Why Societies Move Toward Oligarchy — And How They Don't Have To

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The Attractor Theory, Told in Plain Language

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This is the narrative version. For the full mathematical development, see the rigorous version.

1. The Core Idea in Plain Terms

Societies don't randomly become unequal.

They move toward patterns — like gravity pulling objects.

These patterns are called **attractors**.

Two main ones:

- **Oligarchic** — power and wealth concentrate
- **Egalitarian** — resources remain broadly shared

2. What Creates Oligarchy

Imagine a simple situation:

Someone starts with more.

Because they have more:

- They get better opportunities
- They gain influence
- They reinforce their position

Over time:

- Small differences become large
- Large differences become dominance

> **Real-life example: Modern economies**
>
> Wealth generates investment income. Investment generates more wealth.
>
> This creates **self-reinforcing inequality**.

3. What Prevents Oligarchy

Now imagine a different structure:

- Accumulation is limited
- Sharing is expected
- Dominance is challenged

Example: San societies

If someone accumulates too much:

- Social pressure reduces it
- Sharing restores balance

No one becomes permanently dominant.

4. Why Small Systems Stay Equal

In small groups:

- Everyone sees everything
- Behavior is visible
- Corrections happen quickly

5. Why Large Systems Drift Toward Inequality

As systems grow:

- Visibility decreases
- Coordination becomes harder
- Power concentrates

6. The Breakthrough Insight

> Large systems don't fail because equality is impossible. They fail because **the structure changes as they scale**.

7. How to Scale Equality

Two key mechanisms:

Modular Structure

Instead of one giant system: many smaller systems, connected together.

Each retains local visibility and local control.

New World Web

A shared digital layer that:

- Shows needs
- Shows resources
- Shows decisions

8. What This Looks Like in Practice

Example: Medical Need

A hospital needs equipment.

Instead of budgeting, negotiating, competing —

The system:

- Detects the need
- Finds available supply
- Routes resources

Example: Problem Solving

A community faces a technical issue.

The system:

- Broadcasts the problem
- Matches people with relevant skills
- Enables collaboration

9. What Happens When Things Go Wrong

Case: Shortage

System detects imbalance. Allocation adjusts. Production increases.

Case: Power Concentration

Decision patterns become visible. Authority is redistributed.

Case: Data Failure

Local systems continue operating. Coordination resumes when restored.

10. Why This System Can Stay Stable

Because it:

- Limits accumulation
- Prevents dominance
- Corrects failures early

- Distributes power

11. What This Means for People

In oligarchic systems:

- Insecurity
- Competition
- Inequality

In egalitarian systems:

- Stability
- Cooperation
- Shared access

12. Final Insight

The question is not: *"Are humans too selfish?"*

The question is: **"What system reinforces which behaviors?"**

> If a system rewards accumulation and power — oligarchy emerges.
>
> If a system limits accumulation and distributes coordination — equality stabilizes.

Continue Reading

Rigorous Version The full mathematical framework behind the attractor theory. **Oligarchic Capture Model** The detailed seventeen-stage model of how concentration emerges, stabilizes, and can be transformed. **The Case Against Hierarchy** Evidence from five domains showing that peer-based structures produce the greatest human and societal wellbeing.