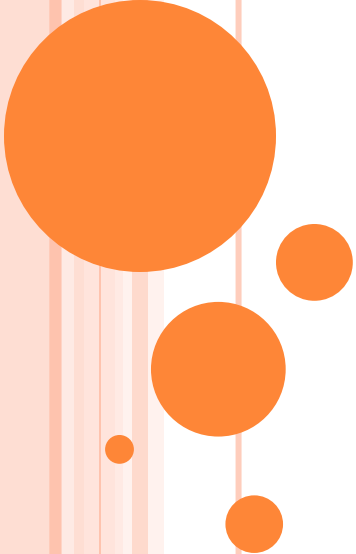




SPARTA: AN EXTRAORDINARY CITY

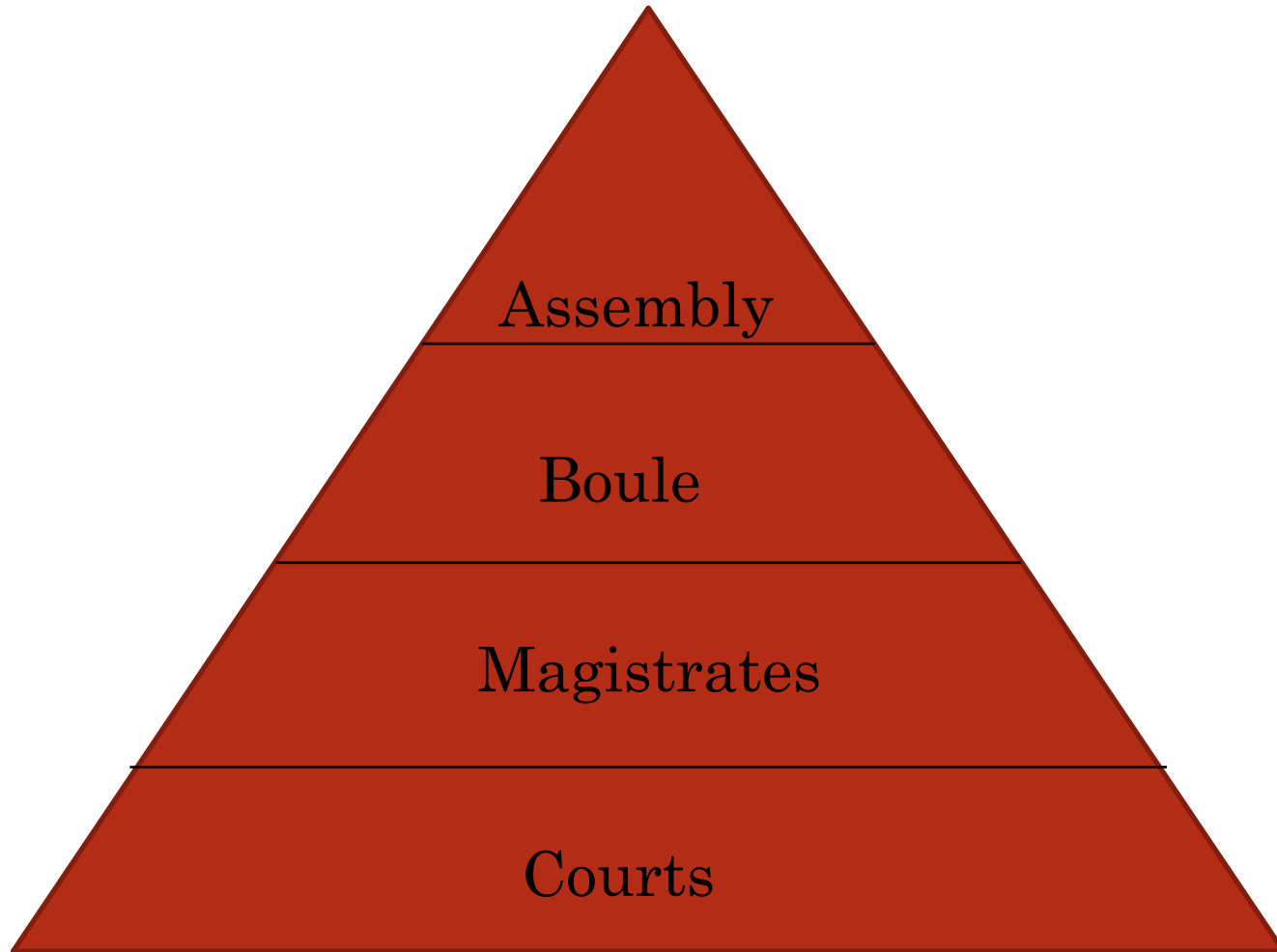
Lecture 16: Oligarchy

SPARTA AND OLIGARCHY

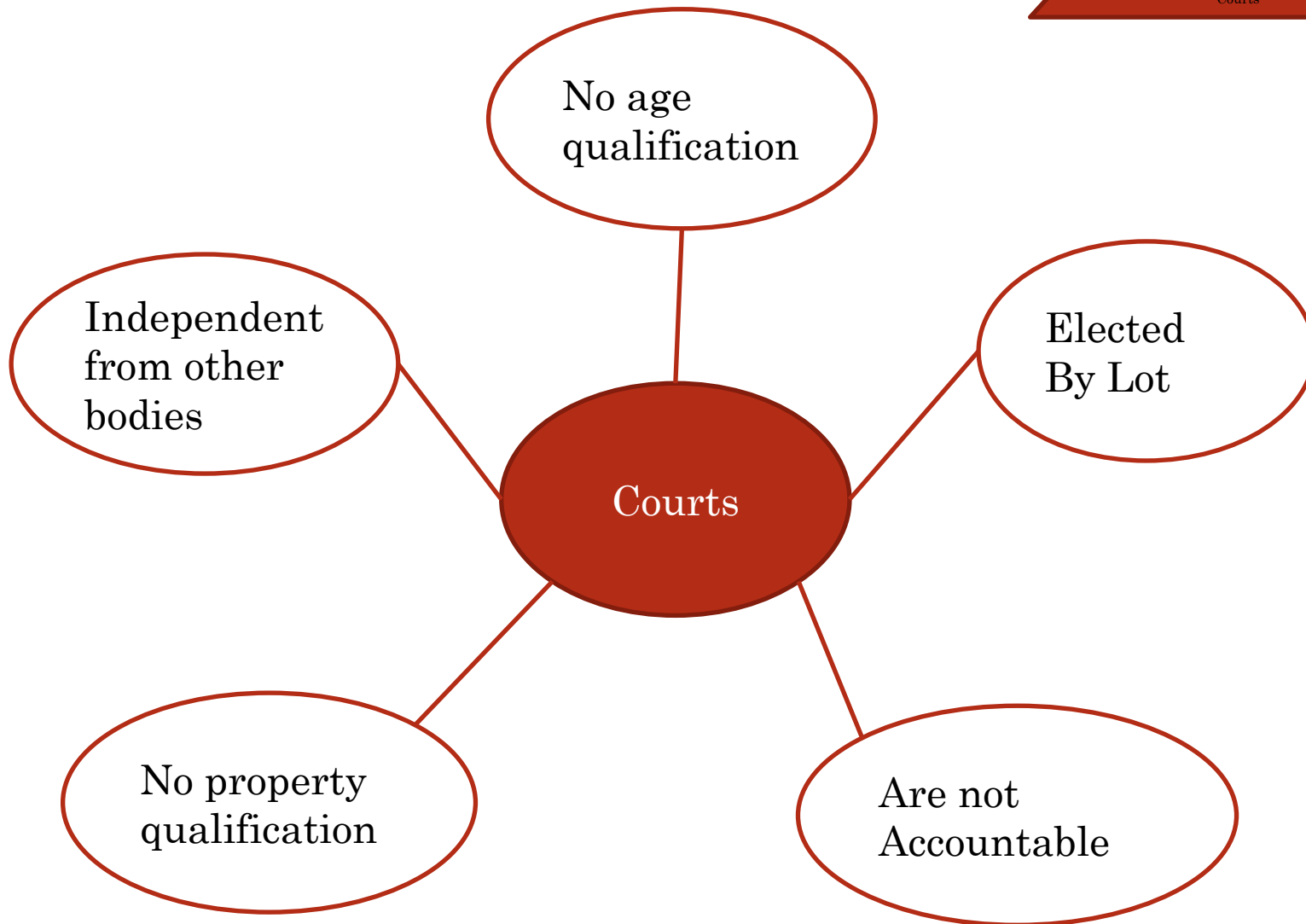
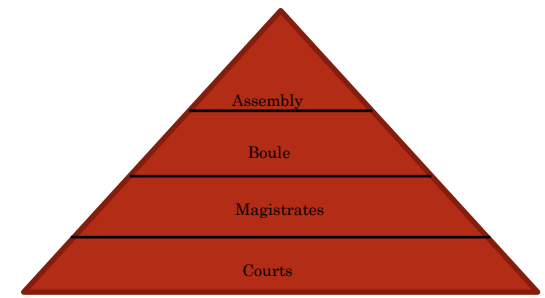
- The issue of Sparta and oligarchy is quite complicated.
- It is one of the most important theoretical issues because it affects not only our understanding of Spartan politics but also Spartan foreign policy especially in the 4th century.
- It is also one of the issues that concerned the Greek authors.



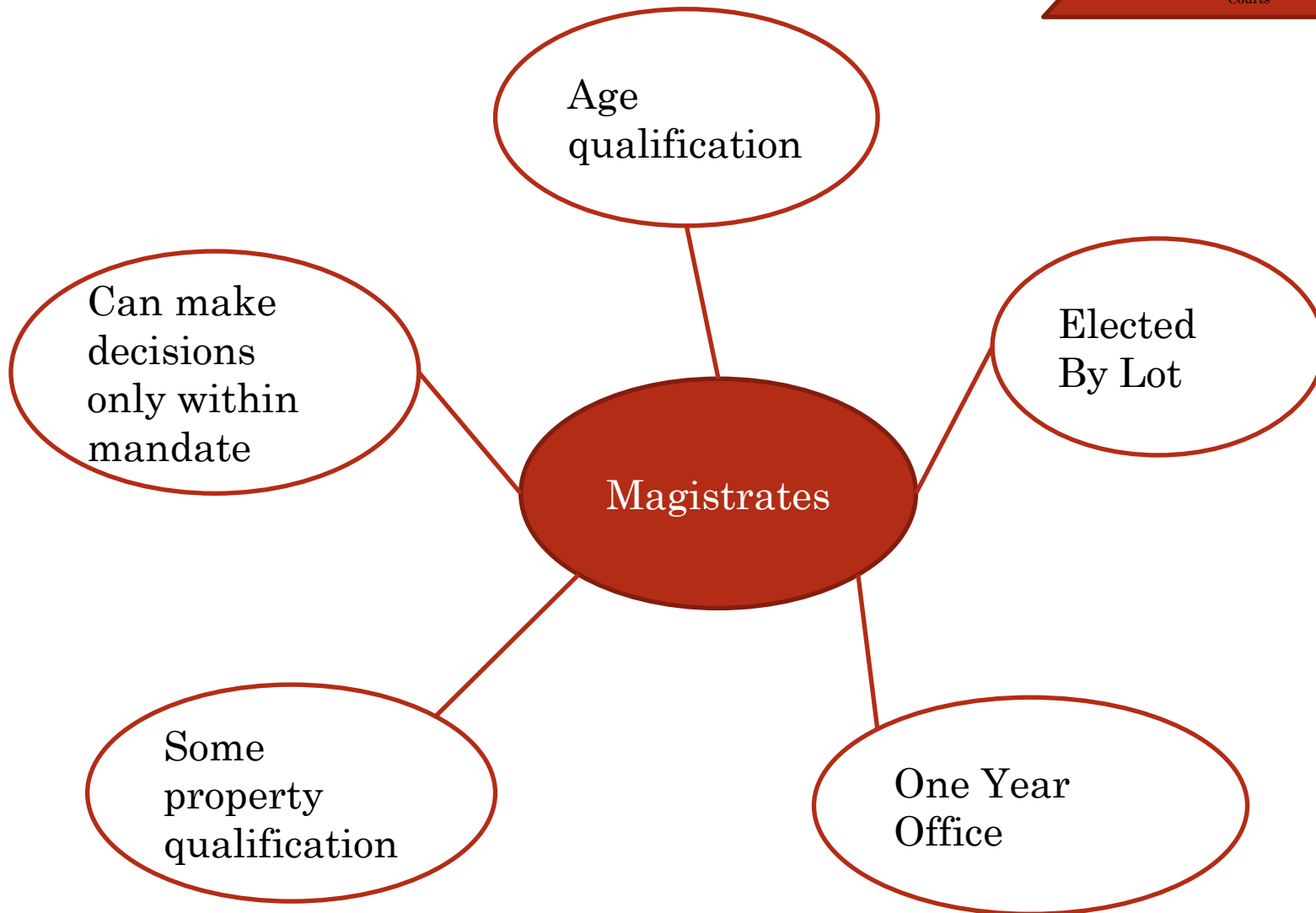
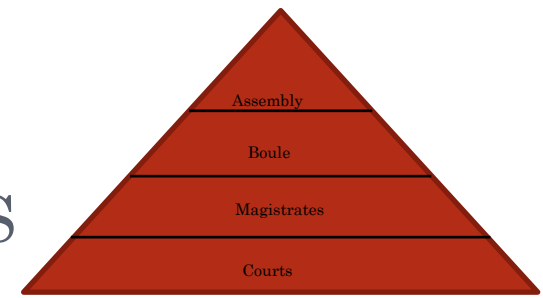
THE CONSTITUTIONS: DEMOCRACY



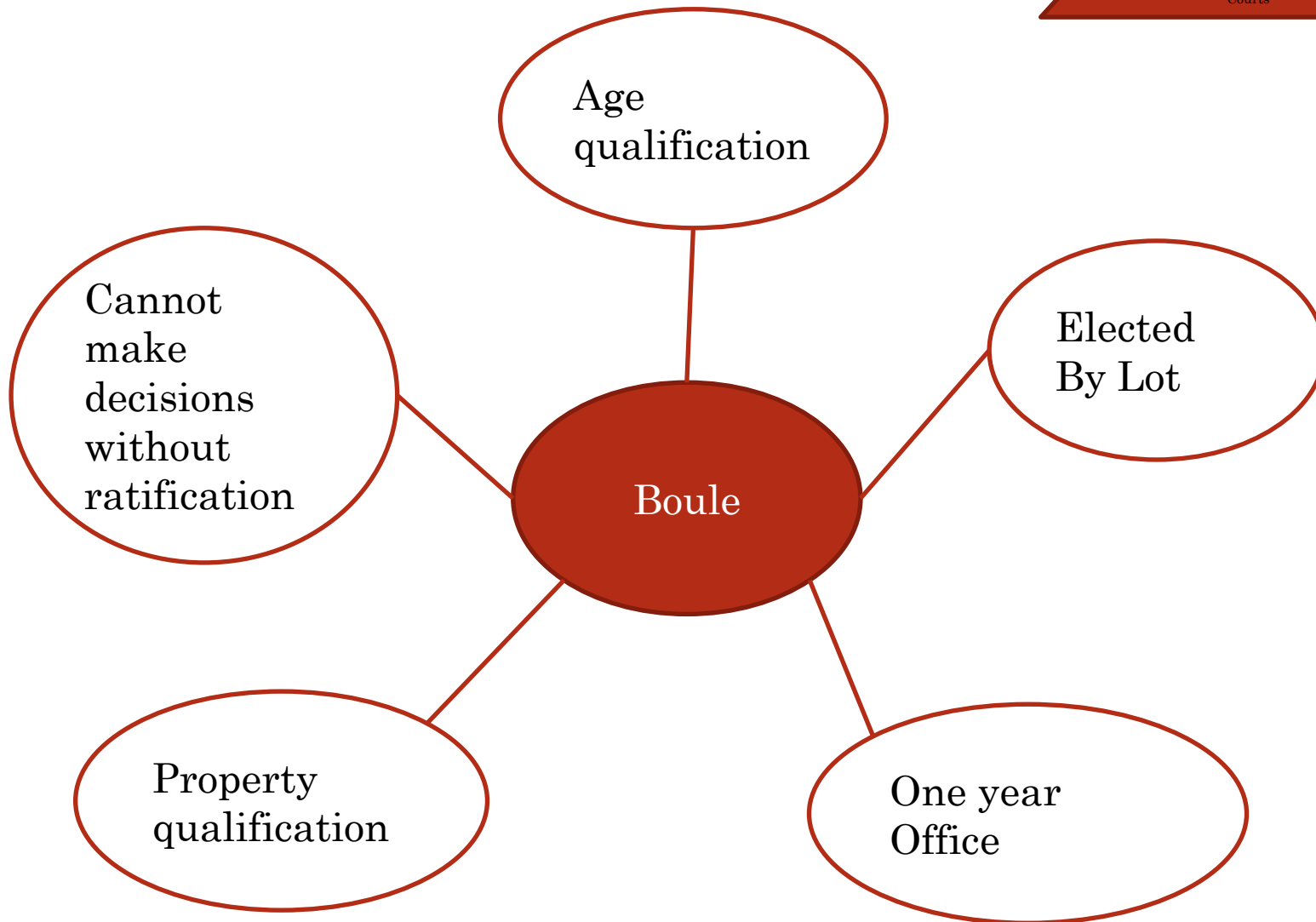
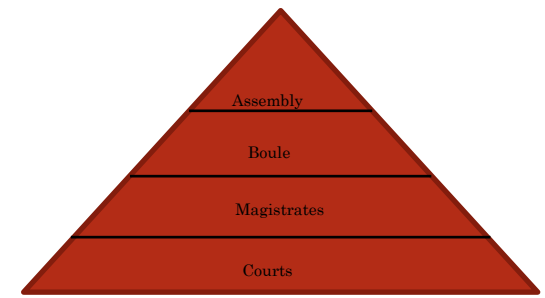
DEMOCRACY: THE COURTS



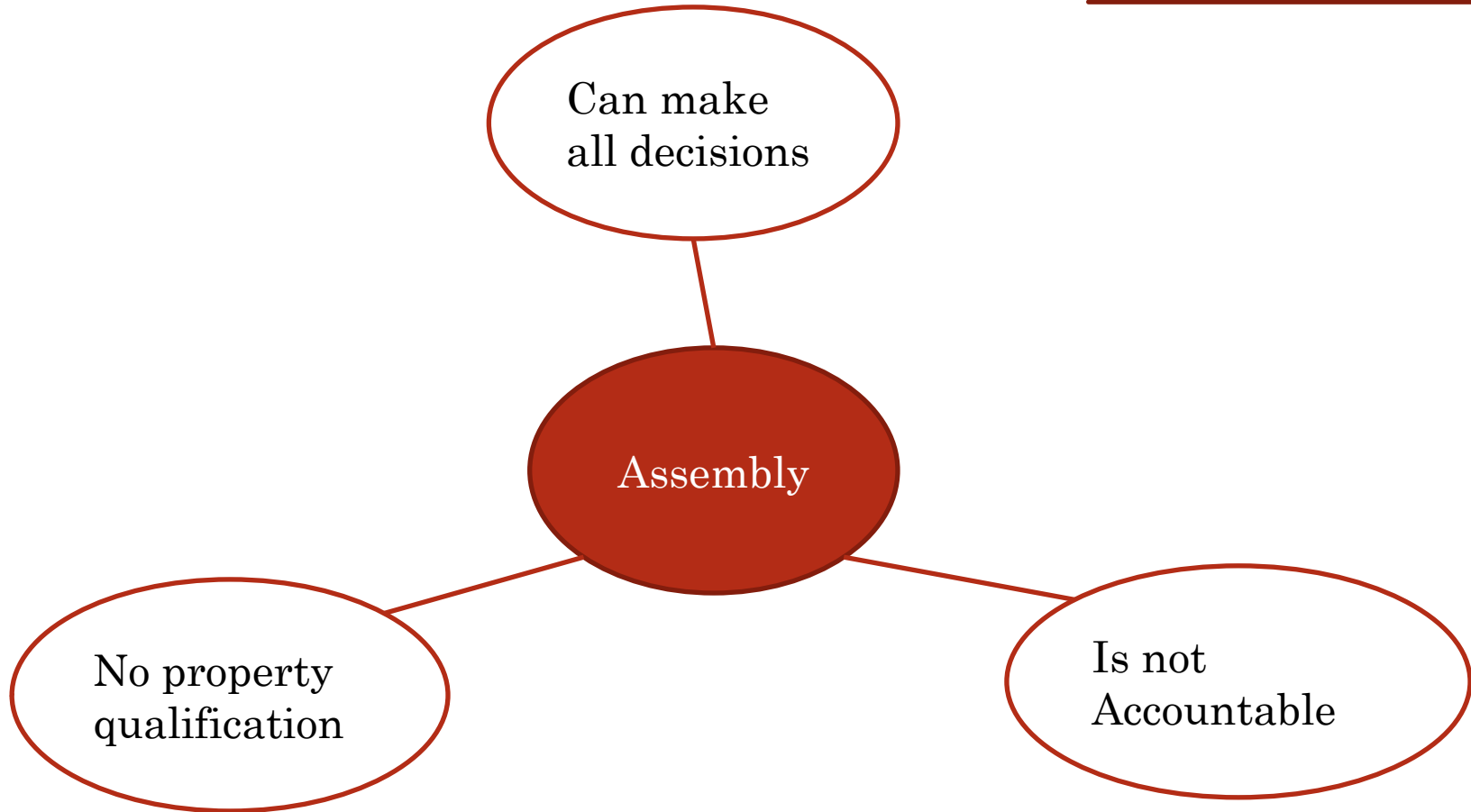
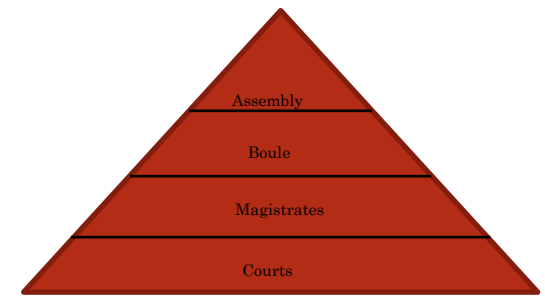
DEMOCRACY: THE MAGISTRATES



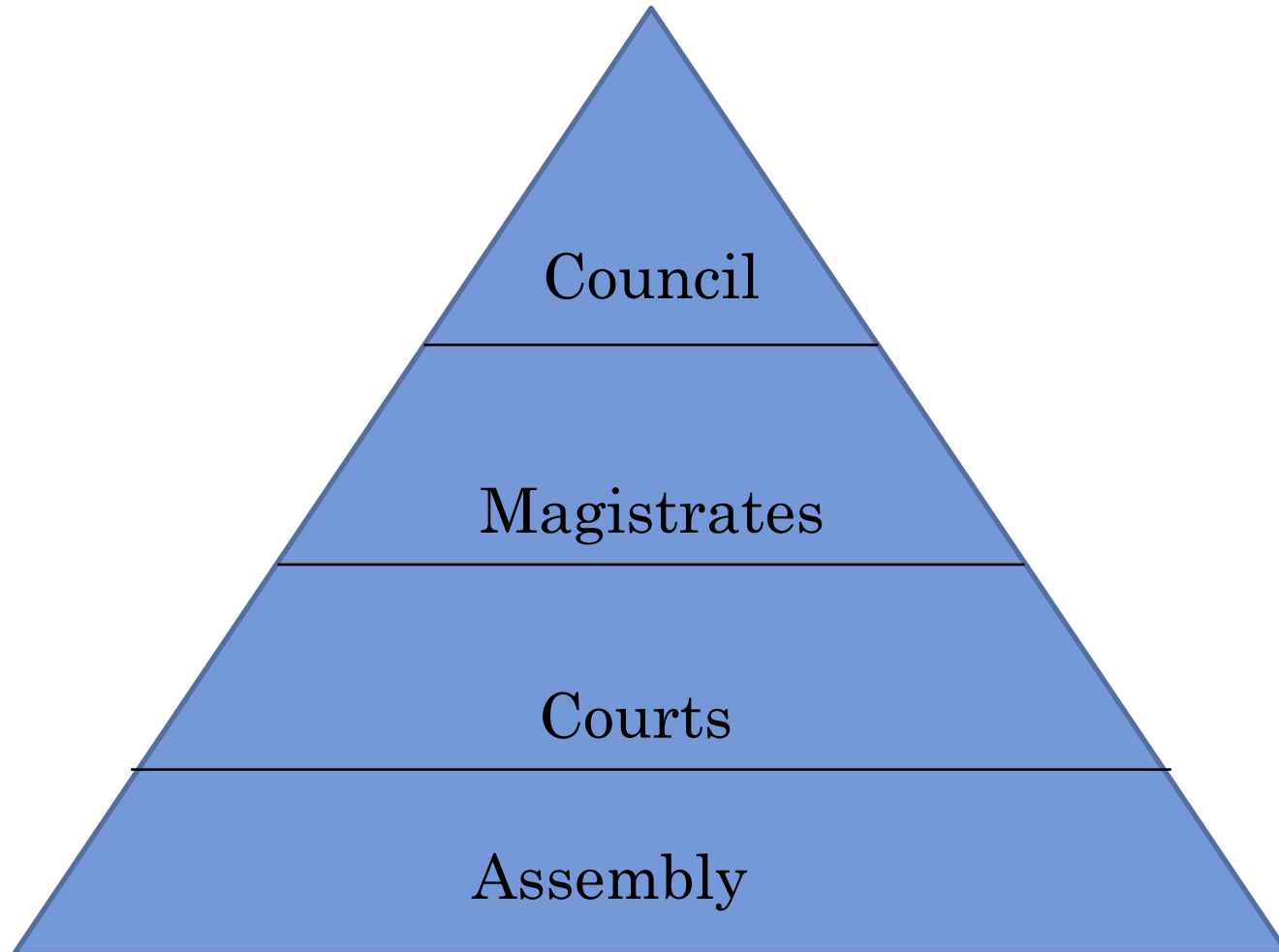
DEMOCRACY: THE BOULE



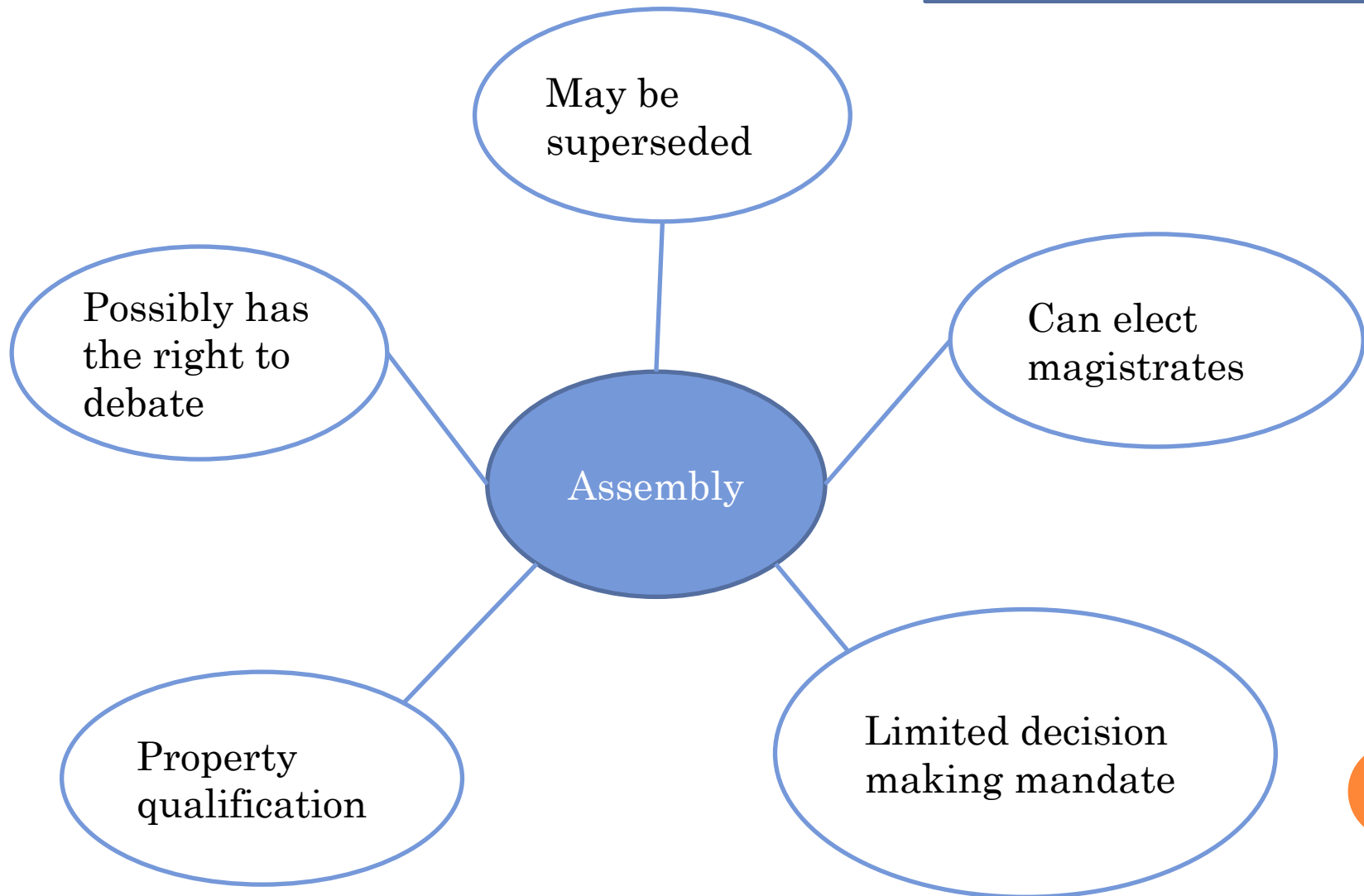
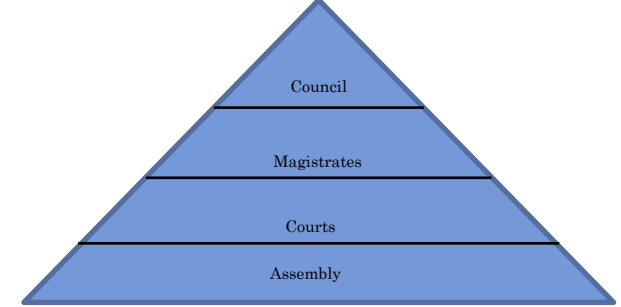
DEMOCRACY: THE ASSEMBLY



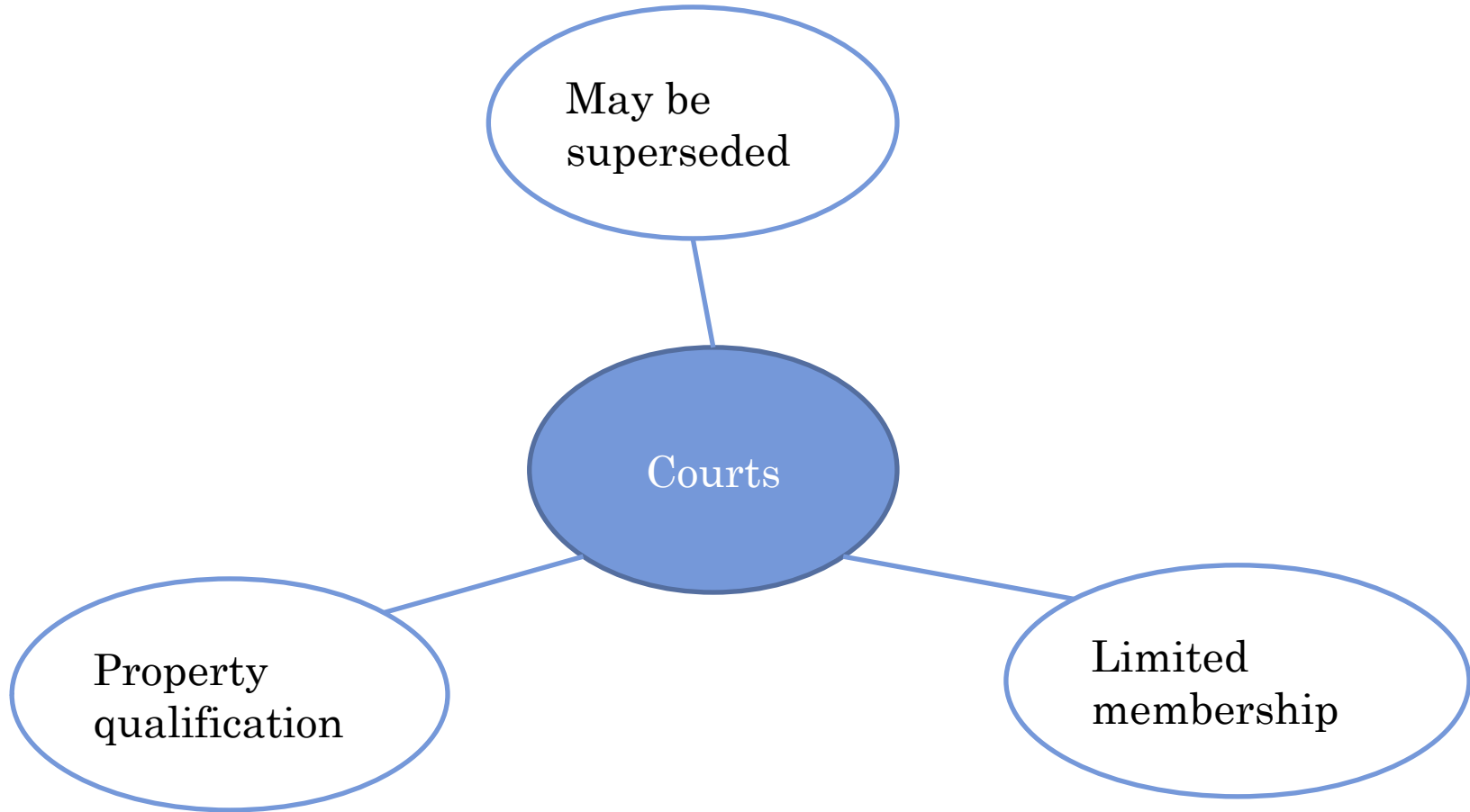
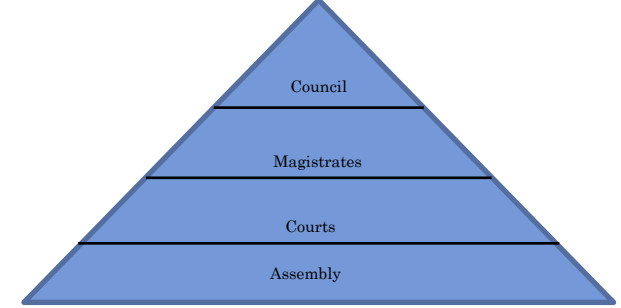
THE CONSTITUTIONS: OLIGARCHY



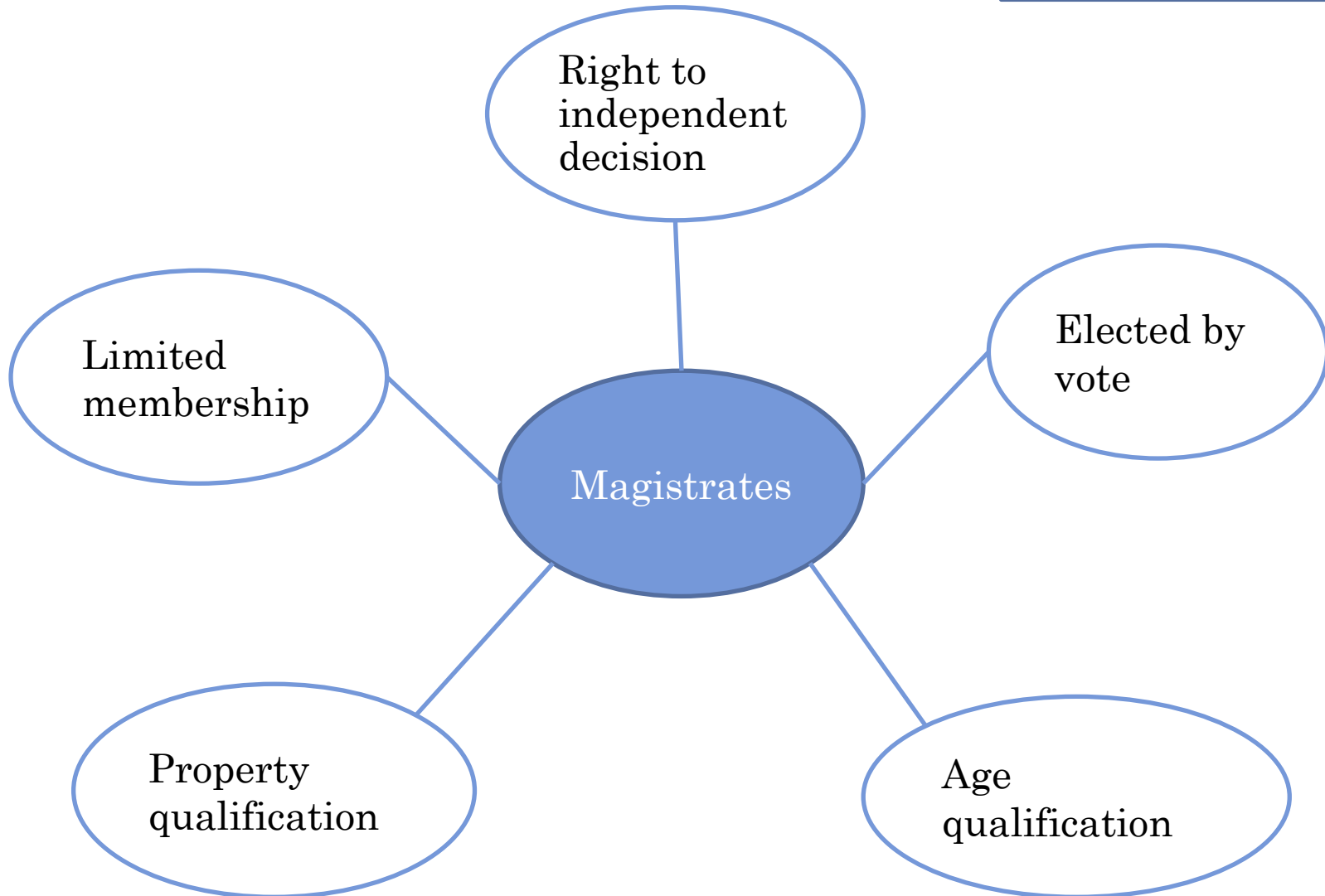
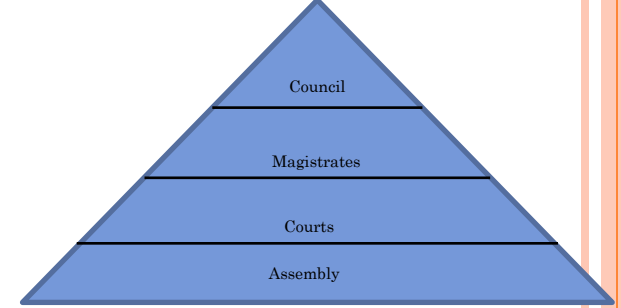
OLIGARCHY: THE ASSEMBLY



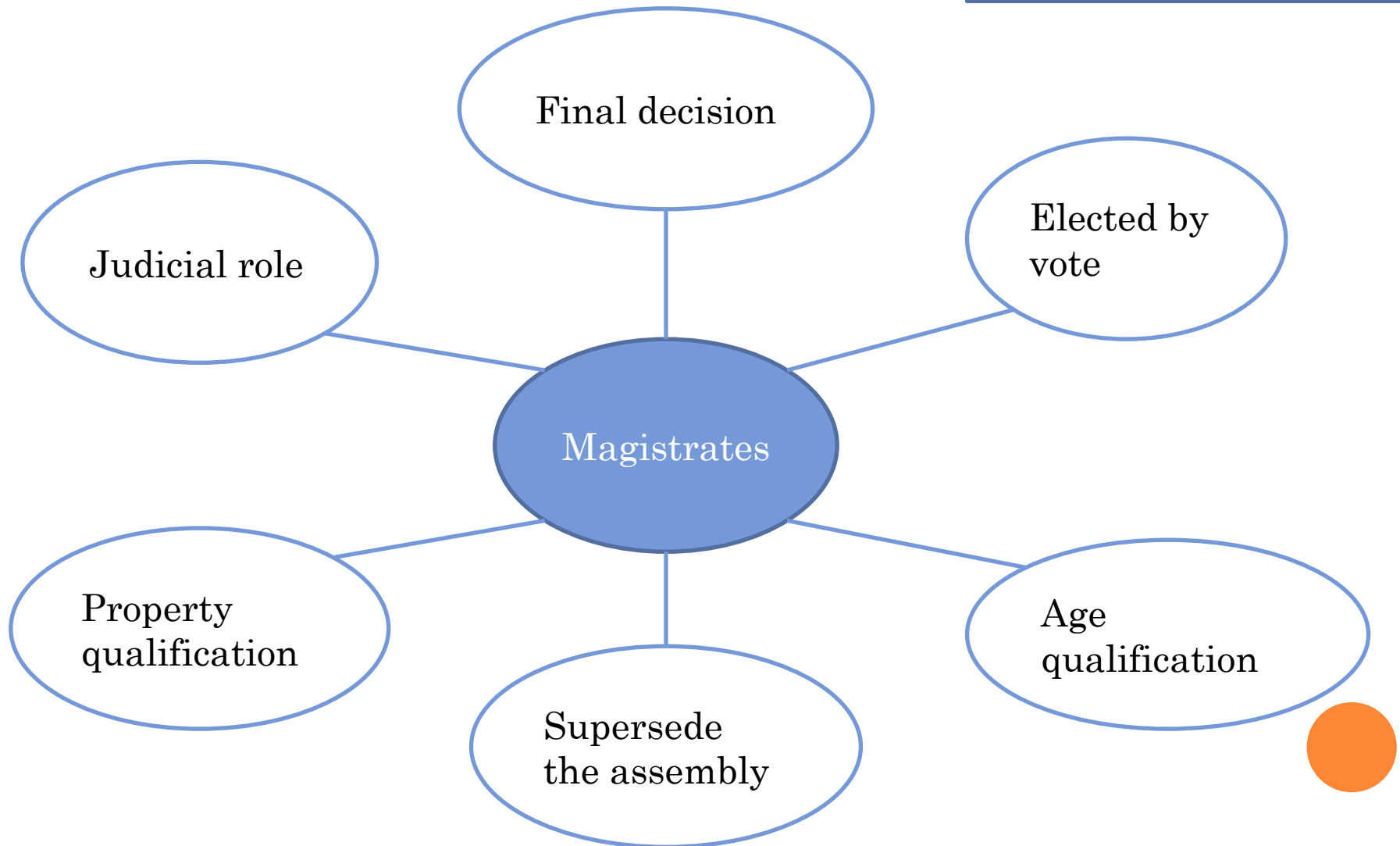
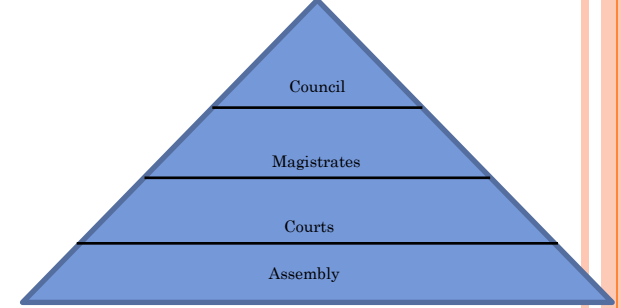
OLIGARCHY: THE COURTS



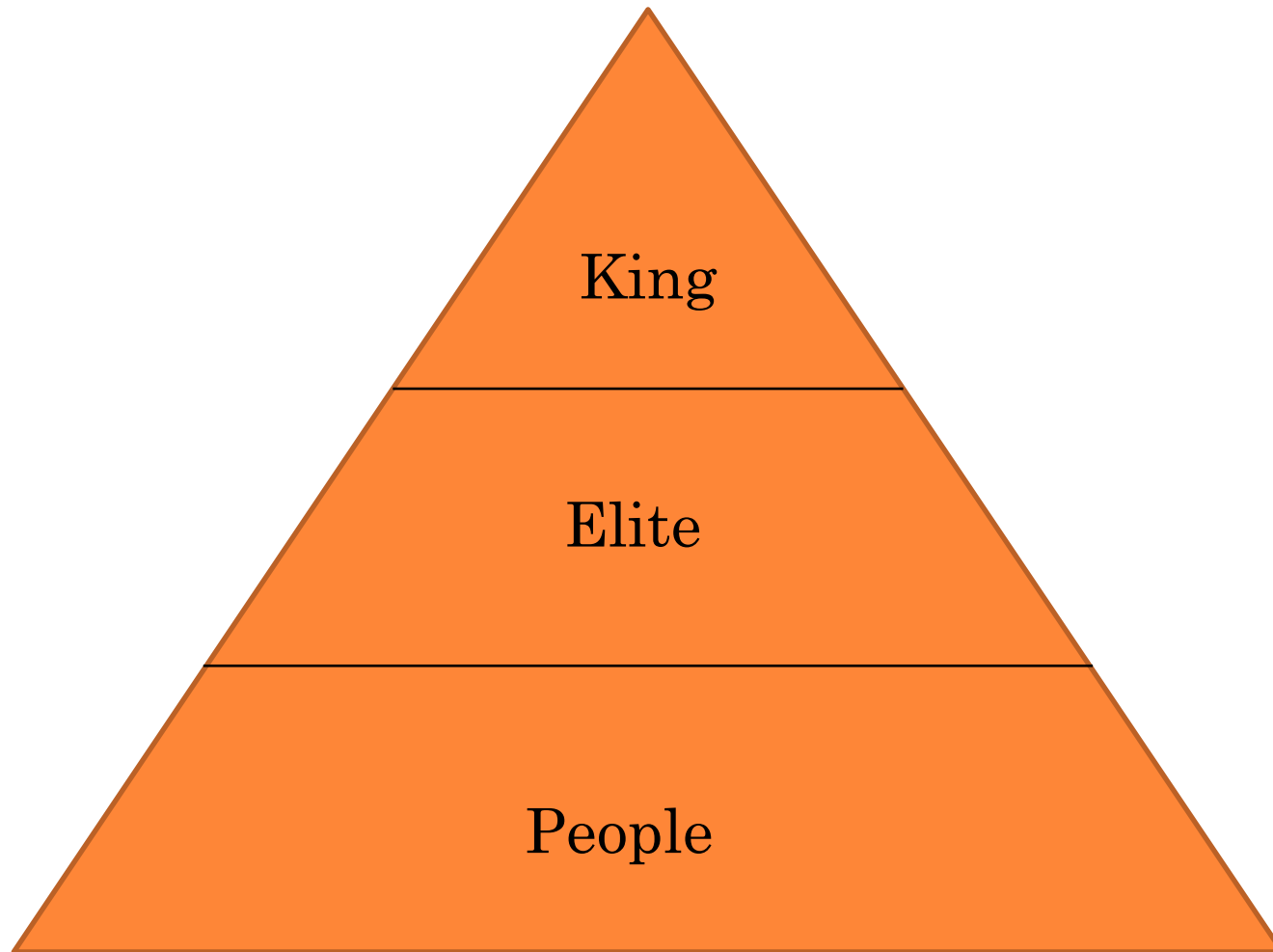
OLIGARCHY: THE MAGISTRATES



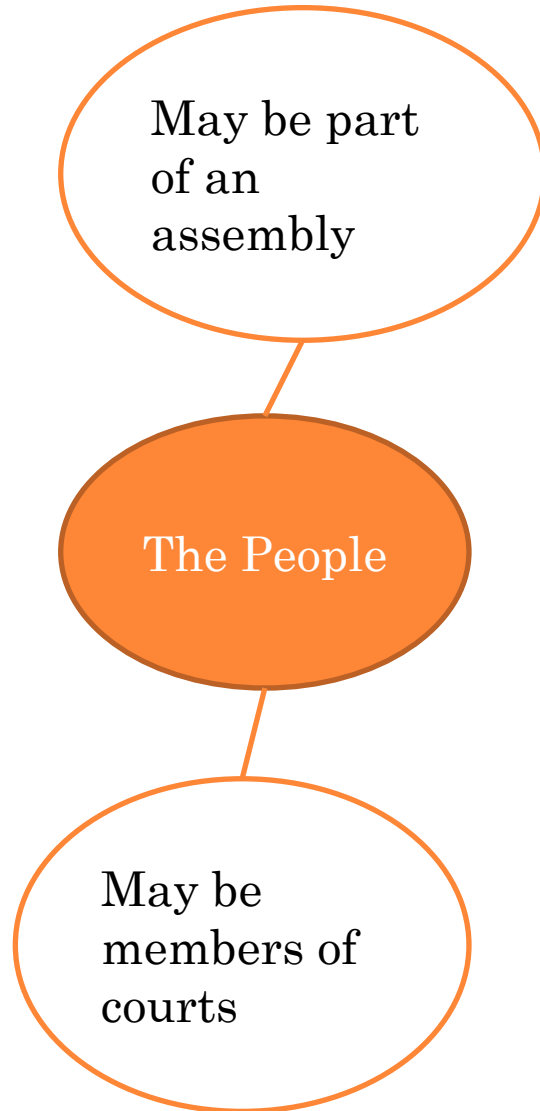
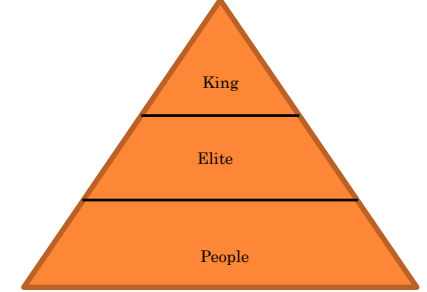
OLIGARCHY: THE COUNCIL



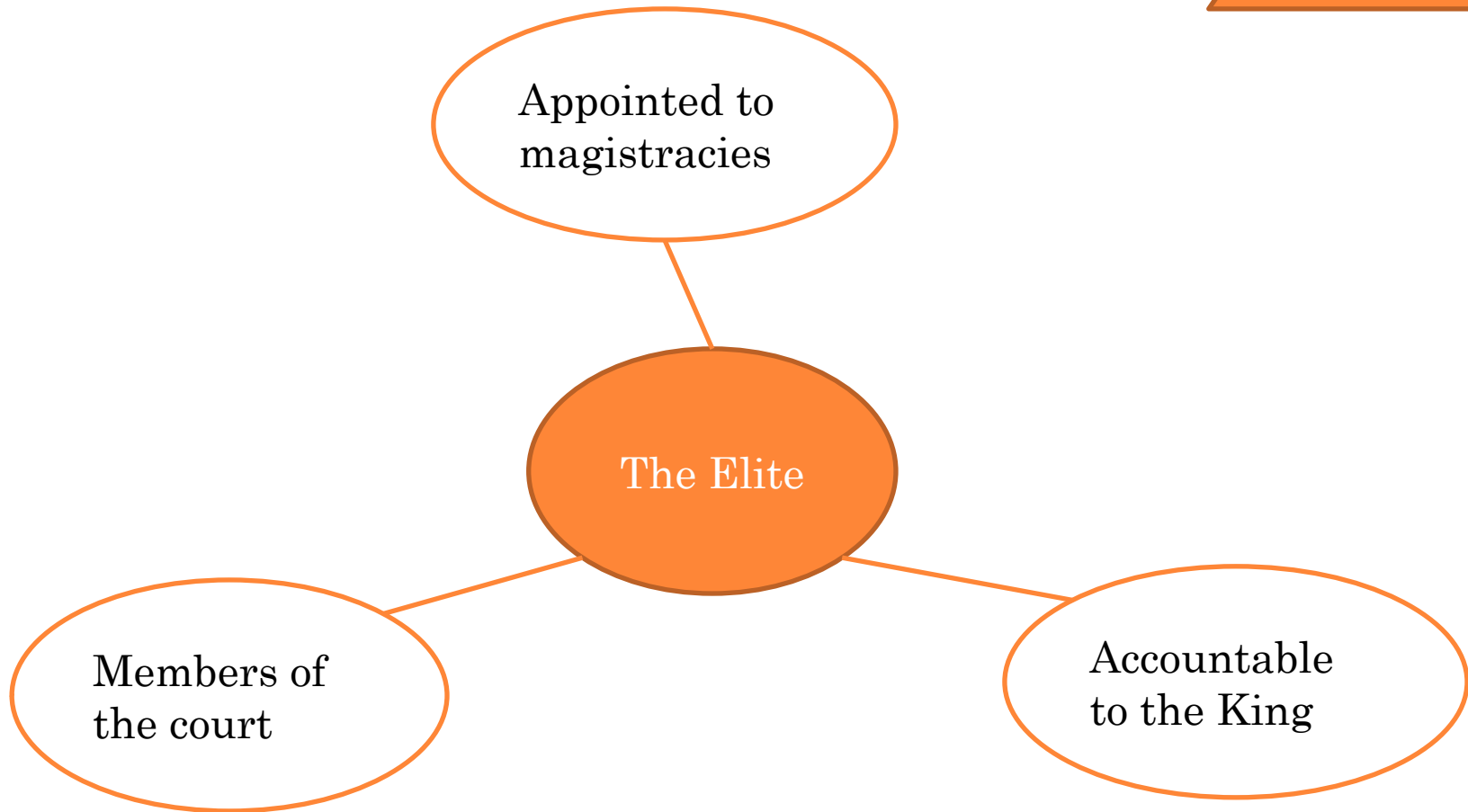
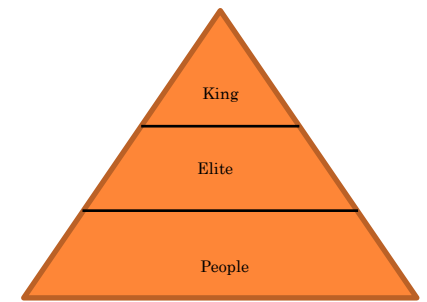
CONSTITUTIONS: MONARCHY/TYRANNY



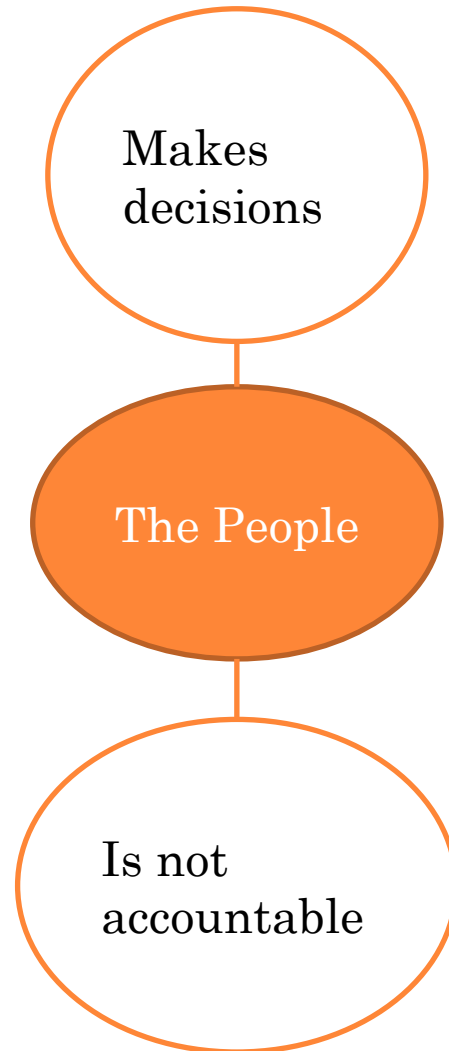
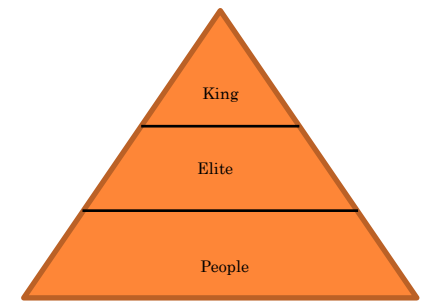
MONARCHY/TYRANNY: THE PEOPLE



MONARCHY/TYRANNY: THE ELITE



MONARCHY/TYRANNY: THE KING



SPARTA: DEMOCRACY OR OLIGARCHY?

This is the case with the constitution of Sparta. For many people endeavor to describe it as being a **democracy**, **because its system has many democratic features**, for instance first of all its **regulation for the rearing of boys**, **since the sons of the rich are brought up in the same way as those of the poor**, and are educated in a manner in which the sons of the poor also could be educated, and they are also treated similarly at the next age, and in the same manner when they are grown up, for there is **nothing that distinguishes the rich man from the poor man—thus the arrangements for food are the same for all at the common messes**, and the rich wear clothes such as even any poor man could procure, and also because of the two greatest offices the common people elect to one and share in the other (**they elect the Elders and share in the Ephorate**); but others call it an **oligarchy**, because it has many oligarchical features, for instance that **all the offices are elective and none appointed by lot and few persons have the power to sentence to death and exile**, and a number of other such matters.



SPARTA: DEMOCRACY OR OLIGARCHY?

In fact some people assert that the best constitution must be a combination of all the forms of constitution, and therefore praise the constitution of Sparta (for some people say that it consists of oligarchy, monarchy and democracy, meaning that the kingship is monarchy and the rule of the ephors oligarchy, but that an element of democracy is introduced by the rule of the ephors because the ephors come from the common people; while others pronounce the ephorate a tyranny but find an element of democracy in the public mess-tables and in the other regulations of daily life).

Aristotle *Politics* 1265b



POLYBIUS ON TYPES OF GOVERNMENTS

Most of those whose object it has been to instruct us methodically concerning such matters, distinguish three kinds of constitutions, which they call kingship, aristocracy, and democracy. Now we should, I think, be quite justified in asking them to enlighten us as to whether they represent these three to be the sole varieties or rather to be the best; for in either case my opinion is that they are wrong. **For it is evident that we must regard as the best constitution a combination of all these three varieties, since we have had proof of this not only theoretically but by actual experience, Lycurgus having been the first to draw up a constitution — that of Sparta — on this principle.** Nor on the other hand can we admit that these are the only three varieties; for we have witnessed monarchical and tyrannical governments, which while they differ very widely from kingship, yet bear a certain resemblance to it, this being the reason why monarchs in general falsely assume and use, as far as they can, the regal title. There have also been several oligarchical constitutions which seem to bear some likeness to aristocratic ones, though the divergence is, generally, as wide as possible. The same holds good about democracies. The truth of what I say is evident from the following considerations. It is by no means every monarchy which we can call straight off a kingship, but only that which is voluntarily accepted by the subjects and where they are governed rather by an appeal to their reason than by fear and force. Nor again can we style every oligarchy an aristocracy, but only that where the government is in the hands of a selected body of the justest and wisest men. Similarly that is no true democracy in which the whole crowd of citizens is free to do whatever they wish or purpose, but when, in a community where it is traditional and customary to reverence the gods, to honour our parents, to respect our elders, and to obey the laws, the will of the greater number prevails, this is to be called a democracy.

Polybius 6.3-4

SPARTA, DEMOCRACY AND OLIGARCHY

- For the Greeks, the Spartans had a mixed constitution managing to avoid the pitfalls of both democracy and oligarchy.
- In many ways, this understanding of the Spartan constitution as a mixed constitution was part of the appeal of the Spartan as an ideal political system.



SPARTA AND THE PEISISTRATIDS

After this the Lacedaemonians sent out a greater army to attack Athens, appointing as its general their king Cleomenes son of Anaxandrides. This army they sent not by sea but by land. When they broke into Attica, the Thessalian horsemen were the first to meet them. They were routed after only a short time, and more than forty men were slain. Those who were left alive made off for Thessaly by the nearest way they could. Then Cleomenes, when he and the Athenians who desired freedom came into the city, drove the tyrants' family within the Pelasgic wall and besieged them there.

Herodotos 5.64



SPARTA AND CONSTITUTIONS OUTSIDE SPARTA: TYRANNY

- In the 6th century, Sparta became the bane of tyranny in the Greek world.
- Often we tend to associate resistance to tyranny with democracy but for the Greeks the main anti-tyrannical regime was a mixed constitution.



SPARTA AND CLEISTHENES

When Cleisthenes had drawn into his own party the Athenian people, which was then debarred from all rights, he gave the tribes new names and increased their number, making ten tribe-wardens in place of four, and assigning ten districts to each tribe. When he had won over the people, he was stronger by far than the rival faction. Isagoras, who was on the losing side, devised a counter-plot, and invited the aid of Cleomenes, who had been his friend since the besieging of the Pisistratidae. ... Then Cleomenes first sent a herald to Athens demanding the banishment of Cleisthenes and many other Athenians with him, the Accursed, as he called them. This he said in his message by Isagoras' instruction, for the Alcmeonidae and their faction were held to be guilty of that bloody deed while Isagoras and his friends had no part in it.

Herodotos 5.69-70



SPARTA AND CONSTITUTIONS OUTSIDE SPARTA: DEMOCRACY

- Sparta from very early clearly does not seem to like overtly democratic constitutions or at least prefers more traditional aristocracies.
- Theoretically it could be argued that Sparta having a mixed constitution did not agree, or want to support, any extreme constitution, either monarchical or democratic.



SPARTA AND CONSTITUTIONS OUTSIDE SPARTA: OLIGARCHY

- Sparta does not appear to generally support oligarchies blindly in the archaic and early classical periods.
- However, it is clear that most of its allies are under oligarchic constitutions and judging from Cleomenes reaction to Cleisthenes, oligarchies are preferred to democracies



FROM OLIGARCHY TO DECARCHY

- The institution of the decarchies was a clear message on the part of Sparta that democracy would not be tolerated.



ACTION OR REACTION?

In regard to the allies: the Athenians sail out and lay information as they are said to do; they hate the aristocrats inasmuch as they realize that the ruler is necessarily hated by the ruled and that if the rich and aristocratic men in the cities are strong, the rule of the people at Athens will last for a very short time. This is why they disfranchise the aristocrats, take away their money, expel and kill them, whereas they promote the interests of the lower class. The Athenian aristocrats protect their opposite numbers in the allied cities, since they realize that it will be to their advantage always to protect the finer people in the cities.

Old Oligarch 1.14



DECARCHIES AND ATHENIAN IMPERIAL RULE

- Athens had a tendency to impose democracy as a constitution on the allies.
- In some ways, the Spartan effort to establish close oligarchies can be viewed as a reaction to democratic pro-Athenian constitutions.



IS A DECARCHY AN OLIGARCHY?

- It is easy to look at decarchies as oligarchic constitutions.
- But judging from the Thirty in Athens, the decarchies would be considered tyrannies not oligarchies by the Greeks.
- So for example the constitution of the 5000 was considered an oligarchy but the regime of the Thirty a tyranny.



DID THE SPARTANS SUPPORT OLIGARCHIES?

- The Spartans generally supported oligarchies over democracies but more importantly supported pro-Spartan parties and politicians.
- That is best seen in both Thebes and Corinth, where the anti-Spartan element was mainly oligarchic not democratic.



FOLLOW-UP READING

- Plutarch *Life of Agesilaus*
- Flower, M.A. 'Agesilaus of Sparta and the Origins of the Ruler Cult' *The Classical Quarterly, New Series*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (1988), pp. 123-134
- Rice, D.G. 'Agesilaus, Agesipolis, and Spartan Politics, 386-379 B.C.' *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, Vol. 23, no. 2 (2nd Qtr., 1974), pp. 164-182

