A
Musicians				2	N/A
<i>Capite censi</i>				1	<11,000
				193	

Based on Livy (1.43) and Dionysius of Halicarnassus (4.16–18).

Voting by Block (1)

Comitia Centuriata – one vote per century

Assigned to century according to wealth

More centuries for wealthy citizens

All citizens without sufficient means were placed in the last century (*capite censi*)

Vote counting of centuries according to wealth

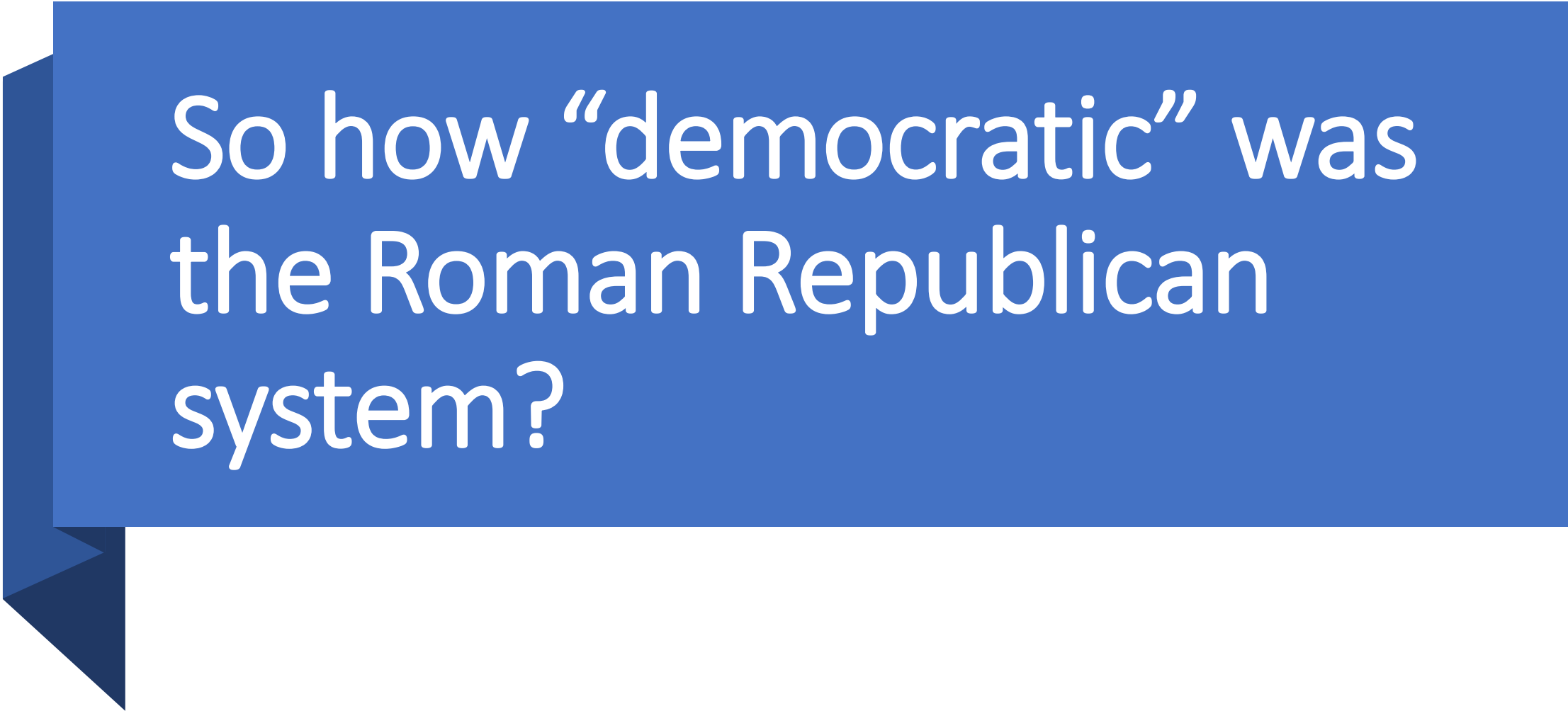
When majority reached, no more counting



Voting by Block (2)

Comitia Tributa – one vote per tribe

- Eventually 35 tribes, 4 tribes for urban (Rome), 31 tribes for rural
- All new citizens in 35th tribe?
- Voting only happened in Rome.



So how “democratic” was
the Roman Republican
system?

Secret voting

- Secret ballot in elections from 139 BC (*Lex Gabinia tabellaria*).
- Way of reducing potential voter intimidation.
- Weakening traditional ties of patronage?



Courting popularity

- Lavish Aedileship.
- [If plebeian], supporting measures as a tribune.
- Conducting a lavish funeral.
- Traditional patronage links with local Italian elites / communities.
- Deference of prominent individuals in court (as an advocate).





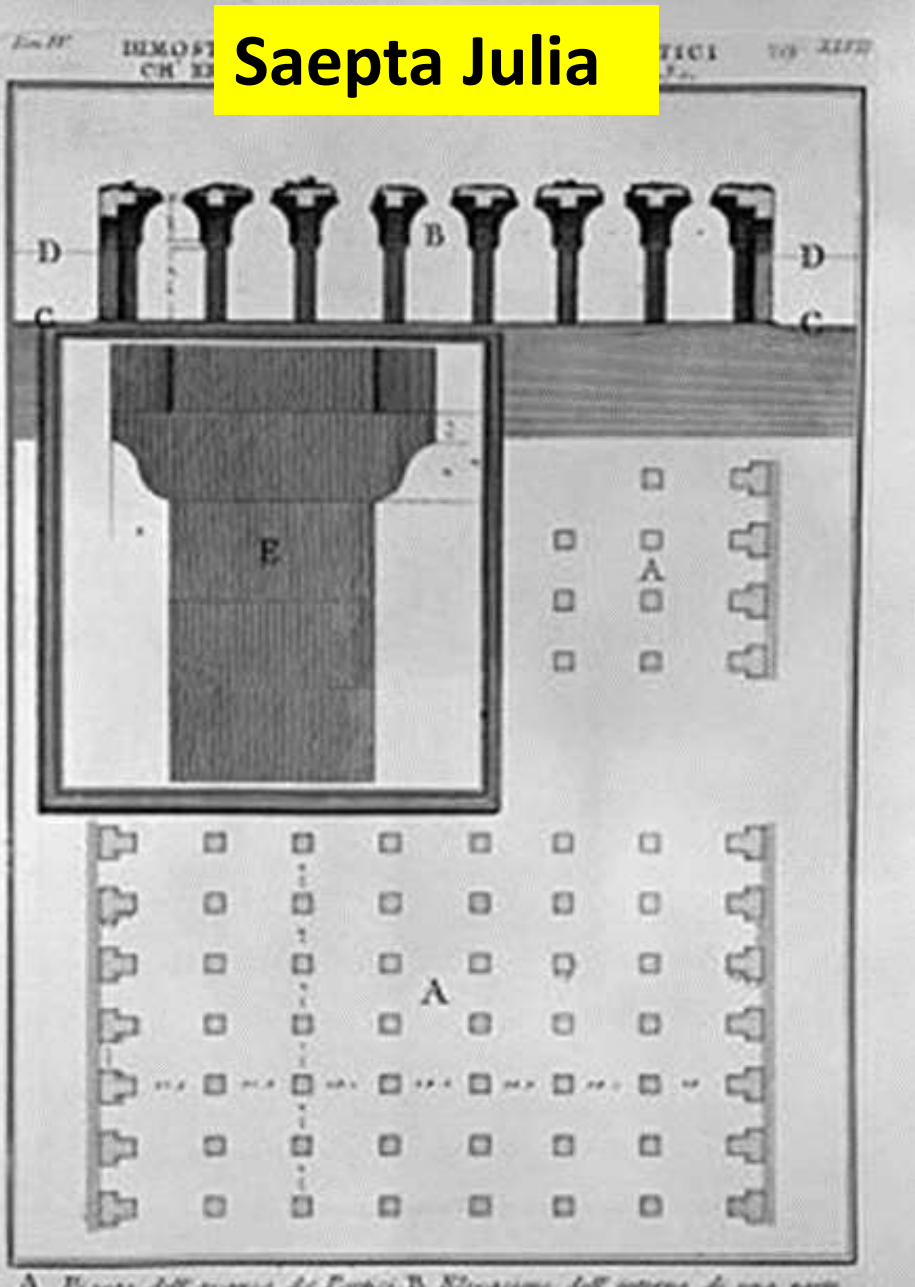
Bribery

- Giving out money.
 - Including distribution of money to members of tribes by patrons (through divisors).
- Lavish dinners (*cenae*) for clients and associates.
- Putting on games/entertainment for fellow tribesmen (via friends / associates).

How widespread
was popular
participation?

[When Gaius Gracchus first went for election to the tribunate in 123 BC] “so great a throng poured into the city from the country and took part in the elections that many could not be housed, and since the Campus Martius could not accommodate the multitude, they gave in their voices from the house-tops and tilings” – **Plutarch *Gaius Gracchus* 3.1.**





Variant views (1)

Henrik Mouritsen (2001):

- Assumes only a small part of the electorate took part.
- Illiteracy, small space for voting, complex and time consuming, and little compensation.

310m long and 120m wide

Voters would enter at northern end, lined up in tribal pens, then exit at southern end.

Variants views (2)

David Rafferty (2021):

- A larger portion of the electorate probably did vote, including rural voters.
- Capacity for 55,000 voters, but this does not factor in sequential voting.



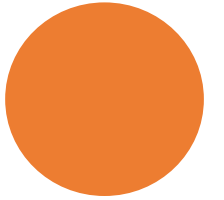


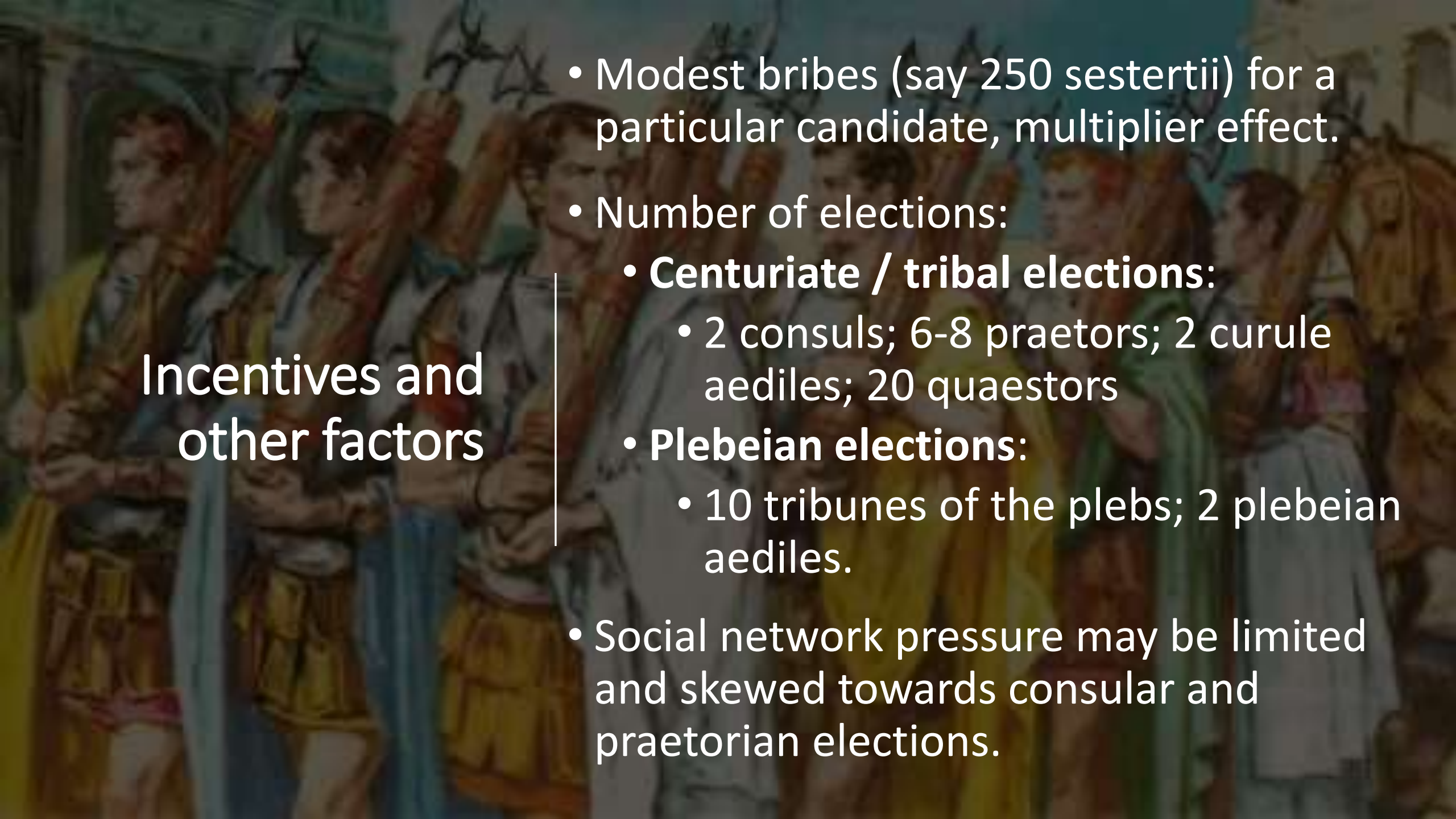
Size of the electorate

- Enfranchisement of the *socii* after Social War (91-87 BC).
- D. Rafferty suggests an active rural electorate, notably for the centuriate magistracies: esp. for Classes I-IV.
- Post-social war, this might mean turnout in the 10,000s to low 100,000s of voters.

Assumed disincentives for rural voters?

- Distance and concern over one's farm.
- **However**, down periods in agricultural year.
 - Initially elections held towards the end of the year (November to December) but moved to July by Sulla (80s BC).
- Those in central Italy perhaps less than 4 days travel to Rome



The background of the slide is a faded, historical-style illustration of a Roman procession. It depicts several men in traditional Roman attire, including togas and stolas. Some of the figures are carrying large, decorated poles or standards on their shoulders. The scene is set outdoors, with architectural elements like columns visible in the background. The overall tone is historical and academic.

Incentives and other factors

- Modest bribes (say 250 sestertii) for a particular candidate, multiplier effect.
- Number of elections:
 - **Centuriate / tribal elections:**
 - 2 consuls; 6-8 praetors; 2 curule aediles; 20 quaestors
 - **Plebeian elections:**
 - 10 tribunes of the plebs; 2 plebeian aediles.
- Social network pressure may be limited and skewed towards consular and praetorian elections.

Closing Question:
Does the Roman system
seem closer to some modern
democracies than the “direct
democracy of Athens”?
