CHAPTER V

ATTENDANCE: MEETING HALLS AND BALLOT SYSTEMS

*Democracy must begin at home, and
its home is the small community.*

—John Dewey

One day in the summer of 1760 a man named Jacob Bailey was walking overland from Montreal to a town in Massachusetts called Newbury. He was a soldier in the service of the Crown returning from a campaign against the French. His journey home led him down the Connecticut River Valley. Just below the fall line where the waters turn deep and canoes no longer scrape bottom in August, he came upon a huge bend in the river. It turned out to be a half loop that snaked off east toward New Hampshire, turned south for about a half mile, and then headed back toward the Green Mountains of Vermont before once again heading south on its journey to the sea.

This is now called the "great oxbow." Immediately below it the river repeated itself on a smaller scale and created the "little oxbow." For ten thousand springtimes the water had rolled across the meadows within these huge bends as the river grew impatient and took the direct route south. Consequently there is no better soil in New England. Bailey knew it. In 1763 he returned to the region the Abnaki called *coos* (where the great pine grow), built a town, and named it Newbury after the place he had called home.

This book began at the Newbury town meeting of 1969 when I went there with one of my students to test the methodology. It is the only community for which I have data for every year the

study was conducted from 1970 to 1998.[1]   The account of what explains (or does not explain) the

practice of real democracy, therefore, appropriately begins in the land of the coos.

HOMELAND NEWBURY

WITNESS

There was the river that led away to God knows where. Give a kid a raft and a little pluck and that deep flowing builder of dreams could bring an eleven year old enough adventure to last a lifetime. We never considered "running" away from home. Hell, we'd float for it. There was a railroad too. Accordingly, there was a station where passenger trains stopped twice a day. It was a perfect place for hanging out and watching the strangers watch you—many with pity in their eyes at the sight of ragged kids without the brains to know how unhappy they were. I have met many of these people later in life.

They still don't get it.

Memory. We had a cemetery, a long pretty one just above the river north of town. The hornpouting was always good down behind it. But you fish for hornpout (some call them bullheads) at night by lantern. Then you have to walk home—through the cemetery. There was a post office in the village, a general store named Jim's, and Harley Slack's Garage where it was always dark and cool in summer and the men there moved slowly about in their cavern of oily tools and off-limit wall calendars.

There was a paved road (that soon changed to dirt) that went into the hills beyond the village to "out back." There was a little pond called the "fishpond" about a half-mile through the woods on an old logging road northwest of town. There was "checkerberry mound," where mayflowers grew in abundance, and lady slippers and hepaticas too. It was there I shot my first partridge.

Here and there little trout-filled brooks flowed into the Connecticut. There were neat old buildings, a few abandoned barns, and even a rich person's beautiful house surrounded by a white picket fence. It was an exact square acre located next to the green in the middle of town. In fact there was a little rock out front on which was painted the inscription "Dream Acre." The owner's name was Mrs. Charles Bailey.

As in: "Let's go down to Pop Green's barn, fill these bags with manure, and tonight we'll dump it all over Mrs. 'Chaaaarles' Bailey's lawn!" Could it have been more perfect?

There was a Sunday school, a grade school and a high school where in 1959 I and six others graduated in a little lilac-filled town hall. There was a little league team, and there was a barber shop until I was ten. Then it moved down to Bradford. In the late '50s we watched out for Russian planes armed with nuclear bombs from the Ground Observers Corps building that Frank Cass and others built down by the creamery.

There were junior proms and basketball games and senior plays and March of Dimes drives and summer people who always could be shamed (very subtly, mind you) into

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[1] Except for 1993 when I was studying rural politics in Mississippi and could not get home for the meeting. .

a variety of gratuities for poor, deprived country kids who had to live "up here" all year long. There was a little library up the street, named the Tenney Memorial Library, operated by Mary Hale and then Katharine King. It was open Tuesday and Thursday from 3 to 9 p.m. and Saturday morning. There were town meetings where we could go and watch pure democracy in action, as long as you kept your mouth shut and behaved, sometimes you got to see grownups sass each other in public. Once in awhile someone got really mad. It was funny.[2]

The trains are gone now and the tracks filled with weeds.   The creamery went out of business, and the high school followed Dick Hinsman's barbershop down to Bradford.   That finished the junior prom, the senior play, all the dances and sporting events and other activities sponsored by the school. This while the population almost doubled. The post office has left South Newbury and the little store closed in West Newbury. Worst of all the farms began to vanish. In 1950 there were 116. In 1998, there were seven. The people used to vote Republican—always. Now, the Democrats have an equal chance.

The greatest change came with Interstate #91. It was long and black, and it slithered up through the Connecticut River Valley from Massachusetts like a snake. It took a long time coming—years—but finally it slid through the town itself, destroying everything in its path. Newbury Village became at once more and less isolated than before—in the wrong way in both instances. I saw it coming from a wood lot in the summer of 1970. Looking south toward Bradford, I could see huge billows of black smoke where bulldozers had pushed hundreds of green trees together. Men then poured oil on them and put them to the torch. Throughout the summer I could hear the constant grind and rumble of the giant earthmovers as they came nearer and nearer. Before they got there I managed to rescue 55 cords of firewood (cut, split, skidded, and piled) from what

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[2]Frank Bryan, "Townscape Newbury," *Vermont Magazine* (November/December 1989): 74-76.

was to become the southbound lane with a chainsaw and a pair of Brown Swiss oxen (Boots and

Hob). My boss (Charlie Cole) gave me $13 a cord and my room and board. He was a wise man.

Before the energy crisis hit in 1973, he said things like: "Too bad to see all that wood go to waste."

In a forenoon, Interstate 91 covered over a field Charlie and I with his three sons and a hired

man named Ray had spent a week clearing by hand with the help of a little Ferguson tractor. They

wiped out "Grandma's half" of the sugar bush after lunch. In a week the highway builders had so

changed the face of the land that, standing by the fence beside the road sixteen years later with one

of my sons (he was eleven), I couldn't answer the question: "But where did you cut the wood,

Dad?" Three months of work over ten acres of land and I couldn't even judge the *lay* of it any more.

 One of the best summers of my life had been bulldozed—not only from the face of the earth—but

also from the heartland of my memory.

Interstate 91 cut Newbury Town in half. There is an interchange in Bradford and one on the

northern edge of town west of Wells River. This means buses no longer go through the village. It

also means you can live in the village, drive a few miles to Bradford or north to Wells River, get on

the inters-state and then drive north up river to work in St. Johnsbury or south down river to White

River, both about thirty miles. Culture leak. It is hard to underestimate the impact Interstate 91 has

had on Newbury. It's not all bad, of course. There is less traffic through town. But even that traffic,

while sometimes a pain in the summer months, brought a presence to the village that is now lacking.

There seems to be loneliness in the air, a certain ambiance of isolation, a subliminal residue of

estrangement from the pulse of the planet, a sorrow like the soft breeze that sometimes touches the

back of your neck on an August afternoon when the locusts cry.

CAUSALITY IS A MOVING TARGET

Keep in mind. The changes that have come to Newbury are not unlike those that have come

to most of the towns of Vermont over the last half of the 20th Century. I have heard Newbury's story

told in one way or other in a thousand conversations with Vermonters over the past 30 years. Thus

the *settings* of this analysis are a moving target. One way to hold them still long enough get a better

look is to make year-to-year comparisons within a single town. The movement from past to present

in Vermont's towns has been a constant one. The size of the population, the politics, and the social

and economic character of the people did not bounce up and down from year to year. They inched

along. Like the filling of a March sap bucket these progressions were almost invisible to the naked

eye. Even when structural changes occurred, like going from meeting during the day to meeting at

night, the effects were felt slowly. Thus towns like Newbury where a long series of yearly town

meeting matches are available give a hint of what is to come in our attempt to understand the

practice of real democracy.

Plot 1 of Figure V-A arranges Newbury's town meeting attendance by the year the

meeting was held. It also marks the shift to Australian ballot[3] voting for town officers in 1978.

Chapter IV demonstrated that most of the reason Newbury's turnout is as it is relates to the size

of its population. But the dramatic drop in attendance between 1970 and 1971 could not have

been totally caused by population increase. Nor could the drop between 1982 and 1983 or the

increase between 1987 and 1988. In fact it is hard to believe most of the year-to-year changes or

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[3] See below pp. __.

short-term ups and downs in the attendance at Newbury's town meeting could have been caused by concomitant alterations on the "check list" (as it's called) of the town's registered voters.

The reason for this is found in Plot 2 of Figure V-A. There Newbury's percent of registered voters attending town meeting and the percent that "ought" to be attending given the size of the registered voter list are displayed. It is immediately apparent that looking within an individual town over time–even over a long time–does much to explain the size variable. The growth of Newbury's population created a slow reduction in the town's size entitled attendance. It's real attendance dropped as well. But year-to-year changes in real attendance were often dramatic while year-to-year changes in size entitlement were hardly noticeable. The 37 percent attendance at the Newbury town meeting in 1970 and the 20 percent attendance in 1971 was in part connected to the fact that the number of names on the check list increased from about 800 to 900 between the two years. But it was also true that 293 people were counted in the town hall in 1970 (the highest count of the day) and the highest count of attendance in 1971 numbered only 171.

[FIGURE V-A ABOUT HERE]

Other things that might matter in the population of the town are even less likely to change radically from year to year; the percent of college graduates, native Vermonters, Democrats, and so forth. This is not to say, obviously, that these things may not matter. There is slow decline in Newbury's attendance over time. Note (from Plot 2) that in the 1970's Newbury is consistently above expectations given size, in the 1980's it is first below and then above predictions, and in the 1990's it tries hard to break even and fails. Plot 1 suggests that the adoption of the Australian

fig 5 A

ballot might have had a lot to do with the sharp decline between 1977 and 1985. Even so year-to-year comparisons of meetings within a single town do provide a valuable control on the contextual relationships that affect democracy. Consequently they provide a check on the size-impact equation generated in Chapter IV. They also emphasize the slack left to explain after size is considered. In short they are a handy way to begin the hunt for other variables that affect the performance of real democracy.

Beginning with a comparison of the meetings in the towns that appeared in both the 1970 and 1971 samples and extending to the 1997-1998 sample there are 28 possible "one-year-to-the-next" comparisons. Of these I used only those (14) which had at least 20 towns appearing in both years. When a town's attendance at town meeting in one year (for instance 1979) is correlated with its attendance in the next year (1980) and so on for all 14 instances when at least 20 towns appeared in two subsequent years, the median percent of variance explained in attendance rates from one year to the next for the 14 sets of comparisons is 68. Remembering that the size equation developed in Chapter IV alone explained 58 percent, this leaves about ten percent left unaccounted for. Plot 3 of Figure V-A demonstrates this with the year-to-year comparison (one year to the next) whose strength ($R^2 = .63$) most approximates the median. The dotted line represents the prediction if each town had exactly the same percentage of registered voters at town meeting in 1980 as it did in 1979.

The solid line represents how well the meetings for each town matched up between 1979 and 1980, given (in this case at least) the fact that there was a weak tendency for towns to have lower attendance in 1980 than they did in 1979. This is the distribution from which the correlation coefficients are computed. Newbury's drop from 15 percent attendance in 1979 to 12

percent in 1980 places it below the line in the lower left quadrant of the distribution. The town

had relative low attendance (remember, yearly scores do not account for town size here and

Newbury is bigger than most of the other towns in the display) that varied little between the two

years. Highgate, Glover, Lincoln, and North Hero all had substantially higher attendance in 1980

than 1979 and Proctor, Starksboro, Berkshire, Grand Isle, and Orange all had much higher

attendance in 1979 than in 1980.

The point is that in the ways structural and community settings are often said to affect

politics these towns changed very little in the twelve months that separated the two meetings

each of them held. With "setting" variables held constant, only about 30 percent of the variance

in attendance is left to explain. This means that most of the reasons why attendance changes

among *meetings* are explained by the *settings* – the structure of the meetings or the character of

the towns in which they were held. Yet, since size alone of all the "settings" variables explains

most of this variation in attendance (58 percentage points of it) precious little is left for other

structural and community context variables to explain. Still, the challenge is to see if we can

determine what these variables are. Equally important is also to decide if the size connection is

real or not. After all it could be a surrogate for structure and/or community context variables. It

could be something about larger towns other than their size that is responsible for lower

attendance. Either way the role of these other variables must be explained.

Thus it is that the search for the correlates of real democracy is fraught with complexity.

Yet the purpose is not to find a perfect pathway. It is to enjoy the journey. The terrain is

unfamiliar and every new horizon tantalizes in ways that make almost pleasant the necessity to

live with the notion that the task is but to mark the trail in the hope that, someday, others may follow. In Vermont any such journey must begin with a consideration of the weather.

TOUGH SLEDDING ON HARD GROUND

In social science as in life itself, it is important to put first things first. In Vermont the first thing is the weather. It won't budge. True, many Vermonters (especially recent arrivals to the state) have tried negotiation, wrapping their lives up in technological cocoons designed to preclude planetary prerogatives from interrupting human activity. They don't work. The north country sees to it. Many an upscale "sports utility vehicle" carefully equipped with four-wheel drive, positive traction, and anti-lock brakes finds itself pastured oddly in a curve side meadow its embarrassed headlights searching the winter heavens as if seeking deliverance from the ice cold stars.   To know why some town meetings have higher attendance than others, it is best to begin with this most independent of independent variables.

As winter slips back across the border into Canada around town meeting day several things happen in northern New England and none of them are good. It gets warmer and the temperature constantly oscillates across the freezing point. The cold but sunny days of February give way to clouds and precipitation. The frost inches upward to the surface of the earth, taking everything in its path with it and signaling the beginning of Vermont's fifth season, mud season. On the gravel and dirt of Vermont's "back" roads (which make up most of the roads in the state) the mud is pervasive. It waylays school buses. It mocks four-wheel drive. It sasses newcomers. Paved roads escape the mud but not the frost. "Frost heaves," nature's own speed bumps, become asphalt catapults at speeds

over thirty miles per hour. They also cause seasickness by adding a nautical rhythm to the backbeat

of shock absorbers on the potholes, a blacktop acne also delivered by the rising frost.

But one cannot count on the frost. The state can be hard as a rock in early March when

spring is "late." Or the twisting of the planet toward the sun may bring the worst snowstorm of the

winter. Meteorologist David Ludlum explains:

> The daily progress of coastal disturbances along the Atlantic seaboard is
> influenced in March by the presence of blocking anticyclones over Quebec and
> the Atlantic provinces of Canada; their position slows the northeast movement of
> storm centers while at the same time increases their intensity and life span...
> Often the "Crown of Winter Storm" comes in early March and raises snow depths
> to the season's high.[4]

In order to reach several town meetings that fell in the 1971 sample, students crossed a gap

in the eastern range of the Green Mountains named "Orange Heights." There a little town named

Orange is nestled in a granite wrinkle just below the place where the highway reaches the height of

the land.[5] There were 88 inches of snow on the ground in the town of Orange that day—more than

seven feet. Down in the Winooski valley to the west in Montpelier there were about five feet of

what Vermonters call "level deep" snow.[6]

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[4]Ludlum, David M., *The Vermont Weather Book*, (Montpelier, Vermont: The Vermont Historical Society, 1985): 39.

[5]In 1830 the town of Orange had 984 people and 5184 sheep. In 1990 there were 997 people in Orange and 70 sheep. As of 1998 there were five organizations in town; Brownies, Girl Scouts, the Grange, a 4-H Club and a snowmobile club called (as God is my witness) the Orange Peelers, Inc. National Survey, Inc., *The Vermont Yearbook 1998-99*, (Chester, Vermont: The National Survey, Inc., 1998): 334. (Get a source for sheep today)

[6]At 1:30 in the afternoon attendance was the highest of the four counts the students made at 88. This was 29 percent of the towns 305 registered voters. Thirty of these (19 men and 11 women) participated at least once. Eleven officers were elected by Australian ballot while the meeting was in progress. Two of these elections were contested. The closest was for school director. Barbara Powers defeated Steven Martian 61 to 46. This means that by holding the election at the polls instead of during the meeting by ballot 19 more people participated. J. Guy Isabelle and

It wasn't particularly cold for town meeting day, 24 degrees. But it could get worse. Temperatures can fall well below zero. They average about ten degrees below freezing. All in all if one were to try to imagine more difficult conditions for highway travel anywhere in America any time of the year, it would be hard to beat early March in Vermont. Ignoring the weather (as most studies of voter turnout in America do) would therefore be especially improper. Moreover, the very nature of real democracy enhances the possibilities that causality can be found in the skies overhead. Attending town meeting means driving somewhere, parking the car, and going into a building for three or four hours and then coming out of that building to God knows what. Thus the weather has more potential to inhibit real democracy than it does the voting act.[7]

Judging what the conditions were on town meeting day in any particular town, however, is tricky business. The state is split by a chain of mountains north to south. Elsewhere are swirls of lesser peaks and here and there a stately monadnock. In the west the weather is affected by the great basin of Lake Champlain that lays flat on the sunrise side of New York's high Adirondacks. In the east the Connecticut River Valley rolls southward between the Green Mountains of Vermont and the still loftier White Mountains of New Hampshire. In between the lake and the river and the

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Larry Spargo, "The 1972 Comparative Town Meeting Study: Town of Orange," (Burlington, Vermont: University of Vermont, the Real Democracy Data Base, March 1972).

[7]Now and then the starting of a town meeting is delayed due to weather. This from the minutes of a meeting in Charlotte in 1985: "The Annual Town Meeting of Charlotte was called to order by Moderator Gordon Sprigg at 10:00 a.m., March 5th, 1985, at the Town Hall in Charlotte, Vermont. A short recess was immediately called because of bad weather. The meeting resumed at 10:15 a.m." Town of Charlotte, Hazel Prindle, Town Clerk, "Abstract of the Town and School District Meetings, March 5, 1985," *Town Report*, (Year ending December 1985).

mountains are thousands of hills. Vermont is a place of incessant ups and downs.[8] The weather may

be fine in one town and horrendous a valley or two away.

The coding decisions for the prevailing weather during each of the 1435 town meetings were

based on the responses of the students who visited each town to two open-ended questions (with

prompts). One involved the weather itself and the other involved road conditions. These were then

cross checked against other reports by students who went to meetings in the same general area and

(when questions arose) by local forecasts and reporting from the press. Sometimes the short essays

written by the students resolved questions about the weather. Even then the weather in the towns at

44 of the meetings to which we went was classified as "missing."[9] Translating this material into a

weather conditions index was also difficult. After experimenting with several prototypes the safest

solution–-a simple dichotomous variable—was tried first. The weather at 959 of the town meetings

was classified "good" and the weather at 441 meetings "not so good."[10]

Thus defined, the weather seemed to depress attendance very little. In places where we

coded it "good" the highest attendance recorded during the day was 20.7 percent of the registered

voters. For "not so good" weather meetings the attendance was 20.2 percent. In real terms this

means that about 137 people will be at meetings where the weather is good and 135 will attend

where it is bad. A drop off of only two attenders does not even meet the requirements of statistical

significance. It is a slap in the face to Vermont's weather.

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[8]Vermonters, when reminded that the state is geographically one of the smallest in the Union, like to observe that if it were flattened out and its parameters remeasured, it would be bigger than Texas–an exaggeration of course but the point is made and made at the expense of our greatest rival (after New Hampshire) the state of Texas which, like Vermont, was the only other state to enter America as a free and independent Republic.

[9]A condition, I suspect, which suited many of the residents just fine.

Remember, however, that there is a lot of slack in a dichotomous measure. To add a bit more precision to the analysis, those meetings where both the weather and the road conditions were coded bad by the students (there were 103 such meetings) were separated from those 871 meetings which were held on days which earned a "good" rating for both the weather and road conditions. The 411 meetings that had mixed ratings were ranked in the middle. The results were as follows:

Weather and Roads	*"N" Meetings*	*Average Percent Present*
GOOD	871	20.7
MIXED	411	20.5
BAD	103	18.9

This lends a bit more credibility to the Vermont weather hypothesis. The 103 meetings with the worst weather ratings had about two percentage points lower turnout than the 871 meetings with the best weather scores. Since the typical "good weather meeting" had only 20.7 percent of the town's registered voters in attendance a drop of two percentage points means a loss of about ten percent of its attendance if the weather were bad. This is not an insignificant decline.

Are there circumstances that might strengthen or weaken this relationship? Would, for instance, towns with more native Vermonters have higher attendance rates, given weather conditions, than towns with more newcomers to the state who are not willing to brave the ice and snow? The answer to that question is no.[11] In fact I matched a wide variety of variables with

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[10]The latter category would no doubt be cast by real Vermonters in their quintessential affirmation of the positive: "It could have been worse."

[11]Over the years I have tried out many of these kinds of hypotheses on a lot of Vermonters on a very informal basis. Once between draws at an ox pull in Tunbridge I asked a teamster buddy of mine what he thought about the notion that the flatlanders would be more apt to stay home from town meeting when the weather was bad. His response: "Flatlanders...(snort). The damn fools.." (This was not said–as anyone who knows the culture of Vermont will testify–with any mean spiritedness whatsoever) "don't *know* enough to stay t'home when it's bad."

weather conditions without expanding the finding that meetings held during the very worst weather have about two percentage points less attendance than meetings when the weather was classified either "mixed" or "good."

There was one exception. Meetings held at night during bad weather help explain the slight loss of attendance that bad weather generates overall. The relationship is demonstrated in Table 1 of Figure V-B. Bad weather meetings held during the day actually have a tad higher attendance than good weather meetings. But meetings held at night in bad weather have especially poor turnout. The data deliver two messages. The first is that it is only when you isolate the few meetings held when the weather was clearly "bad" enough to affect the roads, not "mixed" as in the 411 meetings in the three-way variable or "not so good" in the 441 meetings of the original dichotomous variable, that the effect of weather is apparent. The second is that even though turnout is lower at town meetings held at night irrespective of the weather, all the variance in attendance tied to weather conditions occurs at night. In short, if all the meetings were held during the day weather would not be a factor at all.

[FIGURE V-B ABOUT HERE]

What would happen if we controlled for town size? As we learned in Chapter IV, the size of the town has a huge impact on attendance. It is time to employ the attendance effort index built in the preceding chapter—a measure that scores a meeting's attendance taking the size of the town in which it was held into account. The results are in Table 2 of Figure V-B and make more sense. When size is controlled, bad weather decreases attendance at both day and night meetings. Consider a town with exactly the number of registered voters as the median town in the sample, 719. Size predicts that 19.38 percent of these should attend town meeting. This is 139 persons in a town of

719. If the meeting were held during the day, attendance would be 107 percent of that or 20.74 percent of the registered voters—149 people. If the weather were good, attendance would be exactly the same. But if it were bad, it would drop to the average of the entire sample 19.38 percent or 139 persons. Thus bad

Figure 5B here

weather during the day is associated with a loss of (on average) ten people or about 6.7 percent of what could be expected in good weather.

At night attendance is normally only 94 percent on average; that is, in a town of 719 registered voters 18.22 percent (131) registered voters will attend town meeting. If the weather is good at night, that figure remains stable. If the weather is bad, however, the attendance effort ratio drops to .83. This means only 115 (16.08 percent) citizens will attend—a loss of 16. This is a loss of 12 percent of what would normally be expected. Night has its own negative causality. When storms are in the darkness, the propensity to remain before the hearth is doubled. The scatterplots in Figure V-B so indicate. At night attendance at meetings held in bad weather falls substantially below those held during the day. The meetings are arrayed by town size even though its direct effect on attendance has been taken away by the attendance effort index. There are towns like Norwich and Stowe that have had very high attendance at meetings on stormy nights. Moreover, a few positive outliers are responsible for unnaturally improving the size controlled mean for bad weather night meetings. Sixteen of the 26 bad weather night meetings fall below their own mean. Day meetings held in bad weather are more evenly distributed around the expectation (Plot 2).

THE ARCHITECTURE OF GOVERNANCE

The architecture of governance seldom predominates the paradigms of political science. Often it is downright ignored.[12] Perhaps this is because we were trained to expect our processes to operate in *spite* of our structure as indeed they seemed to for most of our history. Structure,

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[12] An exception is the early literature on city politics. One of the better examples is Rober R. Alford and Eugene Lee "Voting in American Cities," *American Political Science Review* (September 1968): 796-813.

however, does matter. In the United States a central government designed in the beginning not to work and still structurally intact for the most part is hamstrung now that we find it necessary to ask it to *do* complicated things well. How long will we be able to condone the sloppiness produced when 18th Century architecture filters 21st Century policy? And yet variables that account for the design of our political system have not escaped, for the most part, the dungeons into which they were placed during the behavioral revolution.

The weakness of structural variables in our science is also exacerbated by the comparativists' dilemma; learning through comparison depends both on constancy, the ability to freeze frame critical variables, and fluctuation, which allows probing more deeply into the nature of things. This book would have been impossible to write had the people of Vermont met in their town meetings willy-nilly. It is the uniformity in town meeting structure that makes a comparative study of direct democracy possible. But it is also these same uniformities that limit the investigation of the impact of structure on attendance.

Please understand. The scholarship on the linkages between governmental structure and representative democracy is far more advanced and sophisticated than it is for real democracy. There it is nearly nonexistent. The question for us is therefore theoretically fresh: what are the *design* factors that condition the number of people that practice direct democracy in attending town meeting? There are four. They vary from town to town and emit significant degrees of *a priori* energy. The first is when the meetings are held, during the day or at night. A second is whether or not electoral processes are in place which allow for voting without being present for discussion. Third is the way in which school district meetings are treated in town; are they kept separate from

town meeting or in some way made part in the town meeting day process. Finally is the size of the

meeting place itself. Is there enough *room* for more citizens to attend if they wanted to?[13]

Night Meeting/Day Meeting

Many Vermont towns have decided to hold their meetings Monday night instead of during

the day on Tuesday. While some very small towns like Walden, Victory, or Irasburg hold their

meeting Tuesday night, the great majority of night meetings are held Monday night. Night

meetings, presumably, give many more people a chance to attend, especially working people.

Remember, town meeting day is not a holiday in Vermont. Thus hourly wage earners are more

disadvantaged than professional people who have greater latitude to adjust their work day. Night

meetings, on the other hand, may be more difficult for senior citizens and they compete with what

most Americans believe to be leisure time, or as the television networks call it "prime time."

Whatever the merits of the argument for changing the time of the town meeting from a day meeting

on "the first Tuesday after the first Monday in March" to the Monday evening of the first Monday in

March, such a move has long been touted by reformers as a good thing.

But how good? On the face of it Monday night meetings seem to have precisely the opposite

effect. The average attendance for the 1088 meetings of our sample that held their meetings during

the day was 21.6 percent of the registered voters. The 347 towns that held their meetings on

Monday night averaged 17.2 percent. This seems to mean that the average meeting would lose 4.4

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[13]Volume II will treat a series of more legislative design questions that structure the nature and flow of the democratic process *within* town meetings.

percent of its attendance if it shifted its meeting from Tuesday during the work day to Monday night. This is 20 percent of its attendance, a substantial loss.

But something very important is known about towns that hold their meetings at night. They tend to be larger towns like Hinesburg and Shelburne rather than smaller towns like Newark and Athens. The average number of voters in towns we studied that held their meetings Monday night was 1153. The average number of voters in the towns that held their meetings on Tuesday was only 812. Put another way 19 percent of the meetings in the sample with less than 1000 registered voters in town were held at night while twice that amount (35 percent) of the meetings held in towns with more than 1000 voters were at night.

Could it be that the relationship we see between night meetings and lower attendance is spurious—that is, it is caused by the fact that larger towns, which hold their meetings at night have lower attendance because of their size, not because of their night meetings? It is a pure relationship and some of the explanatory power of the size variable is attributable to the fact that large towns are more apt to have night meetings which draw fewer people out than day meetings regardless of town size.

Figure V-C takes a crack at untangling these associations. First (in Plot 1) it divides the towns of the sample into seven categories that seem to make sense based on their size and then calculates the average attendance at the town meetings of the towns in each category depending on whether or not the meetings were held during the day or at night. This procedure accents the power of the size variable. Irrespective of the time of day the meeting is held, as the size of the town increases the attendance at town meeting drops like a rock. It is also apparent that the negative association between time of meeting and attendance is significantly reduced within each category of

town size. In the smallest category of towns we studied, those with less than 250 registered voters, it

is very slightly reversed. The 28 towns in that size cohort which held their meetings at night

averaged 34 percent attendance and the 94 towns with daytime meetings averaged only 36 percent.

[FIGURE V-C ABOUT HERE]

Plot 2 can be imagined as a much more detailed meeting-by-meeting reproduction of the bar

chart. A sample of 100 meetings was selected from the data base and matched up with the size of

the towns in which they were held. The familiar non-linear downward slide in attendance appears

along with the tendency for meetings held at night to settle nearer the bottom of the slope. Since

only 100 (about 7 percent) of the meetings were used, there is elbow room to take note of where

individual communities fit in the landscape of attendance. One of Vermont's geographically

smallest towns (3,190 acres), Baltimore,[14] is perched high on the attendance scale, ranking second

overall next to Goshen, which ranked first. Both meetings are held at night. Newark, Hinesburg, and

Shelburne also appear in their appropriate sectors. There too is the old Scottish settlement town of

Barnet, the rugged mountain community of Lincoln (with high attendance at a night meeting), the

ski town of Stowe and the bedroom town of Jericho, both with day meetings and high attendance.

Woodford and Salisbury have night meetings and low attendance.   There is great variety in the

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[14]Baltimore was created small when it cut off from Cavendish on the 19th of October 1793. This act of the Vermont legislature politically affirmed what the great glacier had ordained 10,000 years earlier when in its retreat to Canada it created Hawk's Mountain which forever barred people on its eastern flank from getting cozy with people on its western side. Hero of the Battle of Bennington, John Stark (then only a major in the service of the King under Major John Hawks, for whom the mountain is named) camped there while chasing another enemy back into Canada, the French. It may have been there that he framed in his heart the motto "live free or die" which, from its vantage point on the license plates of New Hampshire automobiles, has come to so annoy the politically correct. But then the politically correct might think differently had they ever watched the White Mountains turn purple across the deep green of the upper Connecticut River valley on a Hawk Mountain's summer twilight.

towns that held these meetings. But together they say that town meeting works somewhat better in the daylight.

Figure 5C here

To take the influence of town size out of consideration and to let still more light into the

display, the meetings were plotted according to the (base 10) logarithm of their registered voters (to

spread out the distribution) and their size adjusted attendance effort ratio (SAAER). Now the picture

is much clearer (Plot 3 of Figure V-C). With size controlled, towns like Goshen, Baltimore, Newark

and Andover are no longer leading the pack. In fact the second largest town in the sample,

Northfield, with its 3310 registered voters, has the most impressive attendance *effort* with 12.70

percent of its registered voters at town meeting. The meetings are scattered willy nilly along a line

which tilts slightly (and statistically inconsequentially) upward as the towns in which they are held

get bigger. From this picture it is obvious that citizens in towns which hold their meetings at night

make less effort to get to town meeting than citizens in towns that hold their meetings during the day

irrespective of the size of the town.[15] My town of Starksboro, which held its meeting during the day,

had exactly the attendance it should have given its size. Our neighbor two towns over to the south,

Ripton, was almost as close to its predicted allotment and it held its meeting at night. But the

darkened squares (night meetings) were consistently positioned lower in the Y axis than were the

open circles (day meetings). The distance between the solid and the dotted line represents this

average gap in attendance effort between night meetings and day meetings.

More precise quantitative indicators that night meetings have a depressing effect on real

democracy as practiced in these Vermont towns are the correlation coefficients.   The simple

relationship between night meetings and attendance is "r" = -.18. When the size of the town is

controlled, it is reduced only marginally to "r" = -.16. It is also the case that the correlation

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[15] Remember the SAAER takes town size out of the attendance data on the Y axis. The towns were arrayed on the
log of registered voters simply to spread out the distribution and let more light into the array.

coefficient between town size and attendance does not budge at all when the time of the meeting is controlled. The simple "r" is .76 and the time controlled "r" (the partial correlation coefficient) is likewise .76. Both variables matter and they matter independently of each other. The addition of the night meeting coefficient means we can increase the explained variance in attendance from 58 percent to 59. This simply shows that while night meetings are important (this coefficient is statistically significant at the >.000 level), there is a lot of variation left for which neither size nor night meetings can account.

That this might be the case is made clearer by looking at specific towns that changed meeting times. Although 210 of the 237 towns in Vermont made it into the data base, only 19 of these switched from their meeting times and only a handful had enough meetings cluster around the year of the switch to make comparisons reasonable. This is not surprising because the great majority of the towns failed to make any changes between 1970 and 1998. The patterns these towns displayed help explain the weakness of the coefficients. There was only one, Brighton, the old railroad town in the Kingdom, where a drop in attendance seems clearly related to a change to night meetings. Even there one wonders if the relatively high attendance in the 1970's (which may have been associated with an influx of counter cultural groups from "away")[16] produced the "drop" in the latter half of the 1980's and the 1990's. In Lincoln, on the other hand, switching to night meetings seemed associated (given a few years for the change to take hold) with a solid *increase* in size-controlled attendance. (See Plots 1 and 2 of Figure V-D.)

[FIGURE V-D ABOUT HERE]

Another pattern which could make sense is revealed by Norwich and Alburg (two towns which are remarkably different). Alburg borders Canada on an island in Lake Champlain. It is a Catholic, French working class town and an hour from Montreal. Norwich is a traditional upscale New England Protestant valley town on the Connecticut River two minutes from Dartmouth College and two hours from Boston. The people in Alburg give up ice fishing and go to spearing eels in the spring. The people of Norwich rake their lawns. Still, both towns changed to night meetings in the face of declining attendance during the day. If moving to night meetings was considered a remedy for declining attendance, low turnout would be expected prior to a change. At any rate adopting the evening meeting may have worked for both towns—at least for awhile. Comparing the three meetings for which data are available prior to the change to the three meetings following the change, Norwich's size-controlled attendance increased from 1.22 to 1.83 and Alburg's increased from 86.3 to 96.3. Yet even here the data are ambivalent. Alburg's increase was small and would have been wiped out had the 1970 meeting been included in the calculations. Norwich's improvement could be an extension of rising attendance beginning at the low point established in 1975. (See Plots 3 and 4 of Figure V-D.)

Finally there were two instances in which towns reversed the process and went from night to day meetings. Stowe, which had tried night meetings beginning in the late 1970's with mixed results, went back to day meetings in 1984. Attendance did not improve. The next three meetings that fell in the data base seemed very much the average for Stowe even though above average for

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[16]Brighton was just down the road from "Earth People's Park" (culturally progressive) and the home of the Northeast Kingdom Community Church (culturally traditional). These two organizations raised some hell in the Kingdom but on balance were a healthy expression of Vermont's rural human scale, liberal tradition.

the total sample. Later on in the 1990's Stowe's attendance did increase dramatically. But this

happened as the town became a battleground in the war between development and environmentalism

that has ebbed and flowed across Vermont since the late 1960's. Grand Isle returned to day

meetings

Figure 5D here

in 1994. Early results in Grand Isle[17] help explain why the overall relationship between night

meetings and higher attendance, while (unexpectedly) negative, is quite weak. (See Plots 5 and 6 of

Figure V-D.)

The Australian Ballot

Consideration of a second structural factor, the voting system, and in particular the

Australian ballot, permits a refinement of the implications of day vs. night meetings. This variable

has been the object of the progressives' passion over the last half century and contains powerful

theoretical energy in its own right. It is the reform most often recruited to improve local government

in New England. It is a hedge on the bet that real democracy is good democracy that reads:

presence isn't enough and doesn't always work. Voting in private is also necessary. In short the

"Australian ballot" is simply a written ballot, prepared ahead of time to allow people to vote on

questions before the town or for election of town officers without going to a town meeting and

waiting for issues to reach the floor.[18]

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[17]In 1988 the town of Grand Isle experienced a poignant (perhaps pungent is a better word) example of the frustrations town meeting democracies face in Vermont from regulation from the state. The *Burlington Free Press* reported: "The Grand Isle Elementary School doesn't measure up very well to state standards, according to the Public School Approval Report. Along with a laundry list of requirements…state committee members apparently didn't much care for the fact the school is located in a rural area. They found "the smells from the adjoining farms distracting to the educational process." This from a state government which has been touting its farms and lamenting their decline for fifty years. "Barnyard Smell," The *Burlington Free Press* (September 4, 1988).

[18]Confrontation between the Australian ballot and the traditional town meeting system of voting in public often generates substantial debate on the question of direct vs. indirect democracy. Votes on the question of "going to" the Australian ballot are often accompanied by long and heated discussion. And despite the fact that these debates are carried on by everyday people in the most humble of settings, they are usually well reasoned. I find the arguments for and against are complete. Now and again they are a cover for another agenda like the ousting of a well-liked (or powerful) incumbent who no one wants to oppose in public or the defeat of an issue it is difficult to oppose publicly like the school budget. If the oratory is not refined it does contain an eloquence of its own–a mixture of Yankee brevity and rural pragmatism.

Fifty-five percent of the meetings in the data base used the Australian ballot in one way or other. Most limited it to the elections of town officers. There is very strong reason to believe that towns which use the Australian ballot will have lower attendance at town meeting than towns which do not. If one is interested in the race for town lister, for instance, but little else, one can stop at the polls, cast his vote for town officers and be gone. If you do this early in the morning or after work in the evening the town meeting will not be in session and you will avoid even the embarrassment of "voting and running."

The more items that appear on a paper ballot the more decision-making that can be done without actually attending town meeting.[19] The average attendance for the 645 meetings in the data base that did not use the Australian ballot was 26.5 percent. For the 755 that did use the Australian ballot the average attendance was 15.6 percent. This is a dramatic reduction in the expected direction.

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[19] In my youth when Newbury voted each year whether to go "wet" or "dry" by means of the Australian ballot at town meeting, the local grocery store owner (there was only one store of any kind in town) could always be seen entering the town hall about 11 a.m. soon after his part-time helper (my neighbor, who was married to the road commissioner) arrived to spell him for a few minutes at the counter. He was "from away" (New York City) and his arrival in Newbury doubled the Irish Catholic population. Upon his arrival at the town hall (across the green from his store), he never hesitated but walked carefully along the north side of the usually crowded town hall, passed through a little door beside the stage and reappeared a few seconds later on stage where the town officers sat. Behind them was a row of four polling booths. Into one of these he disappeared. We couldn't see him vote but we could see his shoes. Most of the people voting wore boots. Having finished he left the meeting as quickly as he had arrived. The storekeeper was a good citizen of the town, liked and respected by all. (You had to be to make a living as a small town grocer in those days.) But he never stayed at town meeting. He came. He voted by Australian ballot. He left. In fact he had never even gone to town meeting until the year of 1949. At the preceding year's town meeting forces for good in the community had staged a "still hunt" and gunned down his right to have a second class liquor license. Newbury had voted "dry"! Down went the "Beer, Ale and Wine" sign in the store window. And down went his earnings. Way down. Not because people bought a lot of booze in Newbury but because when you went shopping only once a week (as most families did then) it didn't make much sense to shop where you couldn't buy *any*. The dry vote damned near did him in. But he managed to survive the year and he never missed another Australian ballot. We don't vote on the liquor question any more; another decision local people are no longer allowed to consider.

But there are complications and these complications could also help to explain why night meetings do not draw attendance any better than they do. Once again town size is also directly involved. The degree to which the Australian ballot is employed is closely associated with both town size and whether or not town meetings are held in the evening. All but a handful of towns which meet in the evening do so on Monday[20] and use the Australian ballot during the day on Tuesday for at least the election of town officers. A small number of towns meeting Monday evening use the Australian ballot on Tuesday for other matters as well, especially money items. A very few have all the discussion Monday night and all the voting on Tuesday.

Many towns that use the Australian ballot, however, use it for officers only while holding their meeting on Tuesday during the day. Since the polling place is also the meeting place, people who choose to vote only and not take part in the meeting itself come and go throughout the day. State law also prohibits any discussion of Australian ballot items "from the floor" while voting is taking place. This means that a zoning ordinance, for instance, that is on the Warning to be voted on by Australian ballot cannot be discussed at a town meeting that is held while the polls are open on Tuesday.   The following is an example of a Warning in a town having nearly all issues on Australian ballot:

> The legal voters of the Town of Randolph, the Randolph Police District, the Randolph Water District and the Randolph Sewer District are hereby warned to meet at the Chandler Music Hall, Main Street in Randolph, Tuesday, March 7, 2000 at 10:00 A.M. to vote on the Articles herein set forth. **Articles 1 through 32 are to be voted by Australian ballot.** The polls open at 10:00 A.M. and close at 7:00 P.M. Polls will be located at the Gallery, Chandler Music Hall, Main Street in Randolph. **Articles 33 through 38 are to be called for consideration from the floor** at the business meeting of said legal voters which is hereby warned to convene at 10:00

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[20]In the entire sample of 1434 town meetings only 13 were held Tuesday evening. None of the towns doing this used the Australian ballot.

A.M. Tuesday, March 7, 2000 at the Chandler Music Hall, Main Street, Randolph, Vermont. A Public Hearing and Information Meeting on the Town Budget and warned items will be held on Tuesday, February 29, 2000 at 7:00 P.M. in the Studio, Room SR3 of the Randolph Area Vocational Center.[21]

Sometimes issues, which by law should not be discussed because voting is going on at the same time, are anyway, in more or less indirect ways. If the matter gets too direct, the moderator will most usually cut off discussion. If the moderator is new to the job and forgets, a voter may yell out "We're not supposed to talk about that, are we?" (The "are we?" is a kindness to the moderator.) When this kind of challenge arises, the oldtimers usually mutter to themselves about the stupidity of "the state" or "Montpelier" while newcomers may click their tongues at this most insidious denial of the democratic impulse. Once one of my students reported that what she identified as a "flatlander like me" rose on such an occasion to make a pious speech about the value of open discussion and the evils of "censorship" to the silent amusement, followed by patience and then boredom of the voters assembled. Often, wrote this student, "even the best intentioned speakers have trouble finding an opening in their own rhetoric in which to shut themselves up."

WITNESS

Ballot Debate in Randolph

The minutes for the town of Randolph held on Tuesday, March 2, 1999, contain the following under article #37, the "New Business" article. (Articles 2-32 were Australian ballot items and articles 33-36 had been quickly resolved.)

Article 37. To do any other business proper to come before this meeting. The due date for payment of property taxes has not been set. Carolyn Tonelli made a motion to set the due date as November 9, 1999. The motion was seconded and passed by unanimous voice vote.

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[21] Town of Randolph, *Town Report*, (Year ending December 1999): 2.

Dick Drysdale [a local newspaper publisher] asked if there could be any discussion about the articles, whether they were properly warned.

Lew Whitaker expressed disappointment when the Town voted to go to Australian ballot. He felt a lot of discussion was lost in the process. The pro's and con's of discussion in addition to the written materials distributed would help people make better decisions when voting. He would like to go back to the old Town Meeting.

Warren Preston commented that he had worked on getting the Australian ballot and has seen an increase in the number of people voting by ballot. He also noted that there also has been a decrease in discussion. His suggestion was for everyone to contact their legislators to make a law so there can be discussion of issues on Australian ballot.

Carolyn Tonelli, Selectboard Chair, told the audience that discussion was allowed on these issues at the informational meeting which was held last week. No one came to that meeting. She urged people to attend the informational meeting.

Horace Puglisi wanted to know if there could be discussion on any part of Articles 2-32. The response was that there could not be discussion on these articles.

Douglas Shane felt there should be more advance warning of meetings. Meetings are warned as far in advance as is possible and the warning is posted in 3 public places (Town Offices, Floyd's Store, East Randolph Country Store) as required by State Statute.

* * *

Terri Burgee did not understand why discussion could not be done at both the informational meeting and town meeting.

Mr. Whitaker would like to see discussion, not merely voting by Australian ballot.

Charles Russell commented that the intent of the Australian ballot was not to cut off discussion.

Dick Drysdale felt that the Town of Randolph, as a sovereign body, should overrule the statutes and discuss the Australian ballot articles. He made a motion to overrule the Moderator, to ignore the state statutes and to permit discussion. The motion was seconded.

Chris Recchia asked if by discussing the articles if this would invalidate the vote.

Peter Nowlan [the Town Moderator] read the statute to the audience which states that Annual Meeting can be held on any of the 3 days preceding Town Meeting Day and you would be allowed to have discussion, but not if the meeting and the balloting are on the same day.

Mr. Drysdale asked the audience to not be timid and vote to overrule the moderator.

Mr. Russell commented that this is a democracy and the majority rules.

Mr. Adams voiced concern that taking this action might invalidate the vote. He also commented that you can't violate the statutes—it is up to the legislature to change the statutes.

Mr. Wright asked if the meeting had been held the night before if there could be discussion.

Mr. Preston suggested we close the meeting and then stay to have a discussion.

Mr. Nowlan ruled that the motion to overrule the moderator was out of order.

Mr. Whitaker was confused about whether or not there could be discussion on the same day. Mr. Nowlan responded and clarified by citing the statute.

Wendy Wells asked what was the date of the statute.

Mr. Drysdale asked for clarification for why Mr. Nowlan overruled the motion. Mr. Nowlan answered stating the decision was based on his interpretation of the statute.[22]

Many towns do not use the Australian ballot at all. These are called "traditional" town meetings and all voting takes place "in real time" from the floor. A typical Warning for a Tuesday town meeting using the Australian ballot for the election of officers reads as follows:

> The legal voters of the Town of Newfane, Vermont, are hereby warned and notified to meet at Williamsville Hall, in Williamsville, VT on Tuesday, March 3, 1992 at 9:00 a.m. to transact the following business of the Town. (Voting for Town Officers will be by Australian ballot. The polls will be open from 9:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.)[23]

Traditional town warnings typically consist of one sentence:

> The legal voters of the Town and School District of Roxbury are hereby notified and warned to meet in the Town Hall in Roxbury on Tuesday, March 6, 1984 at (ten) 10 o'clock in the forenoon, E.S.T., to act on the following articles:[24]

Hiding in the complexity generated by these multiple kinds of Australian ballot procedures, varying town sizes and different times the town meeting is held are relationships that will help us

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[22] *Ibid*, 10-11.

[23] Town of Newfane, *Town Report*, (Year ending December 1991). Williamsville, Vermont, is a little village in the town of Newfane. It gets its name from William H. Williams who was born in Chester, Massachusetts, in 1776. An orphan he "bound out" to a farmer and then a cloth dressing manufacturer. He arrived in Newfane in 1797 and by his death in 1866 he had become an important citizen operating several cloth mills and carding mills and a gristmill at what is now called Williamsville. Esther Monroe Swift, *Vermont Place-Names*, (Brattleboro, Vermont: The Stephen Greene Press, 1977): 496-497.

[24] Town of Roxbury, *Town Report*, (Year ending December 1983).

answer questions about the linkage between government's *design* and real democracy. Night meetings and the Australian ballot go hand in hand. 343 of the 368 meetings held at night used the Australian ballot for at least the election of town officers. It has been established that night meetings have lower attendance independent of the size of the town in which they are held. Perhaps it is the ballot that lowered attendance at night. Or it could be that does not inhibit attendance at all and that the apparent negative relationship between Australian ballot use and lower attendance is itself a reflection of town size. In short does the Australian ballot possess a negative current of its own that short circuits attendance at night meetings?

Figure V-E arrays our town meetings according to the same population demarcations used in Figure V-C. Again, the impact of size continues to emerge unscathed. Both Australian ballot towns and non-Australian ballot towns show clear and consistent reductions in attendance as the size of the town's electorate grows.[25] But the Australian ballot does pretty well on its own as well. Looking at the percentage differentials in attendance *within* each level of town size a drop at the town meetings using the Australian ballot is also apparent, especially in the four groups of towns with less than 1000 registered voters.

[FIGURE V-E ABOUT HERE]

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[25]The partial correlation coefficient between the size entitlement and attendance when the dummy variable for the presence of the Australian ballot controlled is -.68, only a very mild reduction from the -.76 first order correlation coefficient.

fig 5 E

Roughly how much moxie is left in the Australian ballot variable after size is controlled can be seen by comparing the Australian ballot differential in attendance for all the towns in the sample irrespective of their size with the average of the differentials that remain within each size-based group of towns. As noted Australian ballot towns as a group average 15.6 percent attendance while non-Australian ballot towns average 26.5 percent, for a differential of 10.9 percentage points. The average differential within the six size based groups of towns for which we have data is only 4.23 percentage points. Most of this occurs in the four groups of towns with less than 1000 registered voters where the differential averages 5.7 percentage points.

Because it was necessary to create cohorts with a significant number of meetings, however, the data in Figure V-D is somewhat eschewed because the cohorts do not represent equal increases in town size. Another problem is that these figures do not consider attendance in relation to what can be *expected* given town size. Thus when we draw conclusions based on the percentage point drops in attendance that are so nicely apparent in Figure V-E we are apt to forget that a meeting expected to have 30 percent attendance loses only 17 percent of that with a loss of five percentage points while a meeting expected to have only 20 percent attendance loses 30 percent with a decrease of five percentage points.

The attendance effort index takes care of both these problems. It treats each meeting as a discrete event avoiding all the problems of clustering and it measures turnout gains or losses as a percentage of what was expected. Matched up with the Australian ballot the Attendance Effort Index registers -.97 for those meetings using an Australian ballot (that is, on average these kinds of meetings lose four percent of the attendance they were expected to have based on their size) and

towns which do not use the Australian ballot have on average 1.12 percent more attendance than their size would predict.

The conclusion seems obvious enough. Controlling for town size lessens the original gap in attendance at ballot meetings compared to non-ballot meetings. Earlier we noted that with town size not considered the average meeting with no Australian ballot would have 26.5 percent of the voters present. If it used the ballot would have only 15.6 percent. With no ballot, therefore, the median sized town with its 684 registered voters would have 181 in attendance. With an Australian ballot it would have only 108, a loss of 73 attenders or 40 percent of what it had without the ballot. When the attendance effort index is used (which takes town size into consideration) a town with 684 registered voters is expected to have 148 in attendance without the Australian ballot and 128 with it—a loss of 20 not 73 attenders.

Nevertheless the use of the Australian ballot remains a powerful inhibitor to attendance. The loss of 20 voters a year when a town switches to the Australian ballot is a hefty chunk of the 148 voters the meeting might otherwise have. The next logical step is to divide the town meetings one more time to determine if the remaining negative relationship between the Australian ballot and attendance that cut through the town size control is really a function of the fact that so many meetings that use the Australian ballot are held at night. Conversely it could be that the drop off in attendance at night meetings that we observed earlier was itself caused by the use of the Australian ballot in so many night meetings. To answer these questions it is again useful to clear out some of the complexity by matching the night vs. day and Australian ballot variables with our size controlled attendance effort index.

The worst case for attendance is when the meeting is held on Monday night, but all decisions are made by Australian ballot the next day including the election of town officers and all other substantive matters on the Warning. In effect no important decisions are made at these kinds of meetings. The size-controlled attendance index shows that in a meeting where the size entitlement is 100 attenders the number present will be 85. It improves to 94 for night meetings when only the officers are chosen by ballot the next day leaving the budget and other substantive matters to be resolved during the Monday night meeting itself. The improvement continues at day meetings. When the meeting is held during the day with the Australian ballot used for the election of town officers the attendance effort index is neutral at 1.00. When all the officers are elected from the floor at night (on Tuesday) during the meeting it improves to 1.09. The best situation is during the day with no Australian ballot.

The Australian ballot thus emerges as a greater depressant of attendance than night meetings. This is demonstrated by the small number of meetings held at night with no Australian ballot. The Index for these meetings indicated there are 9 more attenders than the size entitlement predicted for a meeting of 100 attenders, only three percentage points less than it was for day meetings that did not use the Australian ballot either. The rest of the data fall into line too:

Type of Meeting Structure	*N*	*SAAER*
Day meetings: no Australian ballot	609	1.12
Night meetings; no Australian ballot	36	1.09
Day meetings; Australian ballot	479	1.00
Night meetings; Australian ballot (officers only)	310	.94
Night meetings; Australian ballot (all articles)	58	.85

Night meetings retain some negative effect but it is the Australian ballot that is most damaging.[26]

A better look is had by selecting from the 56 towns which contributed more than 10 meetings

each to the sample those towns which used *only* the Australian ballot and comparing them to

those which *never* used it. These 37 towns are (fortunately) evenly split on ballot use (19 did

and 18 did not) and they account for 495 (over one-third) of the 1338 meetings in the sample

(they averaged 13 meetings each).

Plot 1 of Figure V-F shows the dramatic decline in attendance caused by town size and the

equally powerful relationship between size and ballot use. Nearly all the towns that did not use the

Australian ballot are small and those that did are large. But it also shows that when the size of the

town is displayed in logged terms (which takes out the curve in the data) the Australian ballot towns

had lower attendance than expected—given their size. Plot 2 takes out the effect of size with the

SAAER (size adjusted attendance effort ratio) and provides a better perspective on the size variable.

 Note that only 4 of the 18 non-ballot towns had below their expected turnout (they fell below the

line) and only 6 of the 19 ballot towns did better than expected.[27]

[FIGURE V-F ABOUT HERE]

Earlier it was established that the day vs. night variable reduced the variance in the

attendance an additional percent when it was used with town size in a regression equation to

_____

[26]The simple correlation coefficient for the relationship between ballot structure and size-controlled attendance effort is reduced from .22 to .17 when a day/night control is introduced. But the coefficient for the relationship between day/night and attendance is lower at the outset (.l2) and drops to .08 when ballot structure is controlled.

[27]The hump in the data for ballot towns between the 1,500 and 2,500 town population range (marked by Stowe, Charlotte, Norwich and Richmond) is a fascination to which I will return.

fig 5 F

explain attendance at town meeting. Size alone explained 58 percent of the variance and size plus

day vs. night explained 59 percent.   When the Australian ballot joins day vs. night as a predictor

variable in a stepwise regression (that is, the strongest variable is entered first) it squeezes day vs.

night out of the equation altogether. That is to say once the Australian ballot is considered day vs.

night becomes statistically insignificant.   But the Australian ballot alone, combined with size

increases the explained variance in attendance from .58 to .62.

Time series analysis of change within individual towns helps to visualize the actual impact

of a shift to the Australian ballot. It is also more possible for the Australian ballot than it was for

time of day variable because 22 towns in the sample adopted the Australian ballot between 1970 and

1998 and 13 of these had enough meetings recorded at appropriate times to make before and after

comparisons meaningful.[28]   The results of these comparisons were far more substantial than they

were for the day/night variable. Eleven of the 13 towns lost attendance when they changed to the

Australian ballot. Two improved. The average loss in the size adjusted attendance effort ratio in the

11 towns that lost attendance was .39. The average gain in the two that improved was .34. For all

15 towns, switching to the Australian ballot was associated with a loss of 28 points in size adjusted

attendance effort, a loss of about a quarter of expected attendance. All of the 13 towns held their

meetings during the day from 1970 to 1998 so that variable at least is controlled.

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[28]Accordingly, more formal criteria were used to select towns. Each had to have two or more meetings on either side of the change not separated by more than three years when no data were available. For every additional two contiguous meetings available on either side of the change, one more year of separation was allowed. On the principle that more data are better than less, additional meetings were allowed up to a total of five on each side of the change if meeting four was contiguous to meeting three and five was contiguous to four. This assured that meetings clustered around the change. For example the town of Plainfield could not be used because only two meetings were recorded (in 1971 and 1977) that did not use the Australian ballot and these were separated from each other by five years. More importantly the meetings sampled that did use it were held in 1984, 1986, and 1987; six years later.

Most of the towns that adopted Australian ballots over the period did so prior to 1980. A good example of what can happen occurred in the town of Newbury, which adopted the Australian ballot in 1977 and is the only town in the data set for which data are available for every year.[29] The eight meetings prior to the change averaged an attendance effort index of 1.43. The eight meetings following the change averaged .85, a drop of 58 points. If we assume that the 1970 meeting was an anomaly, the decline is reduced somewhat to 49 points. (See Plot 1 of Figure V-G.) More dramatic is what happened in Burke in the 1990's after they adopted the Australian ballot for voting on nearly all issues before the town including the budget in 1993 and used it for the first time in 1994. In effect this reduces town meeting from a place where talk is followed by decision to a place of talk is all there is. Burke went from an average (four meetings between 1987 and 1992) Size Adjusted Attendance Index of 1.14 to .57 in 1996 and .31 in 1997.[30] (See Plot 2 of Figure V-G.)

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[29]This is because it is my home town and though I have not lived there (except for farming in the summers in the 1960's) since my youth, I spend a lot of time in Newbury. One of the best days of the year for me has been returning in early March to do this study for the town. I missed a series of years after I realized that my citizenship in Starksboro precluded such indulgences. In recent years, however, Starksboro has gone to a Saturday meeting and now I can attend both. I was in Newbury for the 1977 meeting. The town debated the Australian ballot issue (for officers only) for only ten minutes between 2:36 and 2:46 p.m. and approved it with a voice vote. That was the year Barbara Welch defeated Annie Murphy for town clerk 111-49. This race became the last contested vote during a town meeting for a town officer in Newbury. The town also voted "to exclude the operation and construction of commercial nuclear reactors or any other nuclear facilities, and the transportation, storage, and disposal of radioactive waste from such reactors in and on the land, air, and water in the town." Nuclear materials used for medical purposes were exempted. The vote was 92-39. Melissa Bryan and Frank Bryan, "The 1977 Comparative Town Meeting Study: Town of Newbury," (Burlington, Vermont: University of Vermont, the Real Democracy Data Base, March 1977).

[30]Justin Smith, one of my students who did the Burke meeting in 1997, says in his report that: "The meeting had a really bad turnout because people could show up any time between 10 a.m. and 7 p.m. to vote, and did not have to be present at the meeting in order to vote. This was disappointing to watch because those who did make the effort to attend the meeting engaged in some meaningful discussion and were much more informed about each warning item than those who just showed up and voted. Burke, by changing to the Australian ballot format, got rid of everything that was good about town meeting." Justin, who lived in Burke, was aided in his work at the meeting by his father, Donald Smith, and Dan Jackson. Justin Smith, Dan Jackson and Donald Smith, "The 1997 Comparative Town Meeting Study: Town of Burke," (Burlington, Vermont: University of Vermont, the Real Democracy Data Base, March 1997).

[FIGURE V-G ABOUT HERE]

Corinth shows a pattern much like Burke's. Corinth is one of a very few towns that adopted the Australian ballot and then returned to the traditional system. They did this in 1978 and 1979. But then 14 years later in a special town meeting held in the evening on October 12, 1992, the town adopted the Australian ballot once again. It was a meeting that began at 7:05 p.m. and had but one warning item: "Shall the town of Corinth elect its Town Clerk, Town Treasurer, Selectman, Lister, Auditor, and School Director by Australian ballot?" The minutes report that after a discussion with "some speaking for the Australian ballot and some against" had been completed and an amendment had been requested that would require *all* town officers be elected by Australian ballot:

> On a motion by Walter Peatman, seconded, he asked for the question to be voted upon.
>
> The vote on the amendment to include all officers was unanimously carried by voice vote.
>
> More than 7 people requested that the article, as amended, be voted by paper ballot. The vote was 53 yes and 17 no.
>
> Article 1. Shall the town of Corinth elect the Town Clerk, Town Treasurer, Selectman, Lister, Auditor, School Director and all other town officers by Australian ballot was passed.
>
> There being no other business to transact, the meeting was adjourned at 8:05 p.m.[31]

At the six meetings preceding this vote, Corinth averaged well above the statewide attendance for a town its size. The size adjusted attendance effort ratio was 1.25. After two years had

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[31]Town of Corinth, "Proceedings, Special Town Meeting, Monday, October 12, 1992," *Town Report*, (Year ending June 1993): 40.

fig 5 G

passed the next three meetings for which we have data (1995, 1997, and 1998) averaged only

.57. This is dramatic decline. (See Plot 3 of Figure V-G.)[32]

Hyde Park represents a rare case of attendance increasing with the adoption of the

Australian ballot. In the two meetings prior to its adoption for which we had data the town

meeting there averaged a size adjusted attendance effort ratio of 1.29. (See Plot 4 of Figure V-

G.) After the coming of the ballot the attendance averaged 1.48 in a sequence of three meetings

clustered in four years. A close inspection of the meetings of 1997 and 1998 reveals that in both

instances there were important debates over the school budget. In neither year were any

divisions of the house necessary to decide a close voice vote during the town meeting. But in

1997 a standing count was necessary to decide (55 percent to 45 percent) that any extra money

generated which exceeded school budget estimates was to be spent on education rather than

returned to the taxpayers. In 1998 two counts were needed, the most contentious of which

denied (by the same 55 to 45 ratio) a $30,000 increase in the school budget.[33] Time will tell

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[32]Corinth was not surveyed in 1997. The attendance for that year was taken from the minutes printed in the town report. In most cases there is no way systematic and accurate data on town meeting attendance can be had using the minutes that is reliable enough to make comparative analysis possible. In this instance, however, the minutes for Corinth were otherwise excellent and I was able to verify the town clerk's attendance figure by a "count of hands" vote taken during the meeting in which a tax of $1 per capita to support a local library was narrowly defeated. Town of Corinth, Margaret S. Pierson, Town Clerk, "Town Meeting Proceedings March 4, 1997," *Town Report*, (Year ending June 1997): 45.

[33]The student report on the 1997 meeting provided a classic case of the dangers of open participation. A woman (the 14th participator in the town meeting who had participated on the question of a $1,000 appropriation to the Hyde Park Softball/Baseball association) whom the student identified as wearing "a deep blue down vest," brought up the only issue under Article #7, "to transact any other business properly to be done when met." It seems the woman in question was Ruth Roy and she has sharp eyes. My student summarized her comment this way. "It was pointed out (by Roy) that none of the School Directors voted for the amendment to the school budget to use returned money for education rather than to reduce property taxes. The lady who brought this up thought it reflected poorly on the school directors. The meeting adjourned afterwards." The School District Clerk, Gary Anderson (who is also the town clerk), in his excellent minutes of both the town and school meetings put it this way in his review of the new business article: "Ruth Roy envisions a School Board as advocates for children, and she was saddened to see that they didn't vote for the amendment to the budget article." When you practice real

whether or not the attendance bubble after the institution of the Australian ballot was only a function of a particularly divisive local battle over educational funding. But for now the question provides a handy transition to the next question that confronts us. What impact do institutionalized educational issues have on attendance at town meeting?

School Meeting/Town Meeting

The third structural consideration brings the content of discussion directly into play. Unlike other states Vermont allows its citizens to govern their school systems as they do their towns, directly in open meetings. As in other states, however, Vermont's school districts are separate legal entities. Traditionally the "town meeting" and the "school meeting" were one—warned together and held at the same time. Over the past half century, but especially in the last two decades many towns in Vermont have moved the school district's annual meeting to another day entirely so that almost no issues involving this most local of local concerns comes up for discussion at town meeting.

The reasons for this are partly technical, partly political. At town meeting time in early March towns seldom know the amount of supplemental money they will receive from the state and do not find out until later in the spring. It makes sense to wait before voting on local school budgets. My data and the minutes of the town meetings themselves also indicate that after a particularly long

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democracy and vote in public, accountability often occurs in real time. Unfortunately for the citizens who were not there, the town report only contained a "resume" of the meeting that reported Article #7 like this: "Board thanked Glenn Hankinson and David Hallquist for serving as school directors." Omitted was any reference to an announcement for a quilt drawing after the meeting (which had also been brought up under new business) or the fact that the school board voted against school money. Town of Hyde Park, *Town Report*, (Year ending December 1997): 72; and Town of Hyde Park, Gary Anderson, Town Clerk, *Town of Hyde Park School District 1997 Annual Meeting,* (Mimeograph 1997): 5. Jeff Barber, "The 1997 Comparative Town Meeting Study: Town of Hyde Park," (Burlington, Vermont: University of Vermont, the Real Democracy Data Base, March 1997).

and assiduous meeting (where school and town are combined) citizens will suggest moving the school meeting to another day.

Yet there may be some mischief afoot as well. Many educational leaders view the town meeting as a thorn in the side of sound education policy. Town meetings (it is felt) are more likely to be attended by generalists (real citizens) or worse yet, angry taxpayers with no children in the school. It would be better for education to keep the gathering small and focused. This could be done, for instance, by meeting on an evening in the good weather of early May. The farmers would be busy with spring work, usually until dark. Daylight savings time would be in effect and the peepers would be in the marsh. A society thawing out after a long winter's cold would be less apt to give up such an evening to go inside and debate school issues.[34]

Whatever the intent, one would imagine that a town meeting with school issues imbedded in the Warning along with roads and social services would have higher attendance than a town meeting where they were completely absent, especially in light of the fact that the great preponderance of locally raised taxes in Vermont go to education. The solution to the town meeting/school meeting problem takes several interesting forms. In our sample of 1438 town meetings 583 had school meetings conducted on the same day either directly before or after the town meeting. Another cluster of school meetings (343) were conducted by interrupting the town meeting, conducting the

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[34]In fact, however, this strategy may have proved dysfunctional to educational interests. If the post Vietnam period has taught us anything about political mobilization, it has taught us that forces opposed to government and its doings can learn to employ the tactics used so successfully by the left in an earlier time. Smaller unifunctional meetings are as vulnerable in hard times as they are secure in good times. Although in general the movement to separate town meetings from school meetings continues, several towns have actually moved back to the traditional practice of having town and school meetings on the same day. It is my judgment that (both ironically and thankfully) it is Vermonters who came into Vermont from "away" in the 1960's and 1970's with leftish-political views who have, with 20 Vermont winters under their belts, begun to see what should be done and are now leading their communities back toward democracy in education. Highgate is such a town.

school meeting, and then returning to finish the town meeting. The minutes from the Champlain

Valley town of Charlotte indicate, for instance, that in 1985:

> [At 12:08 p.m. by my data the meeting was in the middle of Article 6] "Will the
> Town adopt the Selectmen's Budget of $488,046.00 for the fiscal year July 1,
> 1985, to June 30, 1986, less anticipated revenues?" [They had just voted down an
> additional $20,000 for an ambulance by a "show of hands" 53 to 59 when] "The
> Moderator called a recess until 1:00 p.m. and discussion of Article 6 to continue
> after the Town School District meeting."

> [At 1:02 p.m. by my data the school meeting officially opened as warned in the
> Town Report] "The legal voters of the Charlotte Town School District are hereby
> notified and warned to meet at the Charlotte Town Hall..., at one o'clock in the
> afternoon on Tuesday, 5 March 1985..." [After the resolution of Article VII (the
> last article) of the school meeting's Warning ("To transact any other business
> thought proper when met.") the minutes report] "The Town School Meeting was
> adjourned at approximately 2:30 p.m. [actually it was 2:50 p.m.] and the Town
> Meeting was resumed.[35]

Other town meetings (there were 295 of them in my sample) make no formal distinction

between the town and school district in the way they conduct their local governance. School items

simply appear in the Warning of the Town Meeting and are considered in order as they appear. Year

after year in my town of Starksboro the Warning tells us that school business is part of the town

meeting with typical formality: "The legal voters of the Town of Starksboro and the Town *School*

District (emphasis my own) in the County of Addison and State of Vermont are hereby notified and

warned to meet at the Robinson School multi-purpose room in said Starksboro on Tuesday the

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[35] Town of Charlotte, "Abstract of the Town and School District Meetings 1985."

second day of March A.D.,[36] 1993 to transact the following business viz:" Only two of the 14 articles that follow are directly related to school business but since one of them is the budget ("Article 8: Will the voters adopt for the support of the Starksboro School District the proposed budget for the ensuing year [FY 1993–1994], being *$1,118,915* less receipts, with the remainder being raised by taxes on a tax rate set by the Selectmen according to State Statute?") there is almost nothing that cannot be discussed and/or voted.

Finally there are those towns that have separated the two meetings completely. A handful of these schedule their school meetings within a week or two of the town meeting but most hold them in May or early June when it is reasonably certain the Legislature will have allotted the all important financial assistance to the school districts. My sample of meetings included 217 of these.

Our data for attendance on town meeting day (or evening) do not discriminate on the basis of what meeting was in progress at the time it was recorded. This fits the reality of the process for most towns that "warn" and conduct their meetings separately but on the same day and do not miss a beat shifting from one to the other. Both meetings are always held in the same building, the town meeting moderator usually continues as the school meeting moderator (or vice-versa), and an average of less than two minutes separates the closing of one meeting and the opening of the next.[37]

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[36]As long as the people of the town consider what we do historically important to justify an assumption that our records will last long enough to require a notation to future historians that it took place *after* the death of Christ, I am confident that democracy in my town is alive and well.

[37]This average does not include the noon hour when it coincides with the ending of one meeting and the beginning of the other.

The expectations town meeting are straightforward. Towns mixing school and town business would have the highest average for the relationship between the way school matters are handled and attendance at attendance followed by those towns that hold a separate school meeting *within* the town meeting. Lower still would be the average attendance of towns with sequential meetings on the same day and finally would come those towns that scheduled no school meeting at all for town meeting day. Overall the data behaved as expected.

Towns which mix their town and school meetings completely have higher attendance (23.8 percent) than the attendance (15.6 percent) at meetings held in towns that treat school matters another day. But there is no difference in the attendance of those towns that separate their town meetings from their school meetings by formerly warning one to follow the completion of the other and those towns that have their school meeting during an adjournment of the town meeting. Both have about 21 percent of the town's registered voters in attendance. (See Figure V-H Plot 1.)

[FIGURE V-H ABOUT HERE]

When the size controlled measure is used, however, the pattern is refined in the proper direction. Holding the number of registered voters in a town constant demonstrates that there is not a lot of difference in attendance between those meetings that have school business fully integrated with town business and those meetings that hold the school meeting during the (adjourned) town meeting. In our size-controlled universe of town meetings if the projected attendance for any given town averages were 100 people, there will be about two more voters present at the integrated meetings. In other words the attendance effort (which is well above average in both groups) will increase from 1.09 to 1.11, that is, from about nine percent more than they were predicted to have given size to 11 percent more. (See Figure V-H Plot 2.)

fig 5 H

Holding the two meetings in sequence, however, matters more. The SAAER for the 583 meetings that consisted of two separate meetings held back to back averaged only 1.01. This eight-voter drop for every 100 voters present is statistically significant at the .001 level. So is the seven-point drop between these kinds of meetings and the 217 meetings when school matters are discussed on another day entirely. In the latter a meeting whose size predicts 100 voters would have only 94 in attendance, which is simply another way of saying they only had 94 percent of what they were predicted to have. All in all the difference between a meeting that integrates school business and one that has no school business considered whatsoever is substantial (a loss of about 17 voters for every 100 predicted from its size) and (of course) statistically significant.

When the type of school meeting and use of the Australian ballot are compared both affect attendance at town meeting independent of the other, although the Australian ballot is the stronger variable. The attendance at meetings in towns holding the school meeting the same day drops from 113 for every 100 attenders expected if the Australian ballot is not in use to 100 when it is. For the 218 town meetings held when there is no school meeting the day of town meeting, SAAER drops from 1.05 to .85 when the Australian ballot is used. Among the 643 meetings that do not use an Australian ballot, holding the school meeting another day decreases the index from 1.13 to 1.05. Within the cluster of 793 meetings using the Australian ballot the index drops from 1.00 to .85 if the school meeting is held another day. (See Plot 3 in Figure V-H.)

Overall the combination of the two variables makes quite a difference. For every 100 voters predicted to be in attendance at town meeting because of a town's size there will be 13 more present if the meeting has no Australian ballot in use and school matters are a part of the day's business and

15 less if the opposite is true. This is a difference of 28 voters for every 100 predicted. Put another

way if a town changes its school meeting to another day and begins to use the Australian ballot for

its town meeting, it will lose more than a quarter of its size allotted attendance. The dominance of

the Australian ballot, however, is evident in the regression equation used in the following chapter.

The Australian ballot trumps the day vs. night variable and removes it from the table. Although the

school meeting variable survives its meeting with the Australian ballot in the regression equation, it

is definitely the weaker variable, adding but an additional percentage point of variance reduced,

bringing the total to 63.[38]

Town Halls and Church Basements

The meeting places in which the people gather on town meeting day vary like the scratch and

claw topography of the northern New England that surrounds them. In Brandon in 1987 they met in

the modern auditorium of Otter Valley Union High School. In Braintree they met in the West

Braintree town hall which was described by my students as "small and very *old*" (emphasis in the

original).[39] They met in the elementary school gym in Cambridge in 1992. In Calais they met in a

"quaint little church that had been converted to a town hall some time ago,"[40] in Ira in the cellar of

the Ira Baptist church, in Washington at ". . . the small elementary school, that looked like a

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[38]When the SAAER is the dependent variable in an equation in which only those three variables are used (in other words 100 percent of its variance open to explanation) the day vs. night variable manages to hang on.   The Australian ballot explains five percent of the variance, school meetings explain an additional 1.7 percent and day vs. night comes third with .7. In total the three variables explain seven percent of the variance in SAAER.

[39]Nicole Bourassa, John Cain, Adelaide Haskell and C. Tasha Sprague, "The 1987 Comparative Town Meeting Study: Town of Braintree," (Burlington Vermont: University of Vermont, the Real Democracy Data Base, March 1987).

[40]Sara Eastman "Town Meeting Essay, Calais 1992," (Burlington, Vermont: University of Vermont, March 1992).

converted chicken barn . . ."[41] in Tinmouth at the Grange Hall, in Bolton in the fire station, and up on the Canadian border in the town of Troy one of the students described the meeting place as a "tiny bingo building."[42]

But no matter where they were located or in what kind of building all of these meeting places shared one commonality. They were too small, far too small, to hold all the voters of the town had they decided to attend. Most were too small to hold even a majority. In fact the meeting place of the average town meeting of the 1438 would have to increase its seating capacity by 50 percent in order to provide spaces for even a majority of the registered voters of the town. Often the situation is worse. In my old home town of Newbury, for instance, there were 158 in attendance at the highest point during the meeting of 1996. At that time there were 47 empty seats and 13 people standing. If those standing had sat down there would be 34 empty seats. These plus the 158 seats already occupied means there were 192 seats available. But there were 1302 registered voters in Newbury. To accommodate half of these 651 seats would be needed. With only 192 available 459 were lacking. Newbury would have to more than double its seating capacity to provide space for half of its registered voters.

Bigger towns lack the most space. In the smallest towns, for instance, (those with less than 250 voters) there were 16 seats available for every 100 registered voters not in attendance. If an extra 100 persons decided to attend, only 16 could be accommodated. Yet for the largest towns (those with over 2500 voters) there were only four seats available for every 100 registered voters not

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[41]Eileen Riley, "Washington 1992," (Burlington, Vermont: University of Vermont, March 1992).

[42]It was actually held at the Sacred Heart Parish Hall. Tom Butler, "Town Meeting: A Democracy? Troy 1992," (Burlington, Vermont: University of Vermont, March 1992).

in attendance. (See Figure V-I.) The size of the meeting place itself, therefore, may help produce the

strong negative correlation between size of the community and direct democracy. There is much

less room at the meeting places for citizens of larger towns. This could certainly trigger a certain

discouragement among citizens of these more populous places.

[FIGURE V-I ABOUT HERE]

WITNESS

> Right after the lunch break it was this man in the red hunting hat, Gibb Maxwell, that
> made the entire experience what it was. At this time the meeting took a strange turn of
> events. In order to raise more money, about a hundred dollars, Granville had an auction
> of baked goods. It was all I could do to refrain from bidding on the delicious looking
> cakes and brownies. It was a real auction. Mr. Maxwell acted as auctioneer, even
> talking really fast in an attempt to raise the price of each item and inspire bidding
> competition among the townspeople. Even though the people were all fairly well
> acquainted, there were some vicious bidding wars, some even raising the price of a
> single cake to almost fifteen dollars. It was quite a scene, this older backwoods farmer,
> screaming out prices in an extremely thick northern Vermont accent, and pointing wildly
> as he waved cakes and other items around in the air.[43]

The lack of space hypothesis does not work out. It was the meeting places in the little towns

that were most crowded. The data (see Figure V-I) also show that in the 132 meetings held in the

towns of less than 250 registered voters, there were on average less than four empty seats for every

ten attenders. As town size increases the number of empty seats increases faster than the number of

attenders. In the meetings with more than 2500 voters in town there were 8.4 empty seats for each

person in attendance. In short in the larger towns where there were many more people outside the

meeting hall in relation to the total number of seats available *in* the meeting hall, there was also more

space in the hall. Crowdedness (as measured by the empty seats per attender statistics) *increases* as

the potential number of voters available to make the hall crowded *decreases*. It seems likely that if

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[43]Sally Smith, "The 1987 Granville Town Meeting," (Burlington, Vermont: University of Vermont, March 1987).

the lack of adequate meeting space inhibits attendance anywhere it is most apt to do so in the smallest places not the largest ones, making it unlikely indeed that it is in any way responsible for the low turnout in the larger towns.[44] This fact lends strength to the rational citizen thesis. People go to a town meeting when their presence "counts" more *even if* there is less space for them to sit and conditions will be more crowded.

It is now time to turn from correlations between the way meetings are held and attendance to explore the context of the community and its relationship to attendance. In doing this it is possible that meeting structures will need to be considered intervening variables between community context on the one hand and citizen presence at town meeting on the other. Are particular kinds of communities linked up with particular levels of attendance? If so, is responsibility for the match independent of (for instance) whether or not the Australian ballot is used? Or do particular kinds of communities tend to adopt the Australian ballot, which then generates its own causality independent of the nature of community? Thus the investigation becomes more complicated. It also becomes more interesting.

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[44]There is probably some bias in the data in the direction of a low estimate of the amount of space available. Now and then (especially in the smaller towns) extra chairs are brought in and set up if the need arises. Thus the number of "seats" counted may not equate exactly with the amount of space available. In the larger towns where meetings are often held in school gyms the number of seats available in the "bleachers" may be undercounted. It is my judgment that these disparencies are minor, however, and since the error in the large towns is probably more prevalent and it is in the direction of making things even worse for the hypothesis, I feel confident that the rejection of the "lack of seating" explanation for lower turnout in the larger towns is a safe one.