HI-12 Direct assembly at the village and town rung: New England town meeting and the Russian mir

The structural viability of direct assembly as a mechanism of self-governance represents a foundational problem in political science, human anthropology, and institutional design. When a polity expands beyond the biological and cognitive constraints of a hunter-gatherer band—typically operating at the hamlet level of 30 to 50 individuals—and attempts to function at the village (150 to 500) and town (15,000 to 50,000) rungs, the mechanics of decision-making undergo profound strain. In the context of rebuilding governance after the permanent loss of industrial supply chains and the state's reach, understanding the failure points of these assemblies is paramount. Direct face-to-face democracy is frequently romanticized as the natural state of human liberty and egalitarianism. In reality, it is a highly engineered, fragile construct vulnerable to the mathematics of scale, demographic shifts, and rapid capture by individuals exhibiting dark-triad traits (narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy).

As established by political scientists Robert Dahl and Edward Tufte in their seminal 1973 work, *Size and Democracy*, there is an iron trade-off between citizen participation and system effectiveness[1]. In very small political systems, a citizen may participate extensively in decisions that carry little systemic weight; in large systems, the decisions matter immensely, but the individual's capacity to participate is reduced to a statistical irrelevancy[3]. Direct assembly at the village and town rung represents the historical attempt to find an optimal inflection point on this curve. This report evaluates four long-running historical models of direct assembly: the New England town meeting, the Russian *mir* (or *obshchina*), the Swiss *Gemeindeversammlung*, and the Spanish *concejo abierto*.

The New England Town Meeting

Originating in the 1630s with the earliest European settlements in the region, the New England town meeting is the most thoroughly documented local legislative assembly in modern history. Functioning across six American states, it requires the gathered citizenry to act as the direct legislative body for the municipality, approving budgets, electing officers, and passing local ordinances.

The empirical reality of the institution was definitively quantified by Frank M. Bryan in *Real Democracy: The New England Town Meeting and How It Works* (2004). Bryan and his researchers compiled a database over 28 years, observing 1,435 town meetings across 210 Vermont towns between 1970 and 1998, with 55 towns followed for ten or more years to establish longitudinal comparative baselines[4]. In total, the research team recorded 238,603 distinct acts of participation by 63,140 citizen-legislators[4].

The defining empirical metric of the town meeting is its structurally low attendance rate. Bryan found that, on average, only 20.5% of registered voters actually attend the meetings[6]. The primary determinant of this turnout is not socio-economic status, education, or time of day, but

raw demographic scale. Using multivariate regression, Bryan proved that town population size is the strongest predictor, explaining 58% of the variance in attendance[4]. As a town's population increases, attendance as a percentage of the population decreases logarithmically[6]. Counterintuitively, higher population density (population per road mile) correlates with lower turnout, as seen in comparative cases like Elmore and Strafford, Vermont[6]. Education, often presumed by democratic theorists to drive civic engagement, survived Bryan's regression equations but explained only 1% of the variance in attendance[9]. Furthermore, Bryan recorded stark gender imbalances; historically, women were excluded entirely, and even in the late 20th century, women constituted only 46% of attendees and 36% of active speakers[7].

Jane Mansbridge, in *Beyond Adversary Democracy* (1983), provided the definitive ethnographic critique of the town meeting through her immersive study of "Selby," a pseudonym for a Vermont town of roughly 350 residents in the 1970s[6]. Mansbridge dismantled the presumption that small assemblies operate on egalitarian debate, categorizing the town meeting as a "unitary democracy" driven by a forced consensus, rather than an "adversary democracy" driven by majority rule and secret ballots[11]. The social dynamics of Selby revealed that face-to-face assemblies heavily suppress dissent.

To separate the mythology of the arrangement from its historical and modern realities, it is necessary to examine what the participants believed, what the historical record proves, and what modern analysis deduces. The practitioners and early American transcendentalists, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Thomas Jefferson, viewed the town meeting as the ultimate school of citizenship, claiming it was the purest realization of the social compact where every individual held equal weight in governance[6]. However, the historical record demonstrates a deeply exclusionary institution that barred non-property owners, women, and minorities for centuries, functionally operating as an administrative mechanism for localized tax extraction, road maintenance, and schooling, dominated by local mercantile and agrarian elites. Modern political scholarship infers that the town meeting is an institution severely constrained by the mathematics of scale and the psychology of proximity. Mansbridge infers that the fear of interpersonal conflict in a tight-knit community leads to "hidden coercion," where minorities silence themselves to preserve social harmony and protect their local economic interests[6]. Bryan infers that the consistently low turnout (around 20%) actually saves the institution from structural collapse; physical infrastructure could not hold the populace if participation ever approached a simple majority[13].

Scale Ledger: New England Town Meeting

Rung	Population	Viability and Reasoning
Household	4–10	**Never Tried:** Formal parliamentary procedure and structural voting are entirely unsuited for the

		psychological and relational dynamics of a single household.
Hamlet	30–50	**Operated/Worked:** Highly viable, but functions almost entirely on informal consensus and peer pressure rather than formalized voting mechanisms.
Village	150–500	**Operated/Worked (Peak Viability):** Bryan's data proves maximum participatory equity occurs at this scale (e.g., Athens and Newark, Vermont). It is small enough for social cohesion but large enough to require formalized agendas and physical infrastructure[13].
Parish/District	1,500–5,000	**Operated/Failed:** This is the transition zone. Attendance reliably drops below 10%. Australian balloting (secret paper ballots) replaces floor votes for core issues, and representation begins to usurp direct assembly[6].
Town	15,000–50,000	**Failed:** Logistically impossible. Town halls cannot hold the electorate. The institution is universally abandoned or converted to Representative Town Meetings[4].

Region	0.5M–5M	**Never Tried:** Requires mass representative democracy and bureaucratic administration.
Nation	50M–500M	**Never Tried:** Conceptually incompatible with face-to-face deliberation and physically impossible without advanced telecommunications.
Planet	8B	**Never Tried:** Theoretically and physically impossible.

Capture Test: New England Town Meeting

A highly Machiavellian or narcissistic individual captures a town meeting by monopolizing the floor, utilizing parliamentary procedure (such as *Robert's Rules of Order*) to confuse and exhaust opponents, and exploiting the community's deep aversion to public confrontation. Mansbridge observed precisely this dynamic in "Selby," where older, wealthier, and more established male citizens effectively vetoed propositions simply through non-verbal disapproval or by dominating the speaking time[6]. Because voting is public (often by voice or standing), economically vulnerable residents preemptively surrender rather than publicly oppose their employers or landlords.

The primary defense mechanisms against narcissistic capture in the New England model are the endurance of the assembly and the structural introduction of the Australian ballot. Bryan's data indicated that the "best" democracies were those with meetings that lasted the longest, diluting a vocal minority's influence through sheer attrition and allowing a broader distribution of speakers[5]. Furthermore, the introduction of secret ballots for contentious issues completely bypasses the charismatic or aggressive bully, allowing the conflict-averse majority to strike down captured agendas without facing social retribution[6].

The Russian Mir (Obshchina / Skhod)

The Russian *mir* (or *obshchina*) was the peasant commune that dominated rural Russian governance from the medieval era through the early 20th century. At its core was the *skhod*, the direct assembly of the heads of households. Unlike the liberal, individualistic premise of the New England town meeting, the *mir* was fundamentally collectivist and deeply coercive. Its primary functions were the periodic repartition of communal land based on household size or labor capacity, and the enforcement of *krugovaya poruka* (joint liability or collective responsibility)[15]. Under *krugovaya poruka*, the entire commune was financially and legally liable for the tax burdens and military conscription quotas imposed by the Tsarist state. If one household defaulted, the assembly forced the others to make up the deficit, binding the community into a

structure of mutual surveillance and enforcement[15].

Steven Hoch's exhaustive 1986 demographic and social study, *Serfdom and Social Control in Russia: Petrovskoe, a Village in Tambov*, destroyed the romanticized vision of the *mir*[16]. Hoch demonstrated that the *mir* was a theater of intense patriarchal tyranny. The *skhod* was restricted exclusively to the *bol'shak*—the elder male head of a multi-generational household. Ruling with "an iron hand," these men utilized the commune to suppress younger males, control female labor, arrange marriages for economic advantage, and violently enforce agricultural conformity[16].

The Russian state relied heavily on the *mir* for rural extraction, formally institutionalizing state control over the assemblies in 1889 through the creation of the *zemskie nachal'niki* (Land Captains)[18]. These autocratic overseers, drawn from the local nobility, were granted the power to override the decisions of the *skhod*, depose elected peasant elders, and order the flogging of assembly members. The destruction of the *mir* ultimately became state policy under Prime Minister Pyotr Stolypin to prevent agrarian revolution and foster a class of conservative, property-owning farmers. The Stolypin agrarian reforms, initiated by the Ukase of November 9, 1906, and confirmed by the Law of June 14, 1910, allowed individual peasants to demand their land as private property and legally sever their connections with the *mir*[19]. Millions of households subsequently exited the commune, though the institution survived until forced Soviet collectivization.

Distinguishing the mythology from the reality of the *mir* requires addressing its tripartite historical identity. Nineteenth-century Slavophiles and populist revolutionaries (Narodniks) claimed the *mir* was a uniquely Russian institution of egalitarian brotherhood, embodying a natural, indigenous socialism that protected the weak, prevented rural proletarianization, and ensured land for all. Conversely, the archival record shows the *mir* functioned as an unpaid, decentralized organ of state tax collection and military conscription. It systematically trapped peasants in a cycle of low agricultural productivity by preventing land enclosure and penalizing innovation through constant land repartition. Modern historians, building on Hoch's work, infer that the *mir* was a sophisticated mechanism of extreme social control characterized by gerontocracy and violent patriarchal dominance. It operated as a localized cartel of older men who suppressed dissent and extracted labor from their subordinates to meet insurmountable state demands[16].

Scale Ledger: Russian Mir

Rung	Population	Viability and Reasoning
Household	4–10	**Operated/Worked:** The *bol'shak* ruled the multi-generational household absolutely, utilizing physical discipline and economic control to form the basic, unified

		voting block of the *mir*[16].
Hamlet	30–50	**Operated/Worked:** Highly effective for small-scale land coordination and immediate pasture allocation.
Village	150–500	**Operated/Worked (Peak Viability):** The classic demographic scale of the *obshchina* in regions like Tambov. This scale allowed for the intimate peer surveillance strictly necessary to enforce the punitive economics of *krugovaya poruka*[15].
Parish/District	1,500–5,000	**Operated/Failed:** At the *volost* (district) level, the *skhod* became representative rather than direct. It was heavily burdened by state administration and easily captured by wealthy peasants (*kulaks*) and state bureaucrats[18].
Town	15,000–50,000	**Never Tried:** Urbanization and the division of labor fundamentally dissolved the agrarian logic of land repartition.
Region to Planet	> 0.5M	**Never Tried:** Wholly incompatible with the institution's mechanics of face-to-face surveillance and collective agrarian

		liability.

Capture Test: Russian Mir

The *mir* was optimally designed for capture by individuals with psychopathic and Machiavellian traits. A ruthless *bol'shak* could utilize corporal punishment, control over marital arrangements, and strategic alliances within the *skhod* to ruin rivals, dictate land quality distribution, and extract surplus value from weaker households. The ultimate historical case of capture, however, was perpetrated by the state itself. The infiltration of the *mir* via the 1889 Land Captains (*zemskie nachal'niki*) represented total institutional hijacking. The state used the assembly's own mechanisms of collective liability against it, forcing the *skhod* to act as a prison warden for its own populace to prevent tax arrears[18].

The primary resistance to this capture was not procedural, but demographic flight. Peasant households ultimately voted with their feet during the Stolypin reforms of 1906–1910. When given the legal mechanism to do so, vast numbers of peasants severed their ties to the *mir* to consolidate private property and escape the collective, crushing weight of the captured assembly[19].

The Swiss Gemeindeversammlung

The *Gemeindeversammlung* (municipal assembly) is the primary legislative body for approximately four out of five Swiss municipalities. Switzerland’s hyper-federalized structure pushes maximum administrative autonomy down to the local level under the strict principle of subsidiarity, leaving all activities not explicitly assigned to higher levels within the municipal domain[23].

Extensive empirical tracking of these assemblies has been conducted by Swiss political scientist Andreas Ladner through comprehensive surveys of local secretaries in 1988, 1994, 1998, and later, with response rates routinely exceeding 69% to 84%[23]. The defining characteristic of the Swiss municipal system is its absolute, mathematical adherence to the limits of scale. Switzerland has roughly 2,900 municipalities, and more than half of them contain fewer than 1,000 inhabitants[23].

Ladner’s empirical data indicates a severe size threshold for direct assembly. In municipalities with fewer than 1,000 residents, the assembly is robust, and attendance is functional. However, as populations cross the 5,000 to 8,000 inhabitant threshold, the "size effects" originally identified by Dahl and Tufte become inescapable[23]. Participation rates collapse under the logistical and cognitive strain. Consequently, in towns exceeding 10,000 inhabitants, the *Gemeindeversammlung* is almost universally abandoned in favor of a local parliament (*Einwohnerrat* or *Gemeinderat*), a transition heavily concentrated in the French-speaking cantons and larger urban German-speaking regions[23]. Even in large direct democracies, such as the City of Zürich (with approximately 360,000 inhabitants, 210,000 of whom are voters), direct assembly is entirely replaced by a 125-seat representative parliament and a 9-seat executive, checked only by the compulsory and optional referendums on major expenditures[23].

Analyzing the Swiss model requires separating local mythology from empirical reality. The Swiss themselves view the *Gemeindeversammlung* as the cultural bedrock of their political identity,

asserting that it generates high civic competence, prevents the emergence of a detached political elite, and keeps municipal taxes tied directly to local consent. The administrative record does show highly efficient, fiscally conservative local management. However, the record also reveals chronic democratic deficits, specifically the severe under-representation of youth, newcomers, and lower-income demographics at the assemblies[25]. Modern scholarship infers that the *Gemeindeversammlung* survives in the modern era largely because it is backed by an escape valve: the local referendum. In over half of Swiss municipalities, an issue debated and decided at the assembly can be forced to a secret ballot at the polls by a petition of 5% to 40% of the electorate[23]. This structurally limits the damage a vocal minority can inflict on the floor.

Scale Ledger: Swiss Gemeindeversammlung

Rung	Population	Viability and Reasoning
Household	4–10	**Not Tried:** Inapplicable to private domestic spheres.
Hamlet	30–50	**Operated/Worked:** Functions entirely seamlessly, often blurring the line between civic assembly and informal neighborly coordination.
Village	150–500	**Operated/Worked (Peak Viability):** The core demographic bandwidth for Swiss direct democracy, allowing for broad participation without exceeding venue capacities[23].
Parish/District	1,500–5,000	**Operated/Failing:** This is the terminal threshold. Ladner explicitly identifies the 5,000–8,000 mark as the point where size effects destroy the assembly's viability and turnout collapses[23].

Town	15,000–50,000	**Failed/Replaced:** Almost universally replaced by the *Gemeinderat* (local representative parliament) due to logistical impossibility[23].
Region to Planet	> 0.5M	**Never Tried/Replaced:** Substituted entirely by standard representative parliaments and mass referenda (e.g., Zürich's cantonal and municipal structure)[23].

Capture Test: Swiss Gemeindeversammlung

The primary threat to the Swiss assembly is elite capture by local business interests or bureaucratic executives who dominate the complex, highly technical pre-meeting agenda. A Machiavellian mayor or town engineer can bury controversial environmental or zoning decisions in impenetrable technical jargon, exhausting the lay assembly and pushing through favorable legislation for cartels[26]. Anthropological studies of Swiss mountain municipalities frequently note instances of this "elite capture," where local tourist or real estate interests push through zoning exemptions because the average citizen lacks the specialized expertise to effectively debate the executive on the assembly floor[26].

The absolute resistance feature against this capture is the mandatory and optional referendum. If a dark-triad faction successfully bullies or blinds the assembly with technical jargon, the silent majority can easily gather the minimal signatures required to force the decision to a secret, town-wide ballot box. This mechanism instantly bypasses the captured floor debate and reverses the assembly's compromised vote[23].

The Spanish Concejo Abierto

The *concejo abierto* (open council) is a deep historical survival of medieval Spanish municipal law. Joaquín Costa, in his 1898 treatise *Colectivismo Agrario en España*, documented the historical depth of these assemblies, noting their roots in medieval customary law (*ordenanzas*) utilized by rural communes to manage common pastures, irrigation rights, and collective harvesting against the encroachment of the aristocracy[29].

In the modern era, it is structurally codified by Article 29 of Spain's *Ley 7/1985* (Law Regulating the Bases of Local Government)[31]. Unlike the New England or Swiss models, which tolerate assemblies in towns of several thousand, the Spanish state legally restricts the mandatory *concejo abierto* exclusively to micro-municipalities with fewer than 100 inhabitants, or to those that have traditionally retained it by historical privilege[31]. The assembly is comprised of all electors (*vecinos*) in the municipality, presided over by a directly elected Mayor. For the

assembly to be legally constituted and take action, a quorum of at least one-third of the residents (and no fewer than three people) must be present[31].
The traditional narrative among its practitioners and historical defenders posits the *concejo abierto* as a mechanism of fierce rural independence and egalitarian resource management. The historical record, however, shows that it functioned primarily as a localized survival mechanism for harsh, arid environments where survival required the absolute micro-management of scarce resources (water and pasture) through strict collective labor.
Modern legal and political scholarship views the modern *concejo abierto* as a demographic hospice mechanism. It operates only in the context of extreme rural depopulation (*la España vaciada*), acting as an administrative band-aid for dying hamlets that lack the population baseline to form standard representative councils[31].

Scale Ledger: Spanish Concejo Abierto

Rung	Population	Viability and Reasoning
Household	4–10	**Operated/Worked:** Functions legally at this scale, fitting the legal minimum requirement of 3 persons for a quorum[31].
Hamlet	30–50	**Operated/Worked (Peak Viability):** The exact demographic target of *Ley 7/1985* for isolated rural governance[31].
Village	150–500	**Operated/Failed:** Historically operated at this level, but modern law explicitly cuts off mandatory application at 100 residents, viewing it as unmanageable beyond that point[31].
Parish to Planet	> 1,500	**Failed/Never Tried:** Replaced entirely by *Ayuntamientos* (representative municipal councils).

Capture Test: Spanish Concejo Abierto

The Spanish model is historically highly susceptible to *caciquismo*—a uniquely Iberian form of rural bossism. A wealthy landowner or political broker (the *cacique*) uses patronage, employment monopolies, and outright intimidation to dictate the voting of the *vecinos*. During the Spanish Restoration period in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the *concejos* were routinely captured by local oligarchies who manipulated the open voting structure to ensure the election of compliant mayors and facilitate the privatization of communal lands[29]. The primary modern defense against *caciquismo* is the integration of the micro-municipality into the broader regional and national judicial and economic system, which strictly audits municipal budgets, effectively stripping the *concejo* of the financial autonomy that once made it a lucrative target for local tyrants.

What Direct Assembly Does and Does Not Do (300 to 5,000 People)

Between 300 and 5,000 people, direct assembly forces a community to publicly reckon with its resource allocation and leadership. It generates localized legitimacy and creates a space where civic issues are subjected to public scrutiny. However, it *does not* scale evenly. Between 300 and 5,000 people, the mathematical limits of communication inevitably transfer power from the whole to the vocal few, the executive administrators, or the specialized committees. It does not protect minority rights without the aid of a secret ballot, and it does not guarantee high participation; rather, it structurally relies on low participation (roughly 20%) to prevent the physical and logistical collapse of the assembly process.

The Strongest Case Against Direct Assembly

The most potent argument against direct assembly does not originate from autocrats, but from democratic theorists observing its structural flaws. The case rests on three pillars: the mathematics of scale, the tyranny of false consensus, and the cognitive and temporal burden on the citizen.

1. **The Mathematics of Scale:** As population grows linearly, the complexity of human interaction and the logistical difficulty of communication grow exponentially. Robert Dahl and Edward Tufte established that a direct assembly becomes mathematically incoherent past a few thousand people. You cannot physically fit them in a room, and if you do, they cannot speak or be heard[1].
2. **The Tyranny of False Consensus:** Face-to-face democracy forces humans to publicly attach their identities, relationships, and livelihoods to their political preferences. As Jane Mansbridge demonstrated in Vermont, and Steven Hoch proved in Russia, this inevitably leads to "hidden coercion." The vulnerable, the minority, and the conflict-averse will silence themselves rather than risk social ostracism or economic retaliation from powerful neighbors[6]. Consequently, direct assembly structurally favors the loud, the male, the wealthy, and the psychopathic.
3. **The Cognitive and Time Burden:** Direct assembly asks private citizens to perform the highly technical work of a bureaucracy for free. Frank Bryan noted that attending and speaking brings significant costs: "time, money, and psychic stress"[9]. The result is that

attendance plummets, transforming the "direct assembly of the people" into an unrepresentative oligarchy of the elderly, the obsessive, and those with abundant free time.

Avoiding the naturalistic fallacy is critical here: old does not mean good, and small does not mean fair. The antiquity of the *mir* or the *concejo abierto* did not prevent them from operating as engines of patriarchal oppression or oligarchic capture.

Leading Critics: Robert Dahl, Edward Tufte, Jane Mansbridge, Steven Hoch.

Summary of Robust Findings

Town population size is the single strongest negative predictor of attendance in direct legislative assemblies. Assemblies exhibit a hard mathematical viability limit, collapsing entirely or transforming into representative bodies as populations approach the 5,000 to 8,000 inhabitant threshold. Face-to-face voting inherently suppresses minority dissent and artificially enforces consensus through local social pressure and fear of retaliation. Secret balloting (the referendum or Australian ballot) is a mandatory fail-safe required to prevent charismatic or elite capture of the assembly floor. Historically, direct assemblies have relied heavily on the exclusion of women, the young, and non-property owners to keep participation numbers manageable and maintain existing power structures. The Russian *mir* demonstrates conclusively that collectivist assemblies can be effectively weaponized by the state for localized tax and labor extraction. Small scale does not equate to egalitarianism; both the *skhod* and the *concejo abierto* were frequently dominated by patriarchal autocrats (*bol'shak*) or oligarchs (*caciques*). Low attendance (around 20%) is not an anomaly but a structural requirement for the logistical survival of the modern New England town meeting. Charismatic monopolization by dark-triad actors is mitigated primarily by the physical endurance (length) of the meetings, which dilutes their influence. Ultimately, system effectiveness is inversely proportional to citizen participation; as a polity's scale and power grow, the individual's direct influence mathematically vanishes.

Contested or Open Questions

The primary contested question revolves around the "educative effect" of the assembly. Does the mere existence of a direct assembly educate the citizenry and increase civic virtue (as hypothesized by early theorists like Tocqueville and Emerson), even if 80% do not attend? Modern empirical data struggles to isolate this variable from general rural socio-demographics. Furthermore, in a post-industrial context, the question remains whether the precise mathematical equations governing the degradation of discourse per capita can be overcome by altering meeting frequency or subdividing tasks, or if the 5,000-person limit represents an absolute biological ceiling for human civic cognition.

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Implementability after the Fall

The loss of the state and industrial supply chains forces a return to localized governance. The minimum viable version of direct assembly scales distinctly across rungs. For a **Household (4 to 10 people)**, direct assembly is unnecessary and counterproductive; governance is dictatorial or based on informal familial consensus, requiring only verbal communication and a patriarchal/matriarchal enforcer (the *bol'shak* model). For a **Village (300 people)**, direct assembly operates at optimal scale. It requires a physical meeting space large enough to hold approximately 100 people (expecting ~30% turnout). It requires basic literacy for a presiding officer to read an agenda (a "warning"), a shared calendar to guarantee predictable assembly days, and a basic physical ledger to record precedent and property boundaries. Voting is conducted by voice or physical division (standing). For a **District (3,000 people)**, the assembly reaches its absolute maximum viable threshold. It requires highly structured parliamentary procedure, an established, hardened moderator capable of neutralizing aggressive narcissists, a written constitution/charter, and a system for secret paper balloting to protect vulnerable citizens from economic or physical retaliation by new local elites.

The first failure to expect: At the Village rung (300 people), the immediate failure will be *Agenda Capture by a Charismatic Narcissist*. Without a hardened moderator and strict time limits, a highly vocal, aggressive individual will monopolize the floor, transforming the assembly into an exhausting theater of personal grievance. The conflict-averse majority will silently concede to end the discomfort and will subsequently stop attending, leaving the assembly as the legal instrument of a dark-triad faction.

Principles

Governance Principles Supported or Refuted
The viability of direct face-to-face legislative assembly degrades logarithmically as population increases, facing absolute structural failure between 5,000 and 8,000 individuals.
In populations exceeding 1,000, direct assembly survives physically only because the vast majority of the eligible citizenry chooses to self-disenfranchise by not attending.
Face-to-face voting in tight-knit communities suppresses dissent and disproportionately

empowers those with economic leverage or aggressive psychological traits over the conflict-averse.
Direct assemblies cannot protect marginalized individuals from local elite capture without an escape mechanism into secret, anonymized voting.
The time, energy, and psychic stress required to actively participate in a direct assembly act as a regressive tax, naturally concentrating power in the hands of the wealthy, the elderly, and the obsessive.
Assemblies tasked with collective liability inevitably evolve into mechanisms of authoritarian social control wielded by internal patriarchs and external state powers.

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