HI-11 Micro-republics that lasted: San Marino, Ragusa and the one-month rector

The permanent loss of industrial supply chains and the subsequent retreat of centralized state authority necessitates a radical reevaluation of how human beings organize, enforce contracts, and prevent the monopolization of violence. When the logistical and bureaucratic apparatus of the modern nation-state evaporates, human social organization invariably defaults to smaller, localized forms constrained by the speed of human travel and the limits of face-to-face trust. The historical record provides a rich, heavily documented repository of micro-republics, peasant communes, and autonomous city-states that maintained self-governance over centuries, successfully resisting both external imperial conquest and internal tyrannical capture. By rigorously examining the institutional mechanics of polities such as San Marino, the Republic of Ragusa (Dubrovnik), Andorra, the peasant republic of Gersau, and the Hanseatic city-states, the mechanisms of long-term institutional survival become empirically quantifiable.

However, old does not inherently mean good, and small does not inherently mean fair. A central imperative of this foundational analysis for *GOVERNING after the FALL* is to avoid the naturalistic fallacy and the romance of the primitive. The historical data explicitly reveals that while early political autonomy often catalyzed rapid economic growth and institutional innovation, the long-term survival of these micro-republics frequently relied upon rigid aristocratic closure, rent-seeking cartels, and oligarchic consolidation. The objective of this report is to dissect the mechanics of these historical micro-republics, quantifying their operational parameters, evaluating their vulnerability to capture by actors exhibiting dark-triad traits (narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy), and extracting testable principles for scaling governance from a post-collapse household to a reconstructed planetary system.

The Republic of Ragusa: Aristocratic Closure and the Mechanics of Paranoia

The Republic of Ragusa, centered on the modern-day city of Dubrovnik on the Dalmatian coast, operated as an independent and highly prosperous maritime republic from 1358, following the Treaty of Zadar, until its dissolution by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1808[1]. Ragusa's governance model was characterized by an extreme, institutionalized paranoia regarding the concentration of executive power, balanced against strict oligarchic control over all political participation. It provides one of history's most compelling examples of how an elite class can structure a government to prevent any single member of that elite from dominating the rest.

Following a period of gradual aristocratic evolution from the 12th through the 14th centuries, political participation in Ragusa was permanently restricted by the *Serrata* (closure) of 1332[1]. This statute established the *Consilium Maius* (Major Council) as the supreme governing and legislative body, composed exclusively of recognized noble males[1]. To ensure the demographic boundary of the ruling class remained impermeable, marriage between members of different

social classes was strictly and legally forbidden. The genealogical lock on power was so absolute that new families were admitted to the patriciate only once, following a devastating earthquake in 1667 that physically decimated the existing nobility and necessitated a replenishment of the administrative class[1].

The executive apparatus of this closed system was designed specifically to neuter personal ambition. The state was led by a Rector (*Knez*), an office carrying extreme constraints[3]. The Rector was required to be a nobleman over the age of 50 and was elected for a term lasting exactly one month[4]. To prevent the entrenchment of patronage networks or the accumulation of personal wealth through office, the Rector was entirely unpaid; the honor of the position was legally deemed sufficient compensation[4]. Furthermore, the Rector was subjected to virtual house arrest. During his 30-day tenure, he was required to reside on the first floor of the Rector's Palace and was expressly forbidden from leaving the building, not even for a recreational walk, except to execute official state duties and protocols[3]. Every evening, in a powerful psychological ritual underscoring the temporary nature of his authority, the Rector was ceremonially entrusted with the keys to the city, which he was required to return to the citizens the following morning[3]. Upon the conclusion of the one-month term, the individual was legally barred from holding the office again for a minimum of two years[4]. Administrative and legislative power actually resided in the *Consilium Rogatorum* (Senate) and the *Consilium Minus* (Minor Council), with the Rector serving largely as a ceremonial figurehead to absorb the population's psychological need for a singular leader while structurally denying that leader any functional autocracy[3].

When analyzing Ragusa, it is critical to separate the three perspectives of its governance. The Ragusan elites themselves claimed the system was a perfect realization of civic duty, liberty, and self-sacrifice, enshrining their worldview in the state motto: *Non bene pro toto libertas venditur auro* (Liberty is not sold for all the gold in the world). The severe restrictions on the Rector were framed internally as a noble burden borne by the patriciate for the survival of the republic. What the historical record shows, however, is that the system maintained remarkable domestic stability and external neutrality for 450 years. By keeping the bureaucracy small, mostly relegated to record-keeping, and focusing entirely on maritime trade, Ragusa achieved massive commercial success, effectively operating as the "Hong Kong of the Mediterranean"[8]. It demonstrated a high capacity for progressive legislation when it served the republic's stability, such as abolishing the slave trade early in 1416[8]. What modern scholarship infers from this structure is that Ragusa was a highly successful, closed rent-seeking oligarchy. Institutional economists view the structure less as a republic and more as a joint-stock company owned by a few dozen patrician families. The extreme constraints on the Rector were not mechanisms of democratic liberty, but rather mechanisms of intra-elite trust; by ensuring no single family could dominate the executive and utilize the state's monopoly on violence against its peers, the broader oligarchy felt secure in delegating daily commercial administration to the permanent councils[7].

Capture Test: The Dark-Triad Vulnerability in Ragusa

A psychological profile of the Ragusan system reveals a highly specific defense against

dark-triad actors. The mandatory one-month term limit, the physical confinement of the Rector, and the two-year cooling-off period structurally neutralized narcissists, who require sustained public adulation and the physical freedom to stage spectacles[4]. Furthermore, the requirement that the Rector be over 50 years old ensured that youthful, militaristic ambition was filtered out of the executive, selecting instead for low-energy, status-sated elders who were biologically less likely to attempt a kinetic coup[4].

However, a Machiavellian actor would simply bypass the Rectorship entirely. Recognizing that the Rector is a powerless, ceremonial prisoner, a highly intelligent dark-triad actor would target the *Consilium Rogatorum* (Senate). A faction seeking total control would build a shadow coalition within the permanent councils, utilizing commercial wealth and strategic intermarriage (among the closed patrician class) to control the voting blocs that dictated long-term policy and the appointment of the monthly Rectors. Historically, Ragusa resisted this form of internal capture almost entirely throughout its 450-year run because the rigid aristocratic class structure meant power was diffused among highly paranoid, equally wealthy peers who constantly monitored one another for signs of factional dominance. The extreme fragmentation of the executive schedule meant that no single network could solidify its grip on the state apparatus long enough to purge its rivals.

Scale Ledger: The Ragusan Model

Rung	Scale (Population)	Viability	Rationale / Historical Precedent
Household	4 to 10	Untried / Fails	A one-month rotating executive under house arrest is absurd in a household; it requires a surplus population to manage daily survival tasks while the executive is confined.
Hamlet/Band	30 to 50	Fails	The demographic talent pool is far too shallow to sustain a two-year cooling-off period for leaders exclusively over the

			age of 50.
Village	150 to 500	Works (Modified)	If the "noble" and age requirements are dropped, rotating administrative duties monthly effectively prevents the emergence of a permanent village chief or warlord.
Parish	1,500 to 5,000	Works	Provides sufficient demographic depth to rotate elders through administrative posts. Elite collaboration easily substitutes for a standing bureaucracy.
Town	15,000 to 50,000	**Optimal**	Ragusa operated precisely at this scale (pop. ~30,000). The patrician class numbered in the hundreds, allowing for face-to-face trust but strict legalistic rotation.
Region	0.5M to 5M	Fails	Executive churn is too high. Managing the complex logistics of a region requires institutional memory in the

			executive that a 30-day term destroys.
Nation	50M to 500M	Fails	Scaling up the *Consilium Maius* creates an unmanageably large oligarchy; 30-day executive terms at a national scale cause catastrophic bureaucratic paralysis.
Planet	8 Billion	Untried / Fails	Completely incompatible with global logistical coordination and the massive administrative timeframes required for planetary governance.

San Marino: Collegiality, Dual Executives, and the Fascist Bypass

Tradition dates the founding of the Most Serene Republic of San Marino to AD 301. Entirely landlocked within the Italian peninsula, it serves as the only surviving medieval commune and currently maintains a population of roughly 33,745, representing one of history's longest continuous experiments in collegial executive power[10].

The executive branch of San Marino is headed by two Captains Regent (*Capitani Reggenti*), who serve concurrently for a strict term of six months[10]. This model directly mimics the Roman Republic's dual consulship. The two regents hold mutual veto power over one another, a structural mechanism that forces consensus and prevents unilateral executive action. Originally, sovereign power was vested in the *Arengo*, a direct-democratic assembly composed of the heads of all families[10]. As the population expanded over the centuries, the *Arengo* became logistically unwieldy, and legislative power was transferred to the Grand and General Council (a

60-member parliament). Much like Ragusa, this council eventually co-opted itself into a closed oligarchy, ruling unchecked until a democratic revolution in 1906 restored the *Arengo's* authority and modernized the electoral system[11].

Examining the three perspectives on San Marino reveals significant divergence between mythology and reality. Sammarinese historiography posits that their rugged poverty, high altitude on Monte Titano (755 meters), and pious devotion to liberty made them immune to the tyrannies of larger European states[10]. The dual regency was seen as the ultimate, infallible safeguard against dictatorship. The historical record shows that the republic did survive immense external threats. In 1739, the territory was militarily occupied by the forces of Cardinal Alberoni. However, the citizens engaged in systemic civil disobedience and successfully leveraged diplomatic channels, appealing directly to Pope Clement XII, who dismissed Alberoni and restored the republic's independence[10].

Yet, what modern scholarship infers is that while the dual regency is highly effective at preventing sudden executive overreach by a rogue individual, it is highly vulnerable to systemic elite collusion and modern party politics. The 1906 return to democracy proved fragile. The system failed catastrophically during the interwar period, demonstrating that ancient institutional constraints cannot withstand modern ideological capture if the underlying legislature is compromised.

Capture Test: The Dark-Triad Vulnerability in San Marino

The Sammarinese model's vulnerability lies in its reliance on the political plurality of the Grand and General Council. A Machiavellian actor bypasses the six-month term limit of the Captains Regent by capturing the underlying political party or the permanent bureaucratic ministries. By controlling the party apparatus that commands a majority in the council, the actor can simply select loyalists to rotate through the Captains Regent positions every six months, maintaining the illusion of republican rotation while ruling as an autocrat from a non-term-limited ministerial post.

The historical record shows this exact capture occurring in the 20th century. Following the rise of fascism in Italy, the Sammarinese Fascist Party (PFS) was formed and seized absolute power in 1923, formally ruling until 1943[11]. The architect of this capture was Giuliano Gozi, a man exhibiting high Machiavellian traits. Gozi was appointed as the first Fascist Captain Regent on April 23, 1923[10]. While Gozi formally obeyed the six-month term limit rule—serving as Captain Regent five non-consecutive times—he maintained a permanent, unbreakable grip on the state by controlling the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for 26 uninterrupted years (1917-1943)[11]. Modern scholars note that the fascist era in San Marino was effectively a reversion to the pre-1906 oligarchy, driven by the exact same elite families who had controlled the state prior to the democratic reforms[11]. The dual regency proved to be a meaningless rubber stamp once a single autocratic party boss dictated the appointments of both regents.

Scale Ledger: The Sammarinese Model

Rung	Scale (Population)	Viability	Rationale / Historical

			Precedent
Household	4 to 10	Works	Co-heads of household with mutual veto is a common, highly stable domestic arrangement for resource management.
Hamlet/Band	30 to 50	Works	A direct assembly (*Arengo*) of 10 to 15 household heads is highly efficient for dispute resolution and consensus.
Village	150 to 500	Works	The original Sammarinese commune operated successfully at this scale using the *Arengo* for centuries.
Parish	1,500 to 5,000	Works	This represents the historical transition point where the *Arengo* became too large and delegated power to a council.
Town	15,000 to 50,000	**Optimal**	Current San Marino scale (pop. ~33,700). The 6-month dual executive works well when backed by a modern 60-person

			parliament.
Region	0.5M to 5M	Untried / Fails	Roman consuls operated at this scale historically, but modern complexities make a rotating 6-month dual executive highly unstable for regional logistics.
Nation	50M to 500M	Fails	Bipolar executive systems at the nation-state scale inevitably fracture into civil war or deep institutional paralysis without a monarch to break ties.
Planet	8 Billion	Fails	Requires singular logistical direction; a mutual veto at the planetary scale guarantees catastrophic inaction in the face of global crises.

Andorra: The Paréage and Exogenous Institutional Locking

The Principality of Andorra, situated in the high Pyrenees between France and Spain, possesses a governance system that relies on deliberate, exogenously enforced gridlock. Since 1278, the country has operated under a *Paréage*—a feudal treaty establishing a condominium or shared sovereignty (a diarchy)[13].

The heads of state are two Co-Princes: the Bishop of Urgell in Spain and the President of France (who inherited the role from the French monarchy and empire)[13]. Because neither

Co-Prince resides in Andorra, the executive is structurally absent and inherently deadlocked by the competing geopolitical interests of France and Spain. Day-to-day governance is therefore managed by the local population through the *Consell General*, established in 1419, which stands as one of the world's oldest continuous parliaments[13]. The state possesses no standing army; its physical security and military protection are contractually outsourced to Spain and France[13].

The three perspectives on Andorra illustrate the power of geopolitical arbitrage. Andorrans view the dual-principality as a masterstroke of diplomatic balancing that preserved their Catalan culture and autonomy against two massive, imperial neighbors[13]. What the historical record confirms is that the deliberate institutional friction prevented Andorra from being absorbed by either state. It remained neutral in major European conflicts—serving as a vital smuggling route from Vichy France into neutral Spain during World War II—and eventually transitioned smoothly to a modern parliamentary democracy via a 1993 constitution that reduced the feudal powers of the princes[14]. It survives today as a progressive micro-state (pop. ~80,000) with a thriving economy based on tourism, retail, and a banking sector that enjoys partial tax-haven status[13].

What modern scholarship infers is that Andorra exemplifies institutional survival via the outsourcing of the monopoly on violence. By granting nominal, divided sovereignty to external, competing powers, the local elite secured total operational autonomy. The system worked precisely because the Co-Princes neutralized one another.

Capture Test: The Dark-Triad Vulnerability in Andorra

A psychopathic or highly narcissistic actor attempting to capture Andorra would leverage a momentary lapse in attention from the external Co-Princes to seize the domestic media and declare unilateral independence, counting on the sluggishness of international bureaucracy to establish a *fait accompli*.

This specific capture scenario played out historically. On July 12, 1934, a Russian adventurer named Boris Skossyreff arrived in Andorra, ingratiated himself with the *Consell General*, and proclaimed himself King Boris I of Andorra[13]. Demonstrating classic narcissistic traits, he promised massive foreign investment, modernization, and a utopian constitution. The capture, however, lasted only a few days. The resistance feature of the *Paréage* was absolute: because the ultimate sovereignty technically belonged to the Bishop of Urgell, the Bishop simply refused to relinquish his title and dispatched a small contingent of Spanish Civil Guards to the territory. Skossyreff was arrested eight days later, expelled from Spain, and permanently banned from Andorra[13]. The Andorran model proves that outsourcing the monopoly on violence to external, competing stakeholders is a highly effective safeguard against internal dark-triad usurpation, provided the external powers are willing to enforce the contract.

Scale Ledger: The Andorran Model

Rung	Scale (Population)	Viability	Rationale / Historical Precedent

Household	4 to 10	Fails	Surrendering sovereignty to two competing external households guarantees endless interference and loss of domestic agency.
Hamlet/Band	30 to 50	Fails	Insufficient economic surplus or strategic value to attract the attention of external "protectors."
Village	150 to 500	Works	A village situated on a border between two rival territories can pledge fealty to both to maintain local operational independence.
Parish	1,500 to 5,000	Works	Feudal Andorra operated at this scale for centuries, effectively playing lords against each other.
Town	15,000 to 50,000	**Optimal**	The current Andorran model functions perfectly here, utilizing external security architectures to foster internal commercial growth.

Region	0.5M to 5M	Fails	A population of this size becomes an existential threat to its "protectors," inevitably sparking proxy wars rather than gridlock.
Nation	50M to 500M	Fails	Sovereignty at this scale cannot be externally divided without resulting in physical partition (e.g., Cold War Germany or Korea).
Planet	8 Billion	N/A	There are no external geopolitical powers to serve as Co-Princes.

Gersau: The Peasant Republic and Resource Direct Democracy

The Republic of Gersau offers a radically different archetype of the enduring micro-republic: rural, entirely non-aristocratic, and built structurally around communal resource management. Located on a geographically isolated shore of Lake Lucerne, Gersau bought its freedom from Habsburg bailiwick authority on June 3, 1390, for exactly 690 pounds pfennigs, establishing an independent peasant republic[17].

From 1390 until the French invasion in 1798 (and briefly restored from 1814 until its final absorption into the Canton of Schwyz in 1817), Gersau operated as a sovereign entity with a population that hovered around 900 to 1,000 citizens[17]. Governance was exercised via the *Landsgemeinde*, a mandatory, open-air assembly of all male citizens over the age of 14. Non-attendance was severely punished with a fine of 5 shillings, ensuring maximum participation[18]. The assembly convened in the spring in the town hall square to elect a Landammann (mayor) and an 8-member council for two-year terms[18]. The republic possessed its own high jurisdiction, holding the right to sentence criminals to death (symbolized by a local gallows), and managed its agricultural foundation through a *Genossame*—an Alemannic cooperative system for managing common pastures, woods, and meadows[18]. To protect its capital and land from transferring out of the republic, it enforced strict marriage laws, levying a

heavy fine on any citizen who married a foreigner[18].
The citizens of Gersau believed they had engineered a perfect, localized freedom, rooted in the foundational democratic principle that "that which is done by the more shall be kept by the less" (majority rule)[18]. The historical record demonstrates that this system achieved 400 years of unbroken stability, effectively managing common-pool resources without succumbing to the tragedy of the commons, while navigating complex social laws[18]. However, modern scholarship, such as Beat Kümin's analysis of imperial villages, infers that premodern rural communes like Gersau were far from egalitarian utopias. They possessed highly unequal political rights internally, a strict adherence to rigid custom over innovation, and blurred, often dangerous boundaries between executive and judicial spheres[19]. Gersau's survival relied less on the perfection of its democracy and more on its geographical isolation and the broader geopolitical protection of the Swiss Confederacy, allowing it to hide in the blind spots of European state formation[19].

Capture Test: The Dark-Triad Vulnerability in Gersau

A charismatic populist with narcissistic traits would attempt to use the mandatory *Landsgemeinde* to whip the crowd into an emotional frenzy, utilizing in-group/out-group dynamics (e.g., targeting the foreign-born or neighboring villages) to pass extra-legal decrees and bypass the 9-member council.
Historically, Gersau rarely suffered internal capture, primarily because of the extreme transparency required by the *Genossame*. Economic survival in this isolated commune depended entirely on highly synchronized, cooperative alpine farming. A narcissist attempting to disrupt the agricultural schedule for political theater would immediately threaten the food supply, prompting swift, kin-based kinetic correction by the armed citizenry. The compulsory attendance rule meant that radical factions could not hijack sparsely attended meetings. The two-year term limit for the Landammann ensured regular turnover, while the face-to-face nature of the economy made anonymous Machiavellian maneuvering nearly impossible[18].

Scale Ledger: The Gersau Model

Rung	Scale (Population)	Viability	Rationale / Historical Precedent
Household	4 to 10	Untried	A structured, formalized voting assembly is overly bureaucratic and rigid for a household.
Hamlet/Band	30 to 50	Works	Participatory

			assembly and common resource management scale perfectly to this size, resembling hunter-gatherer egalitarianism.
Village	150 to 500	**Optimal**	High social cohesion, face-to-face accountability, and direct voting on physical resource allocation function at maximum efficiency here.
Parish	1,500 to 5,000	Works	Gersau maxed out around 1,000-1,300 people[17]. Direct assemblies of this size remain physically possible, though loud.
Town	15,000 to 50,000	Fails	The *Landsgemeinde* becomes a mob; 15,000 people cannot hold a constructive open-air debate or vote effectively without modern technology.
Region	0.5M to 5M	Fails	Direct democracy on daily administrative tasks collapses entirely

			under the logistical weight and cognitive limits of the population.
Nation	50M to 500M	Fails	Pure direct democracy of the Gersau type is physically impossible without vast digital infrastructure, which is highly vulnerable to systemic capture.
Planet	8 Billion	Fails	Logistically absurd.

The Strongest Case Against: Stasavage, Ogilvie, and the Pathology of Autonomy

It is vital to avoid the naturalistic fallacy—the assumption that because an institution is old or highly localized, it is inherently fair, optimal, or immune to exploitation. The history of European micro-republics, city-states (such as Lucca or Cologne), and Hanseatic towns presents a profoundly dark underbelly of rent-extraction and economic stagnation. The leading critics of the "urban autonomy" romance are political scientist David Stasavage and economic historian Sheilagh Ogilvie.

The Stasavage Critique: The 110-Year Trap and the Rentier Republic

Max Weber famously argued that politically autonomous cities were the primary engine of Europe's economic rise, providing secure property rights free from the predations of princely rulers[21]. David Stasavage subjected this thesis to rigorous econometric testing in his work "Was Weber Right?" (2014) and *States of Credit* (2011). Utilizing an unbalanced panel dataset of 173 cities yielding 1,052 observations spanning the years AD 1000 to 1800, Stasavage measured the exact effects of urban autonomy on growth and state capacity[21].

The empirical findings are staggering. Autonomy initially caused massive economic and demographic growth. In a fixed-effects specification, gaining political autonomy generated an initial growth rate equivalent to a 33 percentage point increase in population if sustained over a century[22]. Furthermore, because they were geographically compact, these city-states possessed intensive representative assemblies that could credibly commit to repaying debts. By 1400, nearly 80 percent of the sample city-states had created long-term public debt[23]. They could borrow at incredibly low interest rates—around 5 percent—because the merchants lending the money were often the very citizens sitting on the councils passing the taxes to

guarantee repayment[24]. In stark contrast, vast territorial monarchs paid exorbitant, risk-heavy rates for short-term loans[24].

However, Stasavage proves statistically that this growth advantage inevitably decays. Evaluating the linear and quadratic trend terms, the turning point occurs after approximately 110 to 155 years of independence[22]. After this period, a formerly autonomous city-state begins to grow *more slowly* than a city subjugated by a prince. The mechanism for this failure is institutional calcification. The very merchant and craft guilds that established the early property rights utilized their consolidated political control over the councils (such as the *Ratsverfassung* in Hanseatic towns, co-opted continuously by patricians after revolts like Lübeck in 1348[25]) to erect massive barriers to entry into professions[21]. The city-states survived economically by transforming from dynamos of innovation into stagnant "rentier-republics," surviving off their preferential access to credit and accumulated wealth rather than actual productivity[26]. As per Cardwell's Law, innovation simply moved to new locations where the guilds did not hold power[21].

The Ogilvie Critique: The Guild as a Dark-Triad Syndicate

Sheilagh Ogilvie's *The European Guilds: An Economic Analysis* (2019) dismantles the persistent economic romance that guilds (which governed the Hanseatic towns, Lucca, and much of urban Europe) were efficiency-enhancing institutions that corrected market failures in human capital or product quality[28].

Ogilvie's exhaustive, 800-year analysis of tens of thousands of guilds proves they were, fundamentally, rent-seeking cartels. They did not promote broader economic growth; they actively restricted it to enrich a specific subset of insider males[29].

1. **Exclusionary Violence:** Guilds utilized their political leverage over town councils to artificially restrict trade volumes, set prices far above competitive levels, and brutally exclude entrants. Most notably, they utilized the state's monopoly on violence to restrict the economic options of women, Jews, and rural artisans[29].
2. **Technological Suppression:** Operating under the assumption of a "lump of labor" (the false belief that there is a fixed amount of work to go around), guilds actively opposed and blocked technological innovation to protect the sunk costs of their members' specific, outdated human capital[29].
3. **Elite Collusion:** Guilds survived for centuries not because they were economically efficient for society, but because they offered a highly efficient, corrupt mechanism for guild members and political elites to collaborate. They captured monopoly rents in the manufacturing and commercial sectors and redistributed that wealth to themselves at the severe expense of consumers, laborers, and the wider economy[29].

In a post-collapse scenario, the default to "guilds" or "syndicates" for local manufacturing will almost certainly result in the immediate recreation of exclusionary, rent-seeking cartels that prioritize the wealth of the ruling masters over the survival and innovation of the wider community.

Scale Ledger: The Hanseatic/Guild Council Model

Rung	Scale (Population)	Viability	Rationale / Historical Precedent
Household	4 to 10	N/A	Guilds require a broad division of labor and a consumer base outside the household to extract rents.
Hamlet/Band	30 to 50	Fails	Insufficient market depth and surplus to support specialized cartels.
Village	150 to 500	Works (Poorly)	Rural artisans often formed cartels to defend against urban harassment, successfully stifling local growth and innovation[29].
Parish	1,500 to 5,000	Works	Easily sustains basic craft and merchant guilds, resulting in an immediate rise in consumer prices and a drop in wages for outsiders.
Town	15,000 to 50,000	**Optimal**	The classic scale of the Hanseatic city-state and Italian communes. Allows for complex cartelization, high elite extraction, and

			long-term economic stagnation.
Region	0.5M to 5M	Fails	Guilds lose their localized monopoly on violence and information; regional free-trade bypasses their artificial bottlenecks.
Nation	50M to 500M	Fails	Requires massive state enforcement. Monarchs eventually abolished guilds to free up national labor markets and centralize taxation.
Planet	8 Billion	N/A	Incompatible with planetary logistics.

Capture Test: The Dark-Triad Vulnerability in Guilds

The guild system is inherently a dark-triad structure. It institutionalizes Machiavellianism (rent-seeking through political bribery of the town councils) and psychopathy (enforcing economic monopolies through the violent suppression of women and minorities)[29]. A dark-triad actor does not need to capture a guild; they simply need to found one. The historical feature that successfully reversed guild capture was not internal democratic reform, but rather the forceful intervention of expanding territorial states (monarchs and princes) who abolished local guild privileges to free up national labor markets, increase aggregate production, and centralize taxation[31].

Implementability after the Fall

To survive the permanent loss of industrial supply chains and the state's reach, governance must be rebuilt utilizing the historical mechanisms proven to resist autocracy without relying on digital or bureaucratic crutches. The findings above dictate specific, minimum viable versions of these historical structures for a post-collapse world.

Minimum Viable Version

- **The Household (4 to 10 people):** The San Marino Dual-Regency. Two co-heads of household hold a mutual veto over major resource expenditures (e.g., grain stores, defensive posture).

    - *Requirements:* A verbal agreement and a shared physical space to ensure constant communication.
    - *First Failure to Expect:* Deadlock. Without a wider assembly to break ties, a mutual veto can lead to fatal paralysis during a rapid-onset crisis, such as a localized raid or sudden weather event.
- **The Village (300 people):** The Gersau *Landsgemeinde*. A mandatory monthly assembly of all working-age members to allocate agricultural tasks, manage common resources, and resolve interpersonal disputes. The assembly elects a 5-person council for 1-year terms.
    - *Requirements:* A physical meeting place capable of holding 300 people (a town square or large barn), a shared physical calendar to track the mandatory monthly meetings, and a hard ledger (paper and charcoal) to record resource distribution and infractions. High social cohesion is required to enforce the fines for non-attendance.
    - *First Failure to Expect:* A populist demagogue weaponizes a poor harvest, blaming a minority faction or newcomers during the assembly to bypass the council and seize extra-legal power through mob rule.
- **The District (3,000 people):** The Ragusan Modification. A representative council drawn from the leaders of the constituent villages. To prevent a district warlord from emerging, the district executive is drawn by lot from the council, serves for a maximum of 30 days, is legally confined to the district meeting hall, and cannot serve again for two years.
    - *Requirements:* Widespread literacy to track complex rotation schedules, highly verifiable paper records to prevent appointment fraud, and a dedicated executive building to enforce the physical confinement of the rotating leader.
    - *First Failure to Expect:* The permanent scribes or quartermasters tracking the rotation manipulate the lots or withhold critical logistical information from the temporary 30-day executive, effectively capturing the system from the bureaucratic shadows.

Summary of Robust Findings

1. Extreme constraints on executive power, such as Ragusa's 30-day terms and San Marino's 6-month dual-regency, are historically proven mechanisms to prevent autocratic consolidation in micro-polities.
2. The physical confinement of an executive (e.g., the Rector's Palace) effectively severs the leader's access to the street-level patronage networks required for a populist coup.
3. Exogenous sovereignty, as demonstrated by Andorra's *Paréage*, allows local populations to achieve absolute operational autonomy by outsourcing geopolitical defense to deadlocked, external rivals.
4. Geographically compact polities generate high elite trust, allowing them to secure long-term public credit at extremely low interest rates centuries before sprawling territorial monarchs could.
5. The acquisition of political autonomy initially spurs massive demographic and economic growth, empirically equivalent to a 33 percentage point population increase per century.
6. This initial growth advantage inevitably decays after approximately 110 to 155 years as early institutional innovators calcify into entrenched oligarchies.

7. Long-term micro-republics almost universally resort to formal aristocratic closure (such as the 1332 *Serrata*) to lock demographic boundaries and ensure stability among the ruling class.
8. Guilds and localized merchant councils were not efficiency-enhancing institutions; they acted as rent-seeking cartels that stifled technological innovation and violently excluded vulnerable demographics.
9. Mandatory, heavily fined participation in direct assemblies (as seen in Gersau) is necessary to prevent highly motivated, extreme factions from hijacking the legislative process by default.
10. Dark-triad capture in micro-polities is rarely achieved through direct executive usurpation, but rather by capturing the permanent, underlying structures (political parties, enduring councils, or syndicates) that outlast term-limited figureheads.

Contested or Open Questions

The exact mechanism driving Stasavage's 110-year expiration date on the benefits of urban autonomy remains fiercely debated; it is an open question whether this decay is an inevitable, biological feature of human organizational psychology (a manifestation of Cardwell's Law) or if highly specific, modern anti-trust mechanisms could theoretically keep an autonomous town innovative indefinitely. Furthermore, despite Ogilvie's overwhelming evidence regarding the rent-seeking nature of guilds, a persistent faction of economic historians contests whether guilds were a *necessary* evil to enforce quality control and basic contract law in pre-modern environments utterly devoid of state-enforced commercial codes. Finally, the exact demographic breaking point where a direct assembly (*Arengo* or *Landsgemeinde*) becomes too large to function, necessitating the transition to a representative oligarchy, remains poorly quantified, oscillating historically between 500 and 5,000 citizens depending on cultural cohesion.

Sources to Read in Full

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Principles

1. **The Principle of Executive Asphyxiation:** The severity of executive term limits must inversely correlate with the scale of the polity; highly localized power requires rapid, enforced rotation to prevent network capture.
2. **The Principle of Institutional Calcification:** Any autonomous governance structure that achieves early economic success will, within three to four generations (approximately 110

to 155 years), reorganize itself into a rent-seeking cartel that stifles the very innovation that birthed it.

3. **The Principle of Exogenous Gridlock:** A small polity can ensure its internal operational survival and neutrality by legally dividing its ultimate sovereignty among larger, external, mutually hostile powers.
4. **The Principle of the Decoy Leader:** Conferring ultimate ceremonial authority upon a heavily restricted, term-limited individual absorbs the population's psychological demand for a singular leader while protecting the permanent administrative council from executive tyranny.
5. **The Principle of Compulsory Plurality:** Direct democratic assemblies must enforce strict, punitive financial or social measures against non-attendance to prevent highly motivated, extreme minority factions from capturing the legislative process.

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