DT-10 Governance after collapse: what people built when the state withdrew

When the logistical, military, and administrative superstructures of complex states collapse, human populations do not default to an unorganized vacuum. Instead, they immediately generate decentralized institutions of governance to manage resources, resolve disputes, and organize defense. A rigorous examination of post-collapse environments—from post-Roman Europe and post-Mycenaean Greece to post-Soviet Central Asia—reveals that these emergent systems share common structural features, vulnerabilities, and trajectories. However, the romanticization of the "primitive" must be discarded: early and small-scale governance was frequently characterized by extreme violence, strict social stratification, and a high susceptibility to elite capture by individuals exhibiting dark-triad traits (narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy).

The historical and archaeological records demonstrate a distinct sequence of post-collapse organization. First, acute physical security is localized at the household or manor level, as populations retreat behind walls and submit to warlords for basic survival. Second, lateral resource management and dispute arbitration mechanisms emerge at the village or valley level to prevent mutual ecological and economic destruction. Third, as populations recover and surpluses grow, coercive stratification re-emerges, often resulting in regional confederations that are subsequently captured by the most violent or manipulative factions.

1. Post-Roman Western Europe: The Peasant Mode and Mutual Surety

Following the political and economic fragmentation of the Western Roman Empire in the fifth century, the complex Mediterranean economic network contracted into localized, autonomous communities. Christopher Wickham's 2005 analysis, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, posits the emergence of a "peasant mode of production" between 400 and 800 CE, where localized subsistence and reciprocity replaced surplus extraction by a central aristocracy[1]. In sub-Roman Britain and post-Carolingian spaces, this localized governance evolved into the Anglo-Saxon *borh* (suretyship) and later the Norman *frankpledge*[4].

Under the frankpledge system, men over the age of twelve were grouped into *tithings*—units of ten households—which were mutually liable for the conduct of their members. These tithings were required to produce offenders at the *hundred* court, a localized administrative body[4]. The creation of written law codes coincided with Christianization, utilizing the threat of divine and secular penalties. The laws of Æthelberht (c. 600 CE), Ine of Wessex (688–694 CE), Alfred the Great (890s CE), and Cnut the Great (1016–1035 CE) heavily codified these responsibilities, assigning specific financial values to human life and property based on strict social hierarchies[6]. Participants within the system articulated its function as the preservation of the "king's peace" (Old English: *mund*), ensuring communal harmony and justice through mutual responsibility and oath-swearing[4]. They claimed it was a righteous system that protected the vulnerable from unchecked violence. However, the historical and archaeological record, evidenced by court rolls

from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, demonstrates that frankpledge functioned primarily as a highly effective, coercive mechanism for social control and revenue extraction. Entire tithings were heavily fined (amercements) if a member fled or if the group failed to report a crime, effectively transferring the cost of policing directly to the peasantry while generating immense profit for the crown and manorial lords[4]. Modern scholarship, synthesized by William Alfred Morris (1910) and Patrick Wormald (1999), infers that frankpledge was a transitional technology of statecraft. It allowed a weak central authority to leverage local horizontal ties for vertical extraction and control, formalizing the enclosure of the peasantry into a self-policing taxation unit[5].

Scale Rung	Viability & Historical Context	Capture Test (Dark Triad Dynamics & Defenses)
Household (4-10)	**N/A:** The system explicitly relied on inter-household dynamics to function.	**Mechanism:** A psychopathic individual within a tithing commits crimes and absconds, leaving the other nine households financially liable for the *wite* (fine)[4].
Hamlet/Band (30-50)	**Worked:** The tithing (10 men/households) operated effectively due to high visibility and interpersonal leverage in rural environments.	**Historical Case:** Wealthy freemen and clergy were exempt. Machiavellian manorial lords turned their estates into private *frith-borhs*, absorbing landless men into serfdom to pay their fines[4].
Village (150-500)	**Worked:** The village (*vill*) maintained multiple tithings, interfacing at the bi-annual "view of frankpledge" to settle debts and oaths[4].	**Resistance/Reversal:** The mutual financial liability incentivized the tithing to swiftly apprehend and turn over violent or manipulative actors to avoid collective ruin, leveraging peer pressure against dark-triad behavior.
Parish/District (1.5k-5k)	**Worked:** The *hundred* court	**Failure Mode:** As

	aggregated tithings, meeting regularly to process the presentment of crimes[5].	demographics shifted post-Black Death, anonymity increased, and the collective liability model broke down, replaced by appointed constables[12].
Town/Watershed (15k-50k)	**Failed:** Urban density and transience diluted the informal monitoring required for mutual surety.	**Mechanism:** Urban environments allowed psychopaths to evade the reputational damage necessary for mutual surety to function.
Region (0.5m-5m)	**Failed:** Required specialized bureaucracies and standing armies beyond peer-to-peer surety.	**N/A**
Nation/Continent (50m-500m)	**Never Tried:** Incompatible with macro-scale governance.	**N/A**
Planet (8 billion)	**Never Tried:** Incompatible with macro-scale governance.	**N/A**

2. Post-Mycenaean Greece: The Oikos and the Gift-Devouring Basileus

The collapse of the Mycenaean palatial economies around 1200 BCE initiated the Greek Dark Age, characterized by a dramatic 75 percent population decline, the total loss of Linear B literacy, and the abandonment of up to 90 percent of small sites in the Peloponnese[14]. Large towns vanished entirely. At Nichoria in Messenia, a substantial Bronze Age town was abandoned around 1150 BCE and only reemerged by 1075 BCE as a minor village of approximately forty families[15]. Governance retreated to the *oikos* (the noble household). By the eighth century BCE, as documented in Hesiod's didactic poem *Works and Days*, power was held by the *basileus* (local chieftain), who acted as a judge and distributor of resources but was highly susceptible to bribery and coercion[16].

The emic perspective of the era, articulated by Hesiod, claimed that the gods—specifically Zeus—demanded justice and protected the weak. Hesiod argued that "good strife" (honest

agricultural labor) was rewarded, while "bad strife" (courtroom manipulation and violence) brought divine ruin[17]. The local populations viewed the *basileis* as necessary arbiters of this divine justice. Conversely, the etic record demonstrates a violent, hierarchical society where physical power and wealth dictated all outcomes. Iron replaced bronze, and local strongmen violently appropriated land and resources from weaker neighbors[14]. Modern scholarship infers that the Dark Age was a period of intense proto-class formation. The *basileus* was not a formalized king, but a warlord whose authority rested purely on the redistribution of plunder and the control of agricultural surpluses, laying the brutal groundwork for the later Archaic oligarchies[14].

Scale Rung	Viability & Historical Context	Capture Test (Dark Triad Dynamics & Defenses)
Household (4-10)	**Worked:** The *oikos* was the absolute center of production, defense, and legal protection in a stateless void.	**Mechanism:** Machiavellian elites manipulated dispute resolution. Hesiod literally calls them "gift-devouring kings" who accepted bribes to dispossess freemen of their land[17].
Hamlet/Band (30-50)	**Worked:** Nichoria-style settlements (40 families) operated via face-to-face dominant hierarchies[15].	**Historical Case:** Hesiod's own brother, Perses, bribed the *basileis* to seize Hesiod's inheritance[17]. The Fable of the Hawk and the Nightingale illustrates the raw "might makes right" reality of psychopaths in power[17].
Village (150-500)	**Worked:** Governed by shifting alliances of competing *basileis* seeking to absorb weaker households.	**Resistance/Reversal:** Resistance was primarily ideological (appeals to *Aidos* or shame, and *Nemesis* or righteous indignation), but structurally, there were no physical checks on a strong, wealthy warlord other than a stronger warlord[18].

Parish/District (1.5k-5k)	**Failed:** Constant inter-elite feuding prevented consolidation without returning to palatial/state models.	**Mechanism:** Narcissistic feuding among elites repeatedly fragmented attempts at district-level cooperation.
Town/Watershed (15k-50k)	**Never Tried:** The polis required the later re-invention of state institutions (c. 800 BCE).	**N/A**
Region (0.5m-5m)	**Never Tried:** The population density of post-collapse Greece could not support this.	**N/A**
Nation to Planet	**Never Tried:** Incompatible with dark age technology.	**N/A**

3. The Icelandic Commonwealth: Feud as Governance

Established in 930 CE by Norwegian exiles fleeing the centralization of King Harald Fairhair, the Icelandic Commonwealth represents a rigorous historical experiment in building a society with complex law but no executive state[19]. Governance was localized around originally thirty-nine *goðar* (chieftains), whose authority (*goðorð*) was a tradable, non-territorial commodity[21]. The system relied on the *Althing* (national assembly) for legislation and structured blood feud for enforcement[23]. The legal code, the *Grágás*, mapped out specific penalties—such as *fjorbaugsgardur* (lesser outlawry) and *skoggangur* (full outlawry)—but left the execution of these penalties entirely to the victims[24].

The participants within the Icelandic system depicted a society where free men (*bændur*) could freely choose their *goði*, maintaining an egalitarian balance of power through carefully calibrated blood-prices (wergild) and peacemaking arbitration[23]. They believed their system prevented tyranny by ensuring no single king could hold a monopoly on violence. However, the historical record demonstrates that feuds were highly destructive and intergenerational. The enforcement of law relied entirely on the aggrieved party's ability to muster physical force[24]. The system culminated in the Sturlung Era (thirteenth century), a violent civil war where five families bought up all the *goðorð* and weaponized the law to eradicate their rivals[21]. Modern scholarship, particularly the work of Jesse Byock (1982) and William Ian Miller (1990), infers that feud was a highly structured social institution meant to channel and limit violence, not an absence of order[29]. Nevertheless, because the system lacked anti-monopoly constraints on power accumulation, it inevitably drifted from a polycentric network of freeholders into a violent

oligarchy, leading directly to its collapse and submission to the Norwegian Crown in 1262 CE[19].

Scale Rung	Viability & Historical Context	Capture Test (Dark Triad Dynamics & Defenses)
Household (4-10)	**Worked:** Farms were independent, heavily armed economic units.	**Mechanism:** A wealthy, psychopathic *goði* commits a crime and refuses to pay compensation, daring the victims to muster enough force to outlaw him[24].
Hamlet/Band (30-50)	**Worked:** Local kinship groups mobilized for feud and defense.	**Historical Case:** Thorgils maimed Haflidi at the Althing of 1121 CE. Defying arbitration, the men arrived with private armies of 940 and 1,440 men respectively to force a settlement[31].
Village (150-500)	**Worked:** Local *Thing* assemblies allowed regional dispute resolution[32].	**Resistance/Reversal:** The primary check on a tyrant was the legal right of freemen to transfer their allegiance to a rival *goði*. When the Sturlungs monopolized the *goðorð*, this check vanished[29].
Parish/District (1.5k-5k)	**Worked:** The Quarter Courts successfully managed regional disputes for nearly three centuries.	**Failure Mode:** Elite intermarriage and the accumulation of wealth allowed dark-triad actors to buy out all competition, forming cartels.
Town/Watershed (15k-50k)	**Failed:** The Commonwealth (total pop. ~40,000-60,000) failed to maintain peace at the national level, succumbing to civil war.	**Mechanism:** The lack of a central executive meant that when a faction grew larger than 50% of the population, the law became a tool for

		their unchecked violence.
Region to Planet	**Never Tried:** The commonwealth model did not scale beyond the island.	**N/A**

4. Alpine Valley Communities: Governing the Commons

In environments where resources are fragile and easily exhausted, hierarchical warlordism often gives way to strict communal management. The Swiss village of Törbel (population ~600) managed its alpine meadows, forests, and irrigation systems without a central state for centuries. Written rules in Törbel date back to 1224 CE and 1517 CE, strictly regulating timber and grazing rights[34]. Elinor Ostrom utilized Törbel, alongside hundreds of other global cases, to empirically demonstrate that the "tragedy of the commons" can be averted by self-organizing institutions[36].

The villagers of Törbel stated that their rules existed to protect the land for future generations, explicitly enforcing a statute that no individual could overwinter more cows than they could feed from their own private hay production[35]. The historical record shows that the system was incredibly effective: it successfully maintained a stable population, prevented overgrazing, and conserved the fragile microclimates of the Valais canton for over 700 years[39]. Modern scholarship, led by Ostrom (1990) and Robert McC. Netting (1981), infers that stable common-pool resources (CPRs) rely on eight specific design principles. These include clearly defined boundaries, congruence between rules and local conditions, collective-choice arrangements, and—crucially—graduated sanctions[34]. The community optimized production while enforcing strict conservation because the rules were crafted and monitored by the users themselves.

Scale Rung	Viability & Historical Context	Capture Test (Dark Triad Dynamics & Defenses)
Household (4-10)	**Worked:** Private agricultural plots were managed at this scale to support the wintering of cattle.	**Mechanism:** A narcissistic free-rider attempts to secretly graze extra cattle on the commons, extracting private benefit while socializing the ecological cost[36].
Hamlet/Band (30-50)	**Worked:** Small herding	**Historical Case:**

	collectives operated efficiently under mutual surveillance.	Individuals frequently tried to bend rules regarding water allocation or timber harvesting, testing the boundaries of the community's patience[35].
Village (150-500)	**Worked:** Törbel (~600 people) is the ideal scale for Ostrom's design principles. High social cohesion drastically lowers monitoring costs[35].	**Resistance/Reversal:** Capture is resisted through *graduated sanctions*. A first offense yields a quiet warning; repeated offenses result in escalating fines and social ostracization. Robust mutual monitoring ensures violations are caught[34].
Parish/District (1.5k-5k)	**Worked:** Achieved via "nested enterprises" (Ostrom's Principle 8), where village commons link to broader valley agreements for water management[34].	**Failure Mode:** If the broader valley authority becomes corrupted, the nested enterprises fail to coordinate, leading to inter-village resource wars.
Town/Watershed (15k-50k)	**Failed:** At massive scales, the transaction costs of mutual monitoring become too high without state intervention[43].	**Mechanism:** Anonymity allows Machiavellian actors to bypass informal monitoring systems entirely.
Region to Planet	**Never Tried:** Requires formalized, centralized states to manage.	**N/A**

5. Post-Classic Maya: Joint Rule in a Walled City

Following the Classic Maya collapse—which saw the abandonment of southern lowland centers by 900 CE due to drought, endemic warfare, and overpopulation—power shifted north to the Yucatán[44]. By 1200 CE, the city of Mayapan emerged as a dense, walled capital with 15,000 to 17,000 inhabitants and over 4,000 structures crammed into 4.2 square kilometers[46]. Governance transitioned from the divine, autocratic kingship of the Classic era to *mulpteal* (joint

rule), a confederation of elite lineages[44].
The inhabitants and elites of Mayapan claimed that the *mulpteal* was a functional council that shared power equitably among the prominent families (most notably the Cocom and Xiu). They asserted that this system prevented the tyrannical excesses that had destroyed the Classic cities[49]. However, the archaeological and historical record shows that Mayapan was a highly militarized state that thrived on raiding, captive-taking, and monopolizing regional trade networks[47]. Population density reached a staggering 126 persons per hectare in the downtown sector, surrounded by a 9.1-kilometer defensive wall with twelve formal gates[47]. Modern scholarship, including the exhaustive work of Marilyn Masson and Carlos Peraza Lope (2014), infers that while Mayapan was a highly urbanized "garden city" with a robust mercantile economy, its joint rule was inherently unstable. The Cocom lineage effectively operated as a mafia, utilizing foreign mercenaries to hoard power and wealth, reducing the "joint rule" to a tributary protection racket[47].

Scale Rung	Viability & Historical Context	Capture Test (Dark Triad Dynamics & Defenses)
Household (4-10)	**Worked:** Clustered houselots managed urban agriculture and intensive craft production[47].	**Mechanism:** A dominant faction within the council uses external force to subvert the voting process, turning a republic of nobles into a dictatorship.
Hamlet/Band (30-50)	**Worked:** Extended family lineages controlled specific craft and trade monopolies.	**Historical Case:** The Cocom family utilized Canul mercenaries from Tabasco to physically intimidate the other lineages, monopolize the salt and slave trades, and hoard resources[50].
Village (150-500)	**Worked:** Neighborhoods integrated seamlessly into the urban grid.	**Resistance/Reversal:** The Machiavellian capture by the Cocom was ultimately reversed by catastrophic violence. In 1441 CE, the Xiu family led a revolt, massacred the Cocom leadership, and the city was subsequently abandoned[46].

Parish/District (1.5k-5k)	**Worked:** Administrative sectors managed water access (cenotes) and defensive wall maintenance.	**Failure Mode:** Prolonged drought exacerbated elite rivalries, demonstrating that joint rule cannot survive severe caloric contraction.
Town/Watershed (15k-50k)	**Worked (Briefly):** Mayapan sustained 15,000+ people for over two centuries, making it the highest density post-collapse polity[46].	**Mechanism:** Psychopathic elite infighting triggered total urban abandonment.
Region (0.5m-5m)	**Failed:** The confederation dissolved into fragmented, warring provinces across the Yucatán post-1441[46].	**N/A**
Nation to Planet	**Never Tried:** Beyond the logistical capacity of the Post-Classic Maya.	**N/A**

6. Post-Han China: Wubao Manors and the State's Return

When the Han Dynasty collapsed in 220 CE, China entered the Six Dynasties period, characterized by severe fragmentation, depopulation, and nomadic incursions[53]. As central military protection vanished, local elites and peasant communities constructed *wubao* (fortified manors or family castles)[55].

The builders of the *wubao* claimed they were constructing defensive sanctuaries purely for local protection, offering physical safety to extended kin and local peasants against marauding warlords and nomadic cavalry[55]. The historical record, however, shows that these structures rapidly became independent, autarkic fiefdoms. Peasants who sought refuge inside the *wubao* were essentially reduced to serfdom, providing military labor and agricultural surplus to the manor lord in exchange for their lives[55]. Modern scholarship, notably Mark Edward Lewis (2009), infers that this era saw a fundamental spatial reorganization of the human household[56]. The *wubao* effectively feudalized the previously bureaucratic Chinese society, halting state taxation and returning the populace to a state of localized bondage.

Scale Rung	Viability & Historical	Capture Test (Dark Triad

	Context	Dynamics & Defenses)
Household (4-10)	**Failed:** Independent households were annihilated by roaming armies; survival required consolidation.	**Mechanism:** A local strongman offers "protection," which rapidly degrades into extortion, forced labor, and total physical subjugation.
Hamlet/Band (30-50)	**Worked:** Small fortified hamlets managed basic subsistence.	**Historical Case:** The manor lords became untouchable regional warlords, hoarding population and evading all taxation, effectively establishing micro-dictatorships[55].
Village (150-500)	**Worked:** The *wubao* effectively protected groups of 100 to 500 people within formidable fortified walls[55].	**Resistance/Reversal:** Capture was reversed from the top down by a re-emerging state. In 485 CE, Emperor Xiaowen of the Northern Wei implemented the Equal-field system (Juntian), bypassing the lords to distribute land directly to peasants[57].
Parish/District (1.5k-5k)	**Failed:** *Wubao* were inherently localized, xenophobic, and hostile to neighboring manors.	**Mechanism:** The state implemented the "Three-elders" system in 486 CE to re-establish direct state taxation, dismantling the manors' power base[57].
Town to Planet	**Failed:** The proliferation of *wubao* caused the fragmentation of the empire until the Sui unification.	**N/A**

7. Post-Soviet Central Asia: Institutional Bricolage

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 devastated rural Central Asia, as state-funded irrigation systems (RaiVodKhozes) suddenly lost up to 50 percent of their budgets and maintenance collapsed[59]. In response, international donors aggressively pushed Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and the creation of Water User Associations (WUAs) to replace the vanished state infrastructure[60].

International donors and policy architects claimed that WUAs would introduce democratic, decentralized, and equitable water distribution, replacing Soviet hierarchies with localized community ownership and efficiency[59]. The empirical record shows a catastrophic failure of this model. Irrigation Service Fees (ISFs) collected by the WUAs covered only 20 to 30 percent of actual operation and maintenance costs[59]. The infrastructure decayed, and water distribution became highly unequal, leading to frequent local conflicts, particularly in the densely populated Fergana Valley[59]. Modern scholarship, notably the work of Jenniver Sehring (2009, 2024), infers a process of "institutional bricolage," where imported democratic structures were immediately co-opted by existing informal power networks[59]. Neopatrimonial elites used the WUAs to legitimize their own power while ignoring the intended democratic functions.

Scale Rung	Viability & Historical Context	Capture Test (Dark Triad Dynamics & Defenses)
Household (4-10)	**N/A:** Water rights in arid regions require collective infrastructure.	**Mechanism:** Local elites hijack democratic voting structures to secure preferential water access for their own networks, starving downstream users[59].
Hamlet/Band (30-50)	**Worked (Informally):** Peasant networks managed minor canals via traditional *mirabs* (water masters) when formal systems failed[62].	**Historical Case:** Former Soviet collective farm bosses (*Aksakals*) took over WUA leadership roles, marginalizing poorer *dekhkans* (farmers), many of whom did not even know they were WUA members[59].
Village (150-500)	**Failed (Formally):** Democratic assemblies were heavily manipulated	**Resistance/Reversal:** Resistance occurred through informal, seasonal

	by dominant local families.	voluntary cleaning of unmanaged canals by poorer farmers, bypassing the corrupt WUA structures entirely, though this lacked the capital to fix structural decay[63].
Parish/District (1.5k-5k)	**Failed:** Formal WUAs became vehicles for power accumulation, exacerbating upstream/downstream conflicts over a shrinking resource[59].	**Mechanism:** Narcissistic leaders monopolized donor funding meant for infrastructure repair, utilizing it for patronage rather than public goods.
Town/Watershed (15k-50k)	**Failed:** High conflict over transboundary rivers (Amu Darya, Syr Darya) without a central Soviet arbiter[64].	**N/A**
Region to Planet	**Failed:** The region suffers from severe water insecurity and geopolitical tension.	**N/A**

The Strongest Case Against Localism: The Hobbesian Critique

The most formidable critique of decentralized, post-collapse governance comes from scholars who reject the "transformation" paradigm championed by historians like Chris Wickham. The leading critic is Bryan Ward-Perkins, whose 2005 work, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization*, explicitly attacks the idea that the retreat of the state was a peaceful transition to peasant autonomy[66]. Ward-Perkins argues that viewing the fall of the state as a liberating return to localism is a dangerous romanticization that ignores the catastrophic human suffering caused by the loss of complex systems[66].

According to Ward-Perkins, the archaeological record demonstrates a staggering decline in the quality of life, mass material culture, and physical security following the collapse of Roman taxation and military protection[66]. Basic markers of civilization—such as tiled roofs, high-quality durable pottery, and fundamental sanitation—disappeared from Western Europe for centuries, replaced by wooden huts and localized squalor[67]. The disappearance of the state did not create egalitarian communes; it left populations at the mercy of Germanic warlords who exacted tribute through the raw, unmitigated threat of force[67]. From this perspective, arrangements like the

Greek *oikos*, the Chinese *wubao*, and the Icelandic feud are not triumphs of self-governance, but desperate, high-friction coping mechanisms in a deeply impoverished, violent world. Without a central monopoly on violence, local governance inevitably falls prey to the strongest local psychopath.

Summary and Findings

10-Line Summary of Robust Findings

When state logistics fail, governance devolves instantly to the lowest unit capable of violence and food production, typically the household or fortified manor. Spontaneous post-collapse institutions, such as blood feud and mutual surety, are highly effective at maintaining local order but require the constant threat of catastrophic violence to enforce compliance. Without explicit, designed anti-monopoly mechanisms—such as Ostrom's graduated sanctions—resources and power rapidly concentrate into the hands of a few Machiavellian actors. Scale is the explicit enemy of informal governance; mechanisms that work perfectly for a village of 300 disintegrate in a town of 15,000 without a formal transition to statecraft. Imported, top-down governance models almost universally fail if they ignore the pre-existing informal power networks that actually control local calories and violence. Post-collapse "freedom" is often an illusion, as peasants invariably trade their political autonomy to a local strongman in exchange for physical security from other strongmen. Long-lasting decentralized systems, like those in Switzerland and Iceland, require a harsh, fragile environment where total domination by one faction risks mutual ecological starvation. Furthermore, the presence of written rules and literacy, even if highly localized, dramatically extends the lifespan of communal agreements. Mutual liability is a highly efficient, brutal way to police a population without a standing police force, externalizing the costs of justice onto the populace. Ultimately, the transition out of a post-collapse dark age requires the reinvention of the state to break the power of entrenched local manors and warlords.

Contested or Open Questions

- **The Intent of Feud:** Is blood feud an evolutionary failure of law, demonstrating a descent into barbarism, or is it a highly sophisticated, rational system for deterring violence in the absolute absence of a state executive?
- **The Necessity of Hierarchy:** Can a community larger than 500 people exist and manage resources without generating a coercive elite class, or is proto-class formation mathematically inevitable as demographic scale increases?
- **Ecological Determinism:** Did the Törbel commons survive for 700 years because of the brilliance of their governance principles, or simply because the extreme Alpine environment made the land ecologically worthless to external conquerors?
- **Transition Mechanisms:** How exactly does a network of autonomous, self-governing villages peacefully scale into a regional body without being violently conquered by a warlord in the process?

5 to 10 Sources to Read in Full

1. **Elinor Ostrom**, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (1990)[69].

2. **Chris Wickham**, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400-800* (2005)[2].
3. **Bryan Ward-Perkins**, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (2005)[67].
4. **William Ian Miller**, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland* (1990)[20].
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6. **Mark Edward Lewis**, *China Between Empires: The Northern and Southern Dynasties* (2009)[54].
7. **Jesse Byock**, *Feud in the Icelandic Saga* (1982)[30].
8. **William Alfred Morris**, *The Frankpledge System* (1910)[73].

Implementability after the Fall

To deploy the minimum viable version of these historical arrangements in a grid-down, stateless scenario, specific mechanisms must be adopted based on scale:

For a Household (4 to 10 people):

The minimum viable version is the *Oikos* model. This is a strictly hierarchical unit focused on absolute agricultural autarky and physical defense. It requires physical fortification capabilities (walls), stored caloric surplus, and a localized weapon monopoly. The first failure to expect is internal fracturing upon the death of the patriarch/matriarch, or violent annexation by a larger, better-armed neighboring household.

For a Village of 300 (No state, no grid, no internet):

The minimum viable version is a hybrid of the Törbel Commons and Anglo-Saxon Frankpledge. Ten groups of 30 people are organized, each mutually liable for their members' behavior and resource usage. To start, this requires localized literacy (to write down access rights and penalties), a shared, immutable calendar (to strictly regulate planting and harvesting windows), and a central physical meeting place (a *Thing* or Moot) safe from the elements. The first failure to expect is a charismatic, Machiavellian individual within the village who convinces 51 percent of the population to ignore the written limits on resource extraction in exchange for short-term caloric gains, collapsing the commons.

For a District of 3,000:

The minimum viable version is the Icelandic *Goðorð* system of nested enterprises. Villages elect specific representatives who meet quarterly to arbitrate inter-village disputes via predefined compensation matrices (wergild). To start, this requires a class of individuals with the leisure time to memorize or record jurisprudence, a physical token system to represent value and fines, and a cultural taboo against violence at the designated meeting place. The first failure to expect is that one village experiences a bumper crop, uses the surplus to hire armed men from outside the district, and transitions the system from voluntary arbitration to a tributary protection racket (the *Wubao* scenario).

Principles

The historical data supports or refutes the following testable governance principles:

1. **The Principle of Mutual Liability:** In the absence of a specialized police force, social

order is most efficiently maintained by making small groups financially and physically liable for the actions of their individual members.
2. **The Principle of the Vulnerable Commons:** Shared resources without strict, written boundaries and graduated sanctions will inevitably be monopolized by the most aggressive actor within the network.
3. **The Principle of Proto-Class Inevitability:** Any post-collapse society that produces an agricultural surplus will, within three generations, generate a class of violent elites who expropriate that surplus.
4. **The Principle of Institutional Bricolage:** Governance structures implanted by external forces (or carried over from pre-collapse ideology) will fail unless they perfectly map onto the informal power networks that actually control local violence and calories.
5. **The Principle of Escalating Feud:** Systems relying on private violence for dispute resolution can maintain long periods of stasis, but inherently lack the mechanism to prevent power monopolies, eventually resulting in oligarchy or civil war.
6. **The Principle of the Security Trade-off:** Populations facing physical annihilation will voluntarily submit to extortionary, dictatorial rule if the local lord can guarantee a monopoly on violence against external threats.

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