CA-05 Selectorate theory: the dictator's handbook applied to villages, firms and churches

Introduction: The Architecture of Political Survival

The study of governance, historically burdened by normative assumptions about civic virtue, ideological purity, or national character, underwent a paradigm shift with the formalization of selectorate theory. Articulated comprehensively by Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, Alastair Smith, Randolph Siverson, and James Morrow in their 2003 foundation text, *The Logic of Political Survival*, the theory posits that all political behavior can be explained by a single, ruthless axiom: leaders are self-interested actors whose primary, overriding objective is to acquire and retain power[1]. Selectorate theory abandons the romance of the primitive and the naturalistic fallacy—the notions that ancient, small-scale, or indigenous arrangements were inherently altruistic or fair. Instead, it applies a universally scalable calculus of political survival, revealing that the mechanics of power remain identical whether the leader governs a sovereign state, a corporate board, a decentralized autonomous organization (DAO), or a post-collapse agrarian village[3].

The framework categorizes any governed population into three nested tiers. The Nominal Selectorate (S or N) encompasses every individual with a formal, legal, or theoretical say in choosing the leader. The Real Selectorate consists of those whose support practically influences the outcome. The Winning Coalition (W) is the absolute minimal subset of the Real Selectorate whose ongoing support is strictly necessary for the incumbent to remain in office[4].

The explanatory engine of the theory is the ratio of the Winning Coalition to the Nominal Selectorate (W/S). This ratio dictates the "loyalty norm"[6]. In systems where W is small and S is vast (a low W/S ratio, typical of autocracies or captured institutions), the members of the Winning Coalition are intensely loyal to the leader[8]. They understand that they receive highly lucrative private goods—wealth, status, immunity—and that because the pool of potential replacements (S) is massive, their probability of maintaining their privileged position under a challenger is statistically negligible[7]. Leaders in these low-W/S environments survive the longest, extract the highest rents, and systematically under-provide public goods[1].

Conversely, when W is large relative to S (a high W/S ratio, characteristic of robust democracies or highly participatory cooperatives), the loyalty norm is weak. The leader simply does not possess sufficient resources to purchase the loyalty of a massive coalition through private goods[1]. Consequently, to prevent mass defection to a challenger, the leader is forced to

expend resources on broad public goods—infrastructure, equitable justice, and economic growth—that benefit the entire Selectorate[1].

Institutional Vulnerability and Dark Triad Capture

Before examining specific governance scales, it is critical to establish how these systems fail under the pressure of hostile actors. The Institutional Vulnerability Framework demonstrates that governance structures are routinely captured by individuals exhibiting the Dark Triad of personality traits: narcissism (grandiosity and entitlement), Machiavellianism (strategic manipulation and cynicism), and psychopathy (ruthlessness and a deficit of empathy)[11]. These traits are not merely clinical pathologies but highly adapted, synergistic evolutionary strategies designed for institutional exploitation[13].

A leader with elevated Machiavellianism intuitively internalizes the axioms of selectorate theory. Their primary strategic imperative is to sever the functional relationship between the Nominal Selectorate and the Winning Coalition[3]. To execute institutional capture, the dark triad actor deliberately inflates the Nominal Selectorate—often by extending superficial voting rights or membership to disorganized, highly dependent, or marginalized groups[9]. This artificial inflation dilutes the institutional power of competent challengers.

Simultaneously, leveraging psychopathic callousness, the leader orchestrates the surgical removal of independent thinkers, institutional veterans, and potential rivals from the Real Selectorate[13]. The leader then constructs a microscopic, highly dependent Winning Coalition[3]. Because this new W is drawn from a vastly inflated S, the W/S ratio approaches zero. The members of the new W become fiercely loyal, aware that they are entirely replaceable and that their access to private goods depends exclusively on the incumbent's survival.

This dynamic is tragically evident in the history of the Peoples Temple. Jim Jones presented an egalitarian, socialist theology (what the organization *said* it did), but his structural reality was an extreme application of selectorate mechanics[14]. Jones systematically expanded his Nominal Selectorate by recruiting vulnerable populations across California[14]. He then centralized absolute power by curating a tiny inner circle (the Winning Coalition) rewarded with extreme private goods, including superior nutrition, exemption from manual labor, and coercive sexual privileges. By relocating to Jonestown, Guyana, Jones eliminated the exit option, rendering the W/S ratio absolute and forcing his coalition to execute violent extraction and ultimate destruction upon the masses[14]. Similar, albeit non-lethal, institutional grooming occurs in corporate governance, where narcissistic executives systematically purge independent board members to replace them with sycophants, transforming public goods (shareholder dividends) into private goods (executive compensation)[3].

Arrangement 1: Village Councils and the Indian Panchayats

The foundational unit of agrarian self-governance is the village council. To understand the empirical mechanics of the Winning Coalition at this scale, modern scholarship frequently turns

to the Indian Gram Panchayats.

Ideology, Record, and Scholarship

What they said it did: The Panchayat system is ideologically framed as a mechanism for democratic decentralization, intended to empower local villagers to manage infrastructure, adjudicate disputes, and direct economic development equitably. **What the record shows:** Historically, Panchayats were heavily captured by local male elites. The Real Selectorate was restricted to high-caste, land-owning men, who systematically directed resources toward their own private enterprises and preferred public goods, heavily neglecting women's infrastructural needs[15]. **What modern scholarship infers:** In 1998, a constitutional amendment in West Bengal mandated that one-third of Panchayat chief (Pradhan) positions be randomly reserved for women[15]. Chattopadhyay and Duflo's (2004) landmark randomized policy experiment analyzed this exogenous shock. The quota artificially and instantly expanded the Real Selectorate and the Winning Coalition[15]. Female participation in the *Gram Samsad* (village assemblies) rose from 6.9% to 9.9%[15]. Because the Winning Coalition now structurally required female support, leaders drastically shifted public goods provision. Investments in drinking water equipment (a priority for rural women) increased by 60%, accounting for 5% of the total Panchayat income, alongside significant increases in road repair[15]. The scholarship definitively proves that expanding W algorithmically forces the reallocation of state resources to match the new coalition's preferences.

Capture Test: The Panchayat

A dark triad actor (e.g., a wealthy landowner) captures a village council by monopolizing a critical economic choke-point, such as the local credit supply or water access[16]. By controlling these private goods, the actor threatens economic ruin for anyone voting for a challenger. The formal election becomes a sham, inflating S while reducing W to the actor's immediate family and enforcers. Capture is resisted only through exogenous institutional enforcement (like the randomized quotas utilized in West Bengal) that bypasses local economic monopolies[15].

Scale Ledger: Village Councils

Scale (Population)	Viability and Historical Record	Structural Rationale
Household (4–10)	Highly viable. Exists universally.	Direct observation prevents free-riding. W and S are virtually identical unless subjected to severe patriarchal authoritarianism.

Hamlet (30–50)	Highly viable.	Reputation tracking is perfect. Exit costs are low, forcing leaders to maintain a large W to prevent community fracturing.
Village (150–500)	**Optimal.** Panchayats demonstrate robust outcomes when quotas are enforced[15].	Operates at the upper limit of Dunbar's number. Requires formal rules to prevent local elites from establishing a permanent small W.
Parish (1.5k–5k)	Marginally viable.	Direct democracy degrades. W naturally shrinks to a managerial class unless representative lotteries or strict term limits are imposed.
Town (15k–50k)	Fails as a direct council.	Reputation tracking collapses. Requires complex representative federation.
Region (0.5M–5M)	Never tried as a single council.	Logistically impossible without modern telecommunications and massive bureaucracy.
Nation (50M–500M)	Never tried.	N/A
Planet (8B)	Never tried.	N/A

Arrangement 2: Communes and the Israeli Kibbutz

The Israeli Kibbutz provides a rigorous environment to test selectorate theory within environments demanding absolute economic egalitarianism.

Ideology, Record, and Scholarship

What they said it did: Founded in 1910, the Kibbutzim were ideological, voluntary socialist communes designed to eradicate private property and wage labor[20]. The ideology dictated that all members were equal components of the Winning Coalition, receiving identical public and private goods regardless of their individual marginal productivity[20]. **What the record shows:** The Kibbutzim were extraordinarily successful for decades, growing to 268 settlements housing 120,000 members (2.5% of the Jewish population) with average community sizes of 440 people[20]. By the 1970s, their living standards exceeded the Israeli average. However, as the external Israeli economy liberalized, the Kibbutzim suffered a catastrophic "brain drain." The most highly skilled members recognized that their labor was subsidizing the less productive members. The record shows that movers were highly educated (61.5% held a high school diploma, compared to 50% for stayers)[20]. To survive, most Kibbutzim eventually abandoned equal sharing in favor of market-based wage systems[21]. **What modern scholarship infers:** Abramitzky (2008) demonstrated that the Kibbutzim initially thrived not merely because of ideological zeal, but because they provided a highly efficient mutual insurance mechanism during a period of extreme macroeconomic volatility and physical danger[20]. In selectorate terms, the external threat environment forced a massive W/S ratio; every member's participation was vital for physical survival. However, as external stability increased, the cost of exit plummeted. The equal-sharing model acted as a massive tax on high-ability individuals. When the Kibbutzim reformed their structures to allow differential wages, the incentive structures rapidly altered behavior. High school students, recognizing the new return on human capital, studied harder, achieving 3.6 more points on exams and a 6% higher graduation rate[20]. The scholarship infers that a 100% W is mathematically unstable when external exit costs are low and productivity is highly varied.

Capture Test: The Commune

In a theoretically perfectly egalitarian commune, a dark triad actor captures the system by taking control of the work-assignment committee. While they cannot legally alter the equal distribution of capital, they can distribute the private goods of *leisure* and *comfort* by assigning grueling physical labor to challengers and administrative or highly desirable tasks to a curated group of loyalists (a shadow W). The feature that historically resisted this capture in the Kibbutz was the absolute freedom of exit; if the work committee became too extractive, the most productive members simply left the Kibbutz, collapsing the shadow leader's resource base[20].

Scale Ledger: Communes

Scale (Population)	Viability and Historical Record	Structural Rationale
Household (4–10)	Highly viable.	Kinship overrides the free-rider problem.

Hamlet (30–50)	Viable under high external threat.	Strict egalitarianism functions well as a mutual insurance mechanism against environmental shock.
Village (150–500)	**Optimal.** The historical Kibbutz (avg 440 members)[20].	High social cohesion is maintained through ideological screening, but requires strict limits on wealth accumulation to prevent factionalism.
Parish (1.5k–5k)	Rare. Fails over time.	At this scale, the cognitive load of monitoring free-riders exceeds human capacity. Bureaucracies form, demanding differential compensation.
Town (15k–50k)	Never successfully sustained.	Equal sharing collapses due to specialized labor requirements and the impossibility of uniform ideological enforcement.
Region (0.5M–5M)	Failed catastrophically.	Attempted via forced collectivization (e.g., Soviet Kolkhoz), resulting in massive death tolls as W shrank to a party vanguard extracting grain from the S.
Nation (50M–500M)	Failed catastrophically.	E.g., Maoist China. W/S ratio is infinitesimal.
Planet (8B)	Never tried.	N/A

Arrangement 3: Cooperatives and the Mondragon Corporation

As governance structures transition from agricultural villages to complex industrial economies, the tension between maintaining a large Winning Coalition and achieving market efficiency becomes acute. The Mondragon Corporation exemplifies this struggle.

Ideology, Record, and Scholarship

What they said it did: Founded in 1956 in the Basque region of Spain by Father José María Arizmendiarrieta, Mondragon was established to embed Catholic social teachings and socialist utopian visions into industrial production[23]. It proclaimed an absolute commitment to workplace democracy, community embeddedness, and strict egalitarianism, heavily restricting wage differentials (initially capped at 1 to 3) and ensuring every worker-member had an equal vote in the General Assembly[24]. **What the record shows:** Mondragon achieved staggering commercial success, growing from five workers to over 80,000 employees globally[25]. However, to survive the brutal structural constraints of global capitalism—particularly following the 2008 financial crisis—Mondragon fundamentally altered its composition. It acquired massive capitalist subsidiaries in developing nations, hiring thousands of wage workers who were explicitly denied cooperative membership rights or voting power[24]. **What modern scholarship infers:** Mondragon succumbed to Robert Michels' "Iron Law of Oligarchy"[24]. As the organization scaled, maintaining a W comprising tens of thousands of members proved administratively and competitively paralyzing. The leadership executed a classic selectorate maneuver: they massively expanded the organization's labor pool (and thus its revenue generation) by hiring international wage workers, but ruthlessly restricted the Nominal Selectorate to the original Basque core[24]. This transformed Mondragon into a "coopitalist hybrid"[24]. Furthermore, scholarship identifies deep discursive inconsistencies; while the formal structure maintains democratic aesthetics, the actual managerial language and operational control mimic post-Fordist capitalist management, indicating that the Real Selectorate is much smaller than the Nominal Selectorate[23].

Capture Test: The Industrial Cooperative

A Machiavellian executive captures a cooperative not through violence, but through technocratic managerialism[27]. The executive argues that the market is too complex for the General Assembly to understand. They outsource critical analytics to external consultants and create complex financial instruments, moving actual decision-making power from the transparent General Assembly to opaque, highly specialized sub-committees (shrinking W). Resistance requires strict, constitutional caps on growth and the mandatory rotation of executive officers to prevent the crystallization of an insulated managerial elite[24].

Scale Ledger: Industrial Cooperatives

Scale (Population)	Viability and Historical Record	Structural Rationale
Household (4–10)	N/A	Too small for industrial division of labor.
Hamlet (30–50)	Viable (artisanal collectives).	Easy to maintain 1:1 voting and transparent ledgers.
Village (150–500)	Highly viable.	The original Mondragon scale. Direct democracy functions efficiently.
Parish (1.5k–5k)	Viable with friction.	Requires transition from direct assembly to elected representative councils.
Town (15k–50k)	**Maximal historical scale without compromise.**	Mondragon's core scale[23]. Survival requires complex federated networks of smaller cooperatives to mask oligarchical drift.
Region (0.5M–5M)	**Fails democratically.**	At 80,000 workers, Mondragon abandoned universal enfranchisement to compete globally[24]. W shrinks relative to the total labor force.
Nation (50M–500M)	Never tried as a unified firm.	N/A
Planet (8B)	Never tried.	N/A

Arrangement 4: Digital Commons, DAOs, and Open Source

In the absence of a physical state, digital governance provides the purest laboratory for testing selectorate theory, particularly because the cost of geographical relocation is replaced by the frictionless mechanism of the "hard fork."

Ideology, Record, and Scholarship

What they said it did: Decentralized Autonomous Organizations (DAOs) and open-source software communities profess to be the ultimate realization of flat, transparent, meritocratic governance[28]. They claim that code is law, and that power is perfectly distributed among users and contributors. **What the record shows:** The reality is plagued by severe voter apathy and rapid oligarchic capture. In MakerDAO, a leading decentralized finance protocol, governance tokens (MKR) dictated voting power. The record showed chronic low participation and the absolute outsized influence of a few "whales" (wealthy token holders) and the founder, Rune Christensen[29]. In the traditional open-source sphere, the Redis database project was functionally captured by its corporate steward, Redis Ltd. In 2024, Redis altered its licensing from the permissive BSD 3-Clause to highly restrictive dual licenses (RSALv2 and SSPLv1), effectively hoarding the software's commercial value as a private good[30]. **What modern scholarship infers:** Digital commons are highly susceptible to capital-based W shrinkage (token accumulation), but they possess an ultimate, capture-resistant defense mechanism: zero-cost exit. When MakerDAO's Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI) indicated dangerous voting concentration[32], the community initiated the 2022-2023 "Endgame Plan," breaking the monolith into semi-independent "SubDAOs" to decentralize the Real Selectorate[28].

The Redis crisis was resolved even more dramatically. Because open-source code can be infinitely replicated, a coalition of tech giants (AWS, Google, Oracle) and independent developers executed a "hard fork" of Redis 7.2.4, creating *Valkey* under the Linux Foundation[30]. Valkey utilized a multi-vendor governance model, mathematically preventing any single actor from monopolizing the code[35]. Within a year, Valkey generated 19,800 GitHub stars, 761 forks, 5 million Docker pulls, and released version 8.1.1, achieving 37% higher throughput than its predecessor[31]. Similarly, the Python programming language resolved a governance crisis by instituting PEP 8016, which established a 5-person Steering Council subject to a two-week vote of no confidence requiring a two-thirds majority to trigger[36]. Scholarship infers that in environments where exiting the system costs nothing, leaders are paralyzed from shrinking W; the moment they attempt to extract private goods, the entire Nominal Selectorate simply migrates to a cloned system.

Capture Test: Digital Commons

A dark triad developer captures a project by quietly accumulating governance tokens during periods of low attention, waiting for voter apathy to lower the threshold of the Real Selectorate. They then initiate a snap vote to alter the foundational code, redirecting treasury funds to their own wallets (an "exit scam" or "rug pull"). This is resisted by instituting algorithmic time-delays on voting execution, capping maximum voting power per address, and maintaining open-source licenses that guarantee the right to fork[30].

Scale Ledger: Digital Commons

Scale (Population)	Viability and Historical Record	Structural Rationale
Household (4–10)	N/A	Requires network effects.
Hamlet (30–50)	Highly viable.	Core developer teams operate efficiently via rough consensus.
Village (150–500)	Highly viable.	Python Steering Council model works perfectly[36].
Parish (1.5k–5k)	Viable.	Requires structured delegate voting.
Town (15k–50k)	**Optimal.**	The scale of major open-source ecosystems (e.g., Valkey contributors and power users)[34].
Region (0.5M–5M)	Viable via SubDAOs.	MakerDAO Endgame attempts this via compartmentalization[29]. Tokenomics often trend toward oligarchy (high HHI) if not strictly regulated[32].
Nation (50M–500M)	Theoretical.	Global protocols (Bitcoin/Ethereum) operate at this scale of users, but the actual core developer W remains at the "Village" scale.
Planet (8B)	N/A	N/A

Arrangement 5: Churches and the Papal Conclave

Religious institutions provide a unique lens into selectorate theory because their stated legitimacy is entirely metaphysical, yet their operational mechanics are bound by brutal political realities.

Ideology, Record, and Scholarship

What they said it did: The Roman Catholic Church asserts that the Pope is selected through the divine guidance of the Holy Spirit, channeling through the College of Cardinals who operate in pious, spiritual consensus. **What the record shows:** Between 1268 and 1271, the papal election in Viterbo became the longest in Church history[39]. The cardinals, deeply entrenched in French and Italian political factions, refused to compromise. The deadlock was broken only when the citizens of Viterbo—acting as a violent, extra-legal enforcer—locked the cardinals in the episcopal palace, physically tore the roof off the building, and reduced their rations to bread and water[40]. Under extreme physical duress, the cardinals rapidly elected Pope Gregory X[39]. **What modern scholarship infers:** In 1274, Gregory X issued the papal bull *Ubi periculum*, permanently institutionalizing the harsh conditions of the Viterbo election into the rules of the papal conclave (from *cum clave*, "with a key")[40]. Selectorate theory explains this brilliantly. Prior to 1274, a prolonged election allowed cardinals (the Winning Coalition) to extract massive private goods (bribes, political concessions, status) from secular kings vying for influence. By locking the cardinals in a room and stripping them of comfort and outside contact, *Ubi periculum* artificially altered their utility calculus. The structural design made the extraction of private goods physically impossible, forcing the W to immediately produce the required public good: a new leader[41].

Capture Test: The Conclave

A Machiavellian cardinal captures the papacy through simony—the purchasing of ecclesiastical office. By utilizing immense wealth to quietly buy the votes of a minimal Winning Coalition prior to the death of the incumbent, the election becomes a rubber stamp. To resist this, the Church implemented excommunication for simony, enforced the total isolation of the conclave to prevent real-time negotiation with external financiers, and required a two-thirds supermajority, making the necessary W prohibitively expensive to buy[41].

Scale Ledger: The Papal Conclave

Scale (Population)	Viability and Historical Record	Structural Rationale
Household (4–10)	N/A	
Hamlet (30–50)	**Optimal.**	The College of Cardinals historically operated at this scale[39]. The isolation mechanic works perfectly for a small, elite Selectorate.

Village (150–500)	Viable.	Modern conclaves operate at this scale (~120 electors). The two-thirds supermajority forces broad consensus.
Parish (1.5k–5k)	Fails.	You cannot physically lock 5,000 people in a room until they agree.
Town (15k–50k)	N/A	
Region (0.5M–5M)	N/A	
Nation (50M–500M)	N/A	
Planet (8B)	N/A	The Catholic Church claims 1.3 billion members, but the Real Selectorate is strictly capped at the Village scale.

Critiques and Theoretical Blind Spots

Selectorate theory, while highly predictive, has faced severe methodological and theoretical attacks from leading scholars.

Methodological Vulnerability: The Endogeneity Problem

Clarke and Stone (2008) delivered a devastating critique of the foundational empirical tests in *The Logic of Political Survival*[1]. Bueno de Mesquita et al. attempted to prove that W causes democratic outcomes by residualizing the Polity IV Democracy variable (creating a variable called WS:DemRes) to isolate the effects of W from other democratic features[1]. Clarke and Stone demonstrated that this residualization introduced massive omitted variable bias. The metrics used to calculate W (like the competitiveness of executive recruitment) are inherently the exact same metrics used to define democracy[6]. When Clarke and Stone ran the regressions including standard democracy controls without residualization, the independent explanatory power of W evaporated[1]. As they noted, "Including both in one regression makes it difficult to judge the separate effects of either." This implies that selectorate theory might not be an independent causal mechanism, but merely a mathematical tautology that re-describes existing democratic indices[1].

Theoretical Blind Spots: Authoritarianism and the Ejectorate

Gallagher and Hanson (2015) present the definitive theoretical challenge, famously characterizing selectorate theory as a "blunt instrument" for understanding autocracies[9]. They identify three catastrophic blind spots:

1. **The Homogeneity Assumption:** The model assumes that all members of the selectorate share identical preferences for public goods, private goods, and leisure[8]. By reducing politics exclusively to the mathematics of coalition size, the theory assumes away the actual substance of politics: ideological warfare, class conflict, and ethnic division. It cannot explain why a leader might be overthrown for implementing a specific policy if the size of W remains unchanged[44].
2. **The Illusion of Formal Institutions:** The concepts of N, S, and W rely on identifiable, institutionalized rules. However, in authoritarian regimes or post-collapse environments, the locus of power is deliberately obscured. As Gallagher and Hanson argue, "Lack of clarity about the ultimate source of power is a distinctive feature of authoritarianism"[9]. Reducing informal military networks or shadow oligarchies to a numerical vector fundamentally misapprehends how tyrants survive[9].
3. **The Role of the Ejectorate:** The theory posits that leaders with a small W care nothing for the unenfranchised masses. In reality, the masses (the "ejectorate") wield the "revolution constraint." If deprivation becomes too severe, the masses will violently overthrow the system[8]. Autocrats are therefore forced to provide a baseline of public goods regardless of W's size, a dynamic the core model fails to elegantly accommodate[8].

Furthermore, as Kennedy (2009) argues, the theory entirely ignores the concepts of legitimacy and ideology[10]. The model cannot explain why a population might willingly endure starvation and a tiny W/S ratio out of profound religious zeal or nationalist fervor, rather than executing a strictly rational resource calculation.

Summary of Robust Findings

Political survival at any scale is universally predicated on building and maintaining a minimal necessary subset of supporters, the Winning Coalition. Leaders are gravitationally pulled toward shrinking this coalition to concentrate private goods and minimize the cost of purchasing loyalty. Expanding the Nominal Selectorate while aggressively keeping the Real Selectorate small generates intense loyalty through the fear of replacement. Conversely, expanding the Winning Coalition mathematically forces leaders to shift resources from private payouts to broad public goods to maintain their grip on power. In micro-governance settings like villages and cooperatives, egalitarianism only survives when strict structural constraints—such as sortition or zero exit costs—prevent elite capture. Mandating the expansion of the real selectorate, as seen in gender quotas, reliably alters the composition of public goods to match the new coalition's specific preferences. As organizations scale, the administrative transaction costs of maintaining

a massive Winning Coalition naturally induce oligarchy unless actively and constitutionally resisted. Digital commons circumvent this by weaponizing the "hard fork," utilizing zero-cost exit to keep the threat of mass defection perpetually high. Dark Triad personalities capture these institutions by systematically inflating the Nominal Selectorate with dependents while ruthlessly purging independent thinkers from the Real Selectorate. Despite its predictive power, the theory struggles to independently measure coalition size without relying on democratic indices, and fails to account for the stabilizing power of ideology and informal shadow networks.

Contested or Open Questions

The paramount unresolved question is whether the size of the Winning Coalition (W) can be empirically measured in a manner entirely mathematically independent of traditional, normative metrics of democracy. Furthermore, how can selectorate theory algorithmically integrate the role of non-material incentives—such as religious zeal, ethnic nationalism, or ideological purity—which frequently sustain small-coalition loyalty during periods of severe economic deprivation? In post-state, resource-scarce environments, what is the exact mathematical threshold of the W/S ratio at which a previously egalitarian organization irrevocably tips into an extractive autocracy? Finally, how does the omnipresent threat of violence from the unenfranchised (the revolution constraint) quantitatively alter the public versus private goods calculus of a microscopic Winning Coalition?

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Implementability after the Fall

To survive the permanent loss of the state's reach, institutions must be engineered with the explicit, cynical assumption that any leader will naturally attempt to shrink their Winning Coalition.

The Household (4 to 10 people)

- **Minimum Viable Version:** A mandatory, daily mealtime assembly where all foraging, agricultural yields, and labor hours are pooled visibly on a central table. Decisions regarding caloric distribution and task assignment are determined by absolute adult consensus.
- **Needs to Start:** A shared hearth (meeting place) and a cultural commitment to collective caloric security.
- **First Failure to Expect:** The most physically capable provider will eventually leverage their asymmetric caloric contribution to demand private goods (larger rations, better sleeping quarters, exemption from menial tasks), reducing W strictly to themselves and fracturing the consensus model into a patriarchal autocracy.

The Village (300 people)

- **Minimum Viable Version:** An adaptation of the Venetian Doge electoral system combined with the Zapatista *Junta de Buen Gobierno*. The Real Selectorate consists of every adult. The executive council (W) is selected entirely by **sortition** (drawing lots from an urn) for brief, non-renewable terms (e.g., three months), severing the ability to curate a loyalist coalition.
- **Needs to Start:** Literacy (to read laws and audit the harvest), a physical ledger, a centralized, weather-proof meeting hall, and a shared, synchronized calendar to enforce rigid rotation schedules.
- **First Failure to Expect:** Charismatic, highly competent, or wealthy families will bypass the sortition council by establishing an informal, shadow decision-making body that controls vital trade with neighboring villages, rendering the formal council a powerless, ceremonial Nominal Selectorate.

The District (3,000 people)

- **Minimum Viable Version:** A federated architecture merging Ostrom's polycentric commons with a strict separation of goods. Ten constituent villages of 300 people send two instantly recallable delegates each to a district assembly. Crucially, the district assembly is constitutionally stripped of the power to distribute private goods or adjudicate local justice; it controls *only* macro-public goods: the maintenance of inter-village roads and the protection of shared watersheds.
- **Needs to Start:** Written, immutable constitutional charters, highly secure record-keeping (locked, dual-key ledgers), scheduled and protected emissary travel routes, and a strict, violently enforceable recall mechanism held by the constituent villages.
- **First Failure to Expect:** The delegates will rapidly form an insulated administrative class. They will collude to tax the villages beyond the actual requirements of infrastructural maintenance, inventing complex bureaucratic necessities to justify paying themselves exorbitant stipends (private goods), thus transitioning the District into a classic, extractive oligarchy.

Principles

1. Leaders universally prioritize their own political survival above the ideological purity,

economic efficiency, or moral health of the system they govern.
2. Expanding the absolute size of the Winning Coalition mathematically forces leaders to provide public goods rather than targeted private rewards.
3. Artificially inflating the Nominal Selectorate while aggressively shrinking the Real Selectorate is the primary mechanism for generating absolute loyalty and facilitating autocratic corruption.
4. Scale intrinsically and inevitably incentivizes oligarchy, as the transaction costs of maintaining a massive Winning Coalition eventually outweigh the political benefits of broad enfranchisement.
5. Sortition actively prevents factional capture by permanently severing a leader's ability to promise future private goods to a static, predictable group of supporters.
6. The presence of zero-cost exit mechanisms severely limits the ability of a leader to extract rents or shrink the Winning Coalition, as the Selectorate can infinitely replicate the system.
7. Institutional vulnerability to dark-triad capture reaches its apex when structural rules permit a leader to obscure the boundaries between the Nominal and Real Selectorate.
8. The unenfranchised masses exert influence upon the Winning Coalition only when the perceived cost of violent revolution drops below the threshold of their daily misery.

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