CHAPTER VII

DEMOCRACY AS PUBLIC TALK: WALKING THE BOUNDS

I turn pale at the outset of a speech and and quake in every limb and in all my argument soul.[1]

—Cicero

Rockwell's speaker stands relaxed and confident, a Lincolnesque figure in working clothes. His

is compelling. Two men in suits, perhaps his economic betters, turn and listen intently as a young girl shyly casts an admiring glance. They discuss a report on an unknown subject, Americans of all ages gathering in modest surroundings to fulfill the American promise of free speech and assembly.[2]

—John Frohnmayer (former chairperson of the National Endowment for the Arts)

Norman Rockwell was certainly the country's most popular illustrator of the 20th Century. His renderings of Franklin Roosevelt's "Four Freedoms" (freedom *of* speech and worship and freedom *from* fear and want) touched chords deep in the heartland of a democracy caught in the passions of war. The image of gas station owner Carl Hess standing to speak at town meeting ("Freedom of Speech") in Arlington, Vermont, is arguably the most familiar to Americans. Rockwell lived in Arlington[3] and (cutting him a little slack for romanticism) it must

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[1] Cicero, *De Oratore*, Vol. 1, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942), quoted in Michael J. Beatty, "Situational and Predispositional Correlates of Public Speaking Anxiety," *Communication Education* 37 (January 1988): 28-39.

[2] John Frohnmayer, "Freedom of Speech," in Stuart Murray and James McCabe, *Norman Rockwell's Four Freedoms Images that Inspire a Nation*, (Stockbridge, Massachusetts: Berkshire House, 1993): 101.

[3] Rockwell was typical of the writers and artists of all kinds who came to Vermont in the 1930's. He was a New Yorker who made a summer trip to Arlington and fell in love with its peace and tranquility. In his introduction to Rockwell's *Rockwell on Rockwell How I Make a Picture*, (New York: Watson-Guptill Publications, 1979) Alden Hatch says: "One summer showed Rockwell that Vermont was his spiritual home" (p. 14).

be said he nailed the distinguishing characteristic of town meeting right on the nose. Above all else town meeting is public talk, common people *standing* for something.[4]

Town meeting is more than free speech, of course. It offers a fifth freedom, freedom to *govern*. After Hess and his neighbors finished talking they voted. They made a decision. Voting after speaking is to governance what keeping the score is to sports. It changes everything.[5] But it

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[4] The conflictual elements of Rockwell's illustration are not apparent to the naked eye. It is well to understand that what was taking place in Arlington was not "social conversation." "Democratic" conversation involves public problem-solving among people who have a desire to get involved in public conflict. It is not done for its inherent pleasure. See: M. Schudson, "Why Conversation is Not the Soul of Democracy," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 14 (1997): 297-309; and Joshua Cohen, "Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy," in James Bohman and William Rehg (eds.), *Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Reason and Politics*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997): 67-92.

[5] Because it does and because, therefore, framers of governance know this and have shied away from it at all levels, political philosophers seem analytically and normatively adverse to the joining of participation and decision making as well. Gerard Delanty interprets this tendency in the work of Jürgen Habermas: "participation does not have to amount to decision-making." Civil society will produce "streams of communications" that will then "coalesce into bundles of topically specified *public* opinion." Then the political institutions take over to make the decision. In this way Habermas is able to "avoid the problems that accompany the simple model of direct or strong democracy." Gerard Delanty, *Social Theory in a Changing World: Conceptions of Modernity*, (Cambridge, England: Polty Press, 1999): 86-91. For a more complete examination of Habermas and the separation of public opinion and decision making see: James Bohman, *Public Deliberation: Pluralism, Complexity, and Democracy*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996). In his insightful critique of the argument that social complexity at a national level precludes deliberative popular sovereignty Bohman comes down hard on town meeting. "It is certainly clear that . . . town meetings are no longer the best way to maximize opportunities for citizenship." My assumption is he is talking about national citizenship. But I can't be sure. This is a maddening circumstance I run up against again and again and I want to ask: Is it your claim that town meetings fail to "maximize citizenship" in the only context that any reasonable person would assume they might be able to—the small (note I did *not* say "homogeneous") town? For this is the critical question. If town meetings do not meet the test for deliberative democratic citizenship in areas that matter to people over which the town has, if not sovereignty, at least control, then the case for a *national*, and deliberative representative democracy would, it seems to me, need (in James Farr's words) be (at a minimum) "reframed." Accordingly, if we are ever going to apply evidence to the truly important notions advanced in the deliberative democracy literature, would not town meetings be the place to start? Real democracy not only involves the individual directly with governmental decisions (referenda do that) it requires that joining of civil society and public *authority* be done face to face. As the literature on democratic participation in civil society reveals it will become more and more useful and necessary to explore participation in real democracies where civil and political life are indeed *joined* not separated. See for instance, James Farr's call to pay attention to precisely this situation in order to properly frame public opinion. Look at deliberation, he says, where deliberation is "over a wide range of issues" where "actual decisions" are made. "One might think of the sort of discussions that are still held in New England town meetings." Farr also emphasizes Harold Lasswell's admonition that "the methods of talk need to aid in the discovery of sound public policy. If the practice of discussion does not create a sense of achievement, there is contempt for talk." Harold Lasswell, *Democracy Through Public Opinion*, cited in Farr. James Farr, "Framing Democratic Discussion" in George E. Marcus and Russell L. Hanson (eds.), *Reconsidering*

is in the speaking, the direct face-to-face link between talk and power, that real democracy transcends nearly every definition of democracy at work on the planet since the Greeks. It is the public talk of ordinary citizens that sets town meeting governance apart and makes its democracy seem so real. This is what enfolds our imagination, sparks our sense of democratic adventure, and conjures up notions of ancient and hopeful possibilities. It is time to explore the boundaries of these sacred images, to prepare a match with reality.[6]

In his essay (above) John Frohnmayer says that Rockwell's citizen is "relaxed and confident." True but many people standing to speak at town meeting may be scared to death. The literature on speech anxiety is extensive. Textbooks on oral communication typically identify symptoms such as "butterflies in the stomach, a rapid pulse rate, inability to sleep, rapid breathing, a dry mouth, clammy palms, perspiration, trembling, shortness of breath . . ." and so on.[7] One text warns students:

> Your voice quavers or becomes very tense. Your rate of speaking becomes unusually fast or slow. Your voice becomes monotonous and you neglect to emphasize words. You have to swallow or clear your throat frequently. Your breathing becomes labored. You stammer a lot. You vocalize every pause with an "um," "er," or other sound. You fumble for words. You look everywhere but at the audience. Your face becomes expressionless. Your hands and arms

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the Democratic Public, (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993): 389. All I can do here unfortunately is to map out the empirical terrain in which such exploration might take place.

[6] The importance of being "face to face" in politics is largely unexplored. But, ironically, the coming of television and with it the importance of televised imagery to the *representative* republic has stimulated innovative work by political scientists that establishes the importance of visual communication in politics. It also suggests frameworks for similar analysis in *communal* democracies like town meeting that are bigger than those used in traditional small group studies but small enough to retain their human scale. See for instance: Dennis G. Sullivan and Roger D. Masters, "Nonverbal Behavior, Emotions and Democratic Leadership" in George E. Marcus and Russell L. Hanson (eds.) *Reconsidering the Democratic Public*, (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993).

[7] Jimmy G. Cheek and Larry R. Arrington, *Effective Oral Communication*, (Danville, Illinois: Interstate Publishers, Inc., 2000): 101.

> become rigid and start to tremble uncontrolably. You begin to sway back and forth and your feet begin to shuffle restlessly.[8]

In 1978 the *Book of Lists* reported Americans were more frightened of public speaking than anything else; heights, sickness, insects, death, flying—you name it.[9] An extensive review of the scholarship on shyness reported by the *New York Times* in 1984 listed public speech second from the top on the list of "social anxieties." Seventy-four percent of respondents said it caused them the most anxiety just below being at a party with strangers.[10] All this needs to be kept in mind as we explore the degrees to which people speak at town meeting.[11]

Frohnmayer also says that the argument made by gas station owner Carl Hess (which in a small Vermont town means he pumped gas and carried grease under his fingernails) was "compelling." Perhaps. But I have seen many a working person (and college professor as well)

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[8] Mary Hinchcliff Pelias, "Communication Apprehension in Basic Public Speaking Texts: An Examination of Contemporary Textbooks," *Communication Education* 38 (January 1989): 46. Rush W. Dozier calls public speaking "the most common of the social phobias" reminding us that the first time Mohanda Gandhi was called upon (in a courtroom in India) he was so overcome he could not utter a word. Dozier's claim is that like all fears, fear of speaking before others is tied to the experiences of early humans when the mere presence of others meant trouble. Rush W. Dozier, Jr., *Fear Itself: The Origin and Nature of the Powerful Emotion that Shapes Our Lives and Our World*, (New York: St. Martins Press, 1998): 234-235, 244. Social psychologist Robert B. Zajonc in a seminal article in *Science* reviewed the century's findings prior to 1960 and concludes that the mere presence of others stimulates an arousal syndrome that reinforces dominant response patterns. Using studies on humans and laboratory animals his conclusion is the presence of others enhances performance and retards learning. His lesson: advise your students to study in private and take their exams in the presence of many others in large lecture halls. (I tend to think the opposite works better. Students who form small study groups and take their exams in peace and quiet do better.) Robert B. Zajonc, "Social Facilitation," *Science* 149 (July 16, 1965): 269-274. From this clinical evidence of arousal springs our fear of public speaking which is one kind of performance that is not enhanced by anxiety produced by the presence of others. Interestingly some of the data appears to be curvilinear which has implications for verbal participation in town meeting.

[9] D. Wallechinsky, *The Book of Lists*, (New York: Bantam, 1978).

[10] Daniel Goleman, "Social Anxiety: New Focus Leads to Insights and Therapy," *New York Times* (December 18, 1984): C1.

[11] When asked why they didn't speak out at meetings of the governing assembly in the Israeli Kibbutz, the most predominant reason among a sample of respondents was a general fear of speaking before large groups. Menachem Rosner, *Democracy, Equality and Change: The Kibbutz and Social Theory* (Darby, Pennsylvania: Norwood Editions, 1982): 53.

make arguments that are far from compelling. Indeed as many of my students have pointed out over the years they are often downright silly. Further on in his essay Frohnmayer says that freedom of speech depends on liberal interpretions of what it means. His examples come, understandably, from the arts. "It will erode," he says, "when we scream at our congressional representatives to ban difficult or confrontational art." What would he say if Carl Hess were standing tall for just such brands of censorship, which one can be certain many people (even majorities) at town meeting sometimes do? Yet, given these caveats Frohnmayer was right (in 1993) to emphasise the speech component of Roosevelt via Rockwell as he was right in emphasising its liberal interpretation.[12] In this chapter, however, I will not deal with questions of speech as governance nor the quality of the speech itself.[13] For the task is far more basic; to treat its quantity, its distribution and its equality.[14]

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[12] One (and perhaps the most qualified) interpreter of "Freedom of Speech" says that Carl Hess represented "A lone dissenter at a New England town meeting." Maureen Hart Hennessey, "The Four Freedoms," in Maureen Hart Hennessey and Anne Knutson, *Norman Rockwell Pictures for the American People*, (Stockbridge, Massachusetts: The Norman Rockwell Museum, 1999). Maybe. Maybe not.

[13] The character of town meeting participation offers many opportunities to study the character of democratic participation. The quality of deliberation is but one. If deliberation requires face-to-face, reasoned give and take resulting in compromise and synthesis, if it involves a *deliberate* consensual reduction of the dimensions of conflict until a point is reached where decisions are possible, then what goes on at a town meeting is often not deliberative democracy. For recent definitional discussions of deliberative democracy see: A. Gutmann, "The Disharmony of Democracy" in John W. Chapman and Ian Shapiro (eds.), *Democratic Community* (New York: The New York University Press, 1993): 126-160 and Jack Knight and James Johnson, "Aggregation and Deliberation: On the Possibility of Democratic Legitimacy," *Political Theory* 22 (May 1994): 277-296. The field of deliberative democracy was theoretically advanced dramatically in 1997 by the essays published in James Bohman and William Rehg (eds.), *Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Reason and Politics*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1997).

[14] David Sally argues that "no other variable has as strong and consistent an effect on results as face-to-face communication. David Sally, "Conversation and Cooperation in Social Dilemmas: A Meta-Analysis of Experiments from 1958-1992," *Rationality and Society* 7 (January 1995): 58-92. Elinor Ostrom in her 1997 presidential address to the American Political Science Association provides an excellent and thorough review of the literature on face-to-face communication. Her conclusions: ". . . consistent, strong and replicable findings are that substantial increases in the level of cooperation are achieved when individuals are allowed to communicate face to face" and "the efficacy of communication is related to the capacity to talk face to face." Elinor Ostrom, "A

WITNESS

In the summer of 198? Starksboro held a special town meeting. It was a hot night and the school's multi-purpose room was filled to capacity. A group opposing new taxes to support the school had petitioned to have two issues decided. The first was to place future school budgets on an Australian ballot. One could then vote on the school budget without attending town meeting. This would be fairer it was argued since it hurt working people more to take a day off without pay and spend it at town meeting than it did professional people. Everyone would have a better chance to vote. There would be of course no more public, *democratic* deliberation, that is, public discussion on a real, conflictural issue spiced by an impending decision that those doing the dliberating would have to live with it. Also, defenders of school budgets could no longer blackmail opponents with a public question like "We're only doing this for the kids. Do you have something against kids?"

The second issue on the special Warning was the current budget passed earlier at the March town meeting. If this article were approved, deliberation on that year's school budget along with the possibility of reductions would be entertained. Considerable discussion on the first budget item (the Australian ballot) ensued. Most of the talk came from people who were against it. These people (including me) tended to be professional people. Many were on salaries, which made attendance at a Tuesday town meeting relatively painless from an economic point of view. We also were more apt to have kids in the school or were simply passionate defenders of education. But the arguments we made were for democratic deliberation, not education. This was only right since the issue was the Australian ballot. Eliminating the deliberative component of town meeting would kill town meeting we said. It is better to maintain the capacity to compromise and even trim an expenditure than force the voters into a simple unimformed "yes-no," "up or down" vote we argued. Public discussion is vital to the democratic process we opined. Thank God we lived in a place where open, public, deliberative democracy was possible! Except for a few "let every one have a chance to vote" declarations, the pro Australian ballot people, were silent. They didn't want to talk about it. Asked for a secret ballot. Figured they had the votes. They didn't.

With the deliberative character of real democracy duly rescued, the moderator then called the second issue to the floor. Would the town meeting call the current school budget to the floor for deliberation? Would those that only moments before extolled the virtues of open, public, democratic debate risk the school budget to such a thing? No. We didn't want to talk about it.

Asked for another secret ballot.

Figured we had the votes.

We did.

Behavioral Approach to the Rational Choice Theory of Collative Action," Presidential Address, American Political Science Association, 1997, *American Political Science Review* 92 (March 1998): 1-20. See also: Elinor Ostrom, Roy Gardner, and James Walker, *Rules, Games and Common-Pool Resources,* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1994).

HOW MANY SPEAK?

Signa Carbee, one of the very few female town moderators in Vermont, opened the Newbury town meeting of 1970 at 10:39 a.m. She was a daughter of the retiring road commissioner, Theron ("Buster") Carbee and my next-door neighbor growing up. Scott Mahoney was the ninth person to speak. Scott was my social studies teacher in high school. He also ran a little inn and sold antiques. His hobbies were cooking, the theater, and raising local hell as a populist and a Democrat. (Not particularly a happy mix in those days.) Forty-eight others would speak by the time the meeting adjourned at 4:34 p.m. In the meantime Scott would contribute sixteen more participations to a meeting that had 197 discrete acts of participation by a total of 57 of the 293 persons who made an appearance at town meeting that year.

Only one would speak more than Scott Mahoney, Milo Leighton a selectman. In almost all town meetings there is a selectman that unofficially answers questions for the board of selectmen and thereby piles up a lot of participations. Richard "Son" Darling, who taught me how to handle a canoe in between visits and beers with my mom at our kitchen table when he was home on leave from the army, was next most often to speak. He did so fifteen times. Year after year following the discussion of the town reports Son would rise and make the motion (it was usually Article #3) that the town appropriate a sum of money to observe Memorial Day. (In 1970 it was $150) By that time he was a retired career sergeant.

Also in 1970 the man who won the most contentious race for selectman in years (nor has there been one like it since), Lloyd Rogers spoke nine times, one less than the fourth place

participator, town clerk Barbara Welch. It took four ballots to elect Rogers, a farmer who lived out back on Rogers' Hill. His place had the most beautiful view of the White Mountains of New Hampshire in New England. But you got the idea Lloyd didn't spend a lot of time looking at it. He had three sisters named Faith, Hope and Charity. Hope was the principal of the high school for my last three years there.

In 1971 Rogers, now a selectman led all participators with 23 discrete acts of participation, Scott Mahoney had 12 and Son Darling had two. There were 116 fewer people at the meeting of 1971 but they talked a lot more, 354 times as opposed to 197 in 1970. In 1970 there were only 57 participators. In 1971 there were 74. They also talked longer. The 1971 meeting took 382 minutes. The 1970 meeting took 302. This is partly because of the many paper ballots held in 1970. Each of them takes from fifteen minutes to a half an hour. During this time formal discussion is suspended. The most important event in the town meeting of 1971 was the defeat of Signa Carbee as moderator.

Voting down a moderator is unpleasant (and therefore rare). The moderator calls the meeting to order and immediately asks a selectman to preside over the election of a moderator for the year. Then she or he steps aside (literally) while the selectman asks for nominations from the floor. There is almost never any opposition and the incumbent is duly nominated and reelected. If there is opposition the moderator usually prevails. Since the office is the town's most prestigious, being thrown out of it is especially embarrassing. In Newbury that day there was opposition, Gary Brooks. The town voted. (A secret ballot) The town counted. (Neighbors talked. People visited.) Signa waited. All this took 14 minutes. Then the town announced the vote. Signa 70, Gary 93. The little town hall shrinks as she walks down (again, literally) off the

stage where she had received her high school diploma 14 years earlier. She sits down in a chair among her neighbors who had defeated her. In better times she had been the star of the girls basketball team on that very floor, one so small that the center jump circle intersected with the top of the key. There is nowhere to hide in the Newbury town hall.

Signa Carbee was not interested in hiding, however. The next year she participated from the floor ten times. Only six of the 220 attenders did so more. Son Darling participated ten times and Lloyd Rogers 23 (again). Scott Mahoney is not recorded as speaking.[15] All in all 56 participators produced 234 individual acts of participation. In 1973, 219 were present and 71 of them spoke a total of 239 times. Scott Mahoney was the first to speak and finished with 13 participations. Son Darling had one, Rogers had 26 and Signa had three. The next year (1974) the meeting lasted 300 minutes and in that time 70 different people participated 277 times. Lloyd Rogers, the selectman, had 30, Darling had three, Signa had six and Scott Mahoney was aparently not in attendance.

As the 1970's progressed these kinds of participation profiles continued. In 1978 Son participated 13 times, Scott 16, Signa 9 (she had been elected to the budget committe a year earlier). and Lloyd 20, even though he was no longer a selectman. In 1982 the year Vermont town meetings were given global attention by their overwhelming support for a nuclear weapons freeze referendum, Son asked for and got money to observe Memorial Day. Scott Mahoney was most interested in where the revenue sharing money went, participating four times on the following, Article 11:

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[15] Unfortunately there is no way to know if he was present and not speaking or if he was simply absent. Knowing Mr. Mahoney the way I did I bet he was absent. He wasn't one not to talk.

> To see if the town will authorize and empower the selectmen to spend money received from the State and Local Fiscal Asistance Act of 1972 (Revenue Sharing) in accordance with the guidelines of the Federal Government. This article will be discussed at 1:00 p.m.[16]

In all he participated eleven times. Signa Carbee spoke eight times and Lloyd Rogers, now a Town Agent and a Justice of the Peace, did so eleven times.

This meeting was not well attended (156 present at the highest count) and didn't last very long (133 minutes). In that time 55 people participated. They took up the nuclear freeze article (#15) at 11:37 a.m., voting to move it up a couple of notches on the agenda to make sure the debate took place before lunch after which it was assumed (correctly) that attendance would drop off a bit. Seven minutes later discussion was over. Only six people participated. There were 245 participations that day at the Newbury town meeting. Only seven were on the nuclear freeze resolution. Son Darling participated once. Scott, Siggie and Lloyd did not participate on it at all. Just before the vote began I counted the attendance and there were 136 people in the hall. Only 117 of them voted on the resolution. It took eleven minutes to do the secret ballot. When the counting was over the town had approved the folowing resolution by a vote of 75 to 42:

> Shall the State Senator and Representative from this district be advised to introduce into the Vermont Legislature a resolution asking the Vermont Congressional Delegation to:
>
> Request the President of the United States to propose to the Soviet Union a mutual freeze on the testing, production and deployment of nuclear weapons and of missles and new aircraft designed primarily to deliver nuclear weapons, with the verification safeguards satisfactory to both countries.

Although Lloyd Rogers did not participate on the nuclear freeze resolution he did participate a total of 11 times on six other articles. He had not missed a town meeting since I

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[16] Town of Newbury, *Town Report,* (Year ending December 1981).

began this study 13 years earlier in 1969. Sometime in the 32 minutes between 2:26 p.m. and 2:58 p.m. on March 2, 1982, Lloyd spoke on Article #14, the town budget. It was to be his last participation in town meeting. He got sick in the spring of 1983 and died up on his farm on May 26. He was 79. There were 229 names on the delinquent tax list in the town report that year. Lloyd's was not among them.[17]

It snowed heavily the night of March 5, 1985. Twelve inches had come down by the time town meeting was to begin. The moderator, Gary Brooks, postponed the opening of the meeting for twenty minutes. In all only 87 voters showed up that year. One of them was Son Darling. At 10:52 he rose at town meeting for the last time. He asked the town to appropriate $300 for the observance of Memorial Day. They did. It took two minutes. He was sick even then. He missed the meeting of 1986 and died later that year. His single participation in 1985 was one of only 177 in Newbury's worst attended meeting between 1970 and 2000.

Scott Mahoney also made it to town meeting in 1985. At 10:59 he was one of 12 attenders to speak on Article #6, "To fix compensation of all town officers." He also entered a property tax debate (one of 12 participations among nine people, six men and three women), spoke three times on the revenue sharing article, and once on snow removal. Then sometime between 2:17 and 2:33 p.m. near the end of the meeting under the "new business" article Scott (then 71) participated one last time. Along with four others (Signal Carbee being one of them), he spoke on the sixth item of new business, whether or not the town meeting should continue to be held during the day or be held at night. His remarks were covered in the *Journal Opinion*, a little weekly paper printed in the neighboring town of Bradford:

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[17] IBM, however was. They owed the town $1.78 in property taxes.

> Scott Mahoney suggested the idea be put to a vote and survey sheets be available at various places, so voters can pick them up and make their feelings known. He said the Town Meeting could be a pop luck supper, allowing working families a time to get home from their jobs and come to the town meeting for a meal and business.[18]

He died a year later. Populist to the end, it was appropriate that this democrat's final participation be a vision of working families eating their supper and governing themselves. The last time I saw Scott he was flat out and in pain at the Veteran's Hospital in White River. But he still managed a grin as my mother and I walked into his room. My mother (protecting me even when I was 45) would not tell me exactly what ailed him. It was, she said some strange variety of cancer. It was the deep green part of June in 1986. He died on July second.

While I don't know exactly what killed him I do know that almost two years earlier his picture had made the front page in the state and local section of the *Burlington Free Press*, Vermont's largest newspaper, under the headline: "Gays Hold Celebration in Burlington." The accompanying story read in part:

> He fought in a tank in George Patton's army in World War II. Born in Barre, this lifetime Vermonter married, had a child, taught in a local university and participated in local school boards, parents associations and local clubs.
>
> Three years ago, shortly after his wife died, he took a male lover.
>
> Saturday, Scott Mahoney, white haired and 70, marched along Bank Street past the Church Street Marketplace as part of Burlington's second annual Lesbian Gay Pride March.
>
> "I have worked in civil rights for Martin Luther King and I've decided it was time for me to work for my own freedom," he said, a relaxed smile creasing

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[18] "Newbury," *The Journal Opinion*, (March 6, 1985): 1, 5.

> his face. "I can't have self-respect if I'm not honest. The human part of me would be lost."[19]

The key is to remember that what Signa Carbee, Son Darling, Lloyd Rogers and Scott Mahoney are *not in the least* atypical of the thousands of people participating in town meeting every year all over Vermont throughout the three decades I studied them.[20] Nor is the Newbury town meeting. It is now time to deal with all the people and all the meetings and set empiricle parameters around the talk of real democracy. The questions are simple. How many people participate in a town meeting? To what extent is the discussion dominated by a relative few? How many actual acts of participation occur? What kinds of meetings produce the most talk, the least talk, the most equally distributed talk? In what kinds of towns are these meetings found? In short what are the empirical parameters of the verbal action of direct democracy and is it possible to identify the contextual variables associated with them? This chapter deals with the descriptive parameters. The next treats the correlates of their variation.

The methodological conundrum, which is the passion and the problem of this book, is particularly relevant to talk democracy: political science provides few clues to guide the analysis. Other social scientists, especially sociologists and psychologists, have developed evidence from their work on participation in small groups but these findings must be transferred to the world of politics and, especially, to the structured realm of *government.* This conceptual

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[19] Scott taught me World History (as it was called in the 1950's), U.S. History and Civics in high school. He never told any of us he was a tanker for Patton. Michael Powell, "Gays Hold Celebration in Burlington," The *Burlington Free Press* (June 17, 1984): B1.

[20] Signa Carbee is still going strong. At the 2000 town meeting in Newbury she participated 38 times; more than any of the other 51 participants in a town meeting with 152 in attendance. She was elected selectperson several years earlier and now is the most powerful officer in town with the possible exception of Barbara Welch, the town clerk.

interface between the two venues is complex and nearly untouched by scholars. In short, while social science provides hints of the answer to the question: "If you had a direct democracy, how many would come?" It is almost totally silent on the answer to the question: "If you held a direct democracy, how many would speak?"

Of the 1438 town meetings studied 1389 were used to analyze the talk at each individual meeting. Forty-nine cases tripped one of the many cords laid out to insure that the data base was clean. They were discarded.[21] Between 1970 and 1998, 196,150 people were counted in attendance at these town meetings. 61,298 different individuals actually talked at least once. In all 238,603 discrete acts of participation were recorded. To do this took 4816 hours of actual deliberative time.[22] We know from Chapter IV that an average of 137 people were present when attendance was the highest at each meeting. An average of 44 of these participated at least once. These are small numbers. However, 896 of the 1014 eligible to vote in these same towns registered to do so and an average of 616 actually did when given the opportunity in a general election. The dramatic drop off in numbers of town residents who participate when the democracy becomes direct rather than representative is displayed in Plot 1 of Figure VII-A.

[FIGURE VII-A ABOUT HERE]

Participation included any verbal act that "commanded the attention" of the meeting itself. Thus one did not have to be recognized by the moderator to have participated. But

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[21]Setting rigorous requirements for accuracy was an affordable luxury because of the large sample size. What was done in effect was to flag any town in which there were even suspicions that the data were not accurate. Special care was needed because taking counts for participation (see the methodological appendix) demanded more precision than taking attendance counts.

grumblings and asides that were more or less localized in the meeting hall were not counted. Also not counted were "seconds" of motions. Although these are formal participations they are almost impossible to record accurately since they are usually called out hurriedly and in some cases when the moderator asks, "Do I hear a second?" the response is so subtle that it would take

[22]In all it took minute by minute recording of participation for an aggregate time span of 102 weeks of five eight-hour days each to establish the data base. These hours do not include time the meeting spent in recess or was adjourned for lunch.

Fig 7A

a skilled auctioneer to identify it.[23] Participations by the moderator were not counted either, since they are fundamentally a constant and their function for the most part is to guide the process of the meeting. When moderators did step down from the podium to speak on an issue they were counted as a participator.[24] Also, moderators participate too much. Their individual acts of participation add up because of the nature of what they are doing and would (if credited as equal to a citizen's participation from the floor) deceptively inflate the participatory landscape of the meeting.

The baseline statistic of most importance is the one that tells us that on average 44 people will speak out at a typical town meeting. Within that figure there is great variation, however, and within this variation are footprints that may lead to the nature of face-to-face democracy. The range of the distribution begins with two meetings that had as few as eleven participators and eight meetings that had less than fifteen. On the other end of the distribution there were 14 meetings in which over seventy-five persons participated. One, the Newfane meeting of 1980 had 102. Between the extremes the data follow a normal curve. (See Figure VII-A, Plot 2.)

Compare for a moment the towns of Northfield in central Vermont and the Kingdom town of Victory. Geographically they are about the same size, 46 and 44 square miles respectively. Both began their town meetings at ten in the morning on the first Tuesday in

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[23]In recent years many towns are producing minutes of the town meetings in which the person who made the motion and the seconder of the motion are identified by name. The temptation to use this data did not override the necessity to be consistent in the data base.

[24]There is no doubt, of course, that some moderators have an impact on the decisions made at town meeting through subtle forms of participation and through their capacity to guide the debate. My sense is that this happens very seldom, however. The moderator who "makes things happen their way" is pretty much a fictional character -- a product of town meeting myth and lore. I would judge they appeared in only a handful of the town meetings we studied. This may be because the role of moderator has been the subject of continuing attention by the Vermont League of Cities and Towns, an organization that has sought to professionalize the role of moderator through workshops and seminars over the last thirty years.

March, 1983. In the Northfield meeting only 11 people spoke. In the Victory meeting of 1978 thirteen did. These two towns were among the five with the lowest totals in the data base of 1389 meetings in the 211 towns we studied. But in Northfield the nine participators sat in a group of 155 and this group of 155 came from a community with 3500 registered voters. In Victory the 11 participants were in a group of only 26 attenders. These 26 represented more than half the total number of registered voters in town, 49. On average 44 percent of the people in attendance at town meeting will speak at least once. But these represent only seven percent of the registered voters.[25]

The number of speakers is obviously connected to the number present at the meeting. But the relationship is not smooth and it is clearly curvilinear. The steep positive slope between attendance and participation flattens out dramatically when attendance begins to exceed 130 people. When attendance is 50, about 30 speak. When it is 100, about 40 do. But at 200 in attendance the average number of speakers is 50; at 400 it is 52. Second there is wide variation around the mean. The number of people in attendance explains only 23 percent of the variance in the number of people who actually speak.[26] The leveling out of the number of speakers at about the 130 in attendance mark makes theoretical sense and matches the empirical expectation of observers like myself who attend a lot of town meetings. (See Figure VII-A, Plot 3.)

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[25] Since the average number of attenders at a town meeting was close to 100, the raw number of speakers and the percent who speak is about the same. Coincidently, Rosner reported that attendance at the assembly in a Kibbutz was also about 100. But in a sample of people who attended these assemblies only 44 percent of these said "they usually do not speak." In a Vermont town meeting we know that 56 percent of the attenders do not speak. Menachem Rosner, *Participatory Political and Organizational Democracy and the Experience of the Israeli Kibbutz* (Haifa: The University of Haifa, 1981): 12.

[26]To make this determination, I regressed speakers on the log of attendance, which straightened the curve appropriately for a linear model.

Seeded in this data is an obvious directive: translate actual participation into relative participation; that is, the number speaking out at least once as a percentage of the total attendance at the meeting. Thus in the town meetings of Victory and Northfield the actual number of participators was about even. But Victory notched 42 percent of those attending as actual participators, while in Northfield only six percent of the attenders participated. Using the highest number of people at town meeting counted in any of the individual counts of attendance taken during the meeting as the denominator and the total number of people speaking at least once as the numerator the average participation percentage for the 1389 meetings in the sample was 37.

The distribution of this participation in town meeting relative to the size of the meeting itself also conformed closely to the expectations of a normal distribution, although several meetings where more than 80 percent of the attenders spoke at least once produced some positive skewness in the data. When arranged along a continuum, the percentage point intervals ranged from seven percent of the attenders participating to 100 percent (in the Victory meeting of 1990) when 100 percent participated. The largest group of meetings (276 meetings) was found in the seven-percentage point interval between 29 and 36 percent. These meetings averaged 33 percent participation. Two hundred and nine town meetings were in the cohort that averaged 26 percent of the attenders speaking at least once and 249 were in the cohort averaging 39 percent. Moving away another cohort in both directions, the next lowest cohort (averaging 19 percent attendance) had 148 meetings and the next highest (averaging 46 percent of the attenders speaking) had 165 meetings. (See Figure VII-B, Plot 1.)

[FIGURE VII-B ABOUT HERE]

Are there town meetings where almost "everybody has their say"? Yes, but they are precious few. Is it true that there are town meetings where those who speak out represent only a small fraction of those in attendance? Yes, but they too are limited in number. The average amount of participation, 37 speakers for every 100 in attendance, is substantial and rises to almost 45 percent if attendance is recorded as the *average* of several counts rather than the single highest one (see above). Still, a majority of the attenders speak in only 23 out of 100 meetings. A final point: in none of the 1393 town meetings in the analysis did a majority of a town's registered voters speak at town meeting. The tiny Kingdom town of Victory came closest in 1990 with 46 percent of the town's registered voters speaking.

Fig 7 B

HOW MUCH TALK IS THERE?

Simple numbers and percentages of people who speak do little more than prepare the canvas for a picture of talk democracy. The true colors are in the details. For instance, the great majority of people who speak at all at town meeting will do so more than once.[27] Thus while the number of participat*ors* at the average town meeting is 44 the number of participat*ions* is 173. It ranges from the 21 recorded in the 1977 meeting in the ski town of Warren to the 539 participations recorded at the meeting in the very same town 11 years later in 1988. The meeting in the upscale college town of Norwich (directly across the Connecticut River from New Hampshire's Dartmouth College) produced only 29 participations in 1982 as did the meeting in the more blue-collar town of Fair Haven across the state on the New York border a year later. Other upside levels of participation were recorded in the 1984 meeting in the Kingdom town of Irasburg (418 individual acts of participation) and in the 1987 meeting of the rugged northern hill town of Bakersfield on the west flank of the Green Mountains in Fairfax County (440 participations).

WITNESS

Standing Tall for Tooth Decay

Things were going smoothly at the Starksboro Town Meeting.

Too smoothly.

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[27] At the 1999 town meeting in Plymouth, Vermont, John Wheeler stood to receive a plaque from the town for 28 years of service as town moderator. His advice to the 61 people in attendance (34 men and 27 women): "Stand up to be seen. Speak up to be heard. Sit down to be appreciated." David Grover, Betsy Kreimer and Prasoeur Prum, "The 1999 Comparative Town Meeting Study: Town of Plymouth," (Burlington, Vermont: The University of Vermont, the Real Democracy Data Base, March 1999).

> One after another the usual list of "Warning" items requesting small amounts of money to fund human services in the region were being approved. Five hundred dollars for a Home Health Agency. One hundred fifty dollars for the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) of Addison County. Six hundred dollars for the Champlain Valley Mental Health Agency. And so on.
>
> I was voting "aye" along with everyone else when it struck me. If this keeps up, we'll be out of here by noon. Where was the debate, the skepticism Vermonters are known for?
>
> What was needed was a little strategic cussedness.
>
> "NAY," I gruffed loudly on the next items, a call for $350 to help support a much needed rural dental clinic. Several others must too have sensed the danger of creeping benevolence and they also voted no. The "yea" forces, lulled by success, had managed only a perfunctory murmur and the moderator called for a standing count.
>
> Oh m'god.
>
> Dilemma: should I retreat into cowardly silence and stare at the floor—or rise grandly for tooth decay?
>
> OH M'GOD!
>
> "All those in favor please stand," intoned the moderator. Melissa's eyes grinned their most cruel, "Now, what are you going to do?" as she rose (along with nearly everyone else in the hall—about 175 people) to vote in the affirmative.
>
> As the count began, my mind searched for salvation like the condemned at death's hour. There is safety in numbers! The moderator would see that the ayes clearly had it. Why waste time counting the nays? I wanted to yell triumphantly, "Stop the count! Stop the count! The ayes have it."
>
> "All those opposed?" said the moderator. Standing proudly before my fellow townspeople in the cause of plaque, cavities and tooth aches among the young I looked around me and gained a new appreciation for two words: "minority" and "chagrined." I had also confirmed in one fell swoop the very worst suspicions of my friends and neighbors: "Good Lord, he *is* to the right of Genghis Khan."[28]

The distribution of the towns on the total participations variable is laid out in the histogram in Figure VII-B Plot 2. The tail caused by skewness on the upper end of the scale is somewhat more pronounced than it was for total participators. About one half of the meetings

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[28] Frank Bryan, "Town Meeting Debate," *Vermont Life* (Spring 1986): 36-39.

fall in the three cohorts averaging 120, 151, and 182 participations. It takes nine cohorts to distribute the rest of the 445 meetings that complete the upper end of the distribution.

It is no surprise that the total acts of participation increases as the total number of individuals who participate at all increases. As Plot 1 of Figure VII-C shows, participations increase at a rate of about three and one-half to four participations for every additional participator. The participation to participator ratio in the average meeting is 3.91. The range of deviation from the relationship between the number speaking at all and the total number of participations grows as the number of speakers increased, but then seems to level off a bit as the number of participations goes past 75.

Plot 2 of Figure VII-C provides a better look at this relationship in individual cases. Located in the lower left hand corner were a group of quiet meetings held in a cluster of towns (Benson, Danby, Ira, Proctor, and Wells) in the western half of Rutland County. In the 1992 meeting in Proctor, 18 people shared only 44 participations. In Danby in 1980[29] only 13 people participated a total of 66 times. As participation increases the pattern dissipates. Lowell and Troy up north in the Kingdom, Athens in the southeast, and Ripton and Bradford in the center of Vermont (west and east) defy generalization. Aside from the fact that Burke, Warren and Waitsfield are all ski towns similarities are rare in the group of towns with the most talkative meetings as well. Plainfield is a mix of counter-culturalists and locals. Highgate is a farming town with a French Canadian ambiance on Vermont's northern border with Canada. Westford has a mix of woodchucks and professionals who work in Burlington. Plot 2 identifies places

[29] In Danby, Dorset Mountain has produced some of the finest marble the world has ever seen. It was cut out of the mountain by the Proctor Marble Company.

where meetings had more talk than the number of speakers predicted, Bakersfield, Huntington, and Belvidere for instance, and those where there was less, Underhill, Thetford, and Topsham.

[FIGURE VII-C ABOUT HERE]

Another general way to take stock of the number of participations that provides hints as to the participatory character of direct democracy is to directly consider the number of participations that were counted per participator. While participations per participator says nothing about the distribution of the average meeting's participation (173 participations had by 44 participators), it does tell us something about the amount of talk at a town meeting in relation to the number of people who talk at all. Figure VII-C Plot 3 displays the distribution of the

Fig 7 C

participations per participator statistic in the data base of 1389 meetings. This variable behaves similarly to the previous two; a decent normal distribution slightly marred by skewness on the upper end.

How is the participations per participator variable related to the number of participators? One might guess, for instance, that the increase in the number of participations would level off as the number of participators increased and time limitations and constraints on attention spans became more pronounced with each additional speaker. In other words would we expect a meeting that had 80 speakers to have the same number of participations per speaker as a town meeting with 20 speakers? Given the time constraints that bear on any town meeting, would it not be reasonable to assume that (at least after a certain point) as the total number of speakers increased the participations per speaker would begin to decrease?

One way to answer this is to simply correlate the number of participators with the participations per participator statistic in anticipation of a negative association. A first glance at such an exercise denies the expectation. The "r" is nearly non-existent, -.01, and the linear regression slope (-.00084) predicts that towns with 20 participators would have 3.96 participations per participator while towns with 100 participators would have 3.89. But a placement (Figure VII-D Plot 1) of the meetings on a scatterplot that matches the number of people actually speaking with the participations per participator reveals an important factor hidden by the overall statistical pattern. At meetings where the number of participators is high the upper limit of the *range* of participations per participator tends to slope downward. This would not be surprising (since there are less cases at the higher end of the distribution) except that the lower limits do not trend upward. It is unlikely that meetings with a large number of

participators have participation per participator ratios that are as high as those meetings where few people participate. Beyond that, however, the picture of participators in Figure VII-D, Plot 1 indicates that there is no clear trend for talk to fill up the meeting space allotted to it. While there are some cases where a few people participated a lot, there are also many cases where the few people who did participate did so very little.

[FIGURE VII-D ABOUT HERE]

Perhaps a better way to judge the notion that the inclination to speak more than once is governed by the expectation that others need time to speak is to match the participation per participator ratio with the total number of attenders rather than the total number of participators. After all everyone in attendance is at least a potential participator and attendance is more constant than participation. In the latter case one has no basis--aside from memory of past years--to ask the question: "Should I speak again now, given the large number who may want to speak?" until enough time has elapsed to allow for a large amount of participation to in fact take place.[30]

Plot 2 of Figure VII-D shows the relationship between the number of attenders and the participator/participation ratio. There is a clear curved decline in the participator to participation ratio as attendance grows. For the most part the relationship exists not because those meetings with lower attendance levels have consistently higher ratios of participations to participators but because those meetings with stronger attendance do not. Put another way, the 71 meetings with, on average, more than 200 persons in attendance at any point during the meeting had 2-9

participations per participator. The 590 with less than 100 averaged 4.6 participations per participator. This pattern is verified for all the cases in the scatterplot by regression analysis.

[30] Some moderators often try to distribute the talk of town meeting, sometimes ignoring a familiar hand as they look to see if someone new wishes to speak. Some moderators even ask the attenders not to speak more than once on an issue until others have had a chance.

Fig 7 D

When a log fit of the attendance variable is applied to the scatterplot to replace the linear model, the percent of variance explained increases from 17 to 23. A cubed curve of the data (displayed in Plots 2 and 3 in Figure VII-D) jacks the R^2 up to 25.

Plot 3 reduces the number of meetings displayed to 200 and allows us to identify some of the towns that held the meetings. Smaller towns, because they produce lower absolute attendance are apt to have higher participations per attender. Belvidere, St. George, Stannard and Hubbardton are examples. But other small towns have lower per attender ratios than their smaller meetings would predict. Many have less participation per attender than some of the bigger meetings. Topsham and Morgan with almost 100 attenders present had less than two participations for each of the 100 present, while Richmond, Northfield, and Williamstown had more participations than expected relative to the size of their meetings and even more participations for each of their attenders, over 2.5 for each of their more than 300 attenders. The message seems clear. It is unlikely that the ratios of participation per attender will go over 4-1 in large meetings of more than 200 people. But in very small meetings, it happens often. Small meetings don't guarantee high participation. They allow it.

HOW LONG DOES THE TALK LAST?

The average town meeting takes the better part of four hours (three hours and 48 minutes) of actual deliberative time. It lasts long enough to give each of its attenders two minutes and fourteen seconds of time. Since many fewer speak than attend, of course, the average time

available for each speaker is close to five minutes (four minutes and 48 seconds).[31] Conversely, since there are about four times as many participations as there are participators, the average town meeting allows for only one minute and 21 seconds for each act of participation. Histograms charting these distributions are in Figure VII-E.

[FIGURE VII-E ABOUT HERE]

Rates of Talk

It stands to reason that in general town meetings that last longer will have more participators and more participations. Beginning with a baseline of about twenty speakers, the average town meeting adds speakers at the rate of about six new speakers for every additional hour the meeting lasts. About 40 percent of the variance in the total number of speakers at the meeting is explained by the number of minutes it lasts. (See Plot 1 of Figure VII-F.) The talk at town meeting is a bit less predictable. Meeting length explains slightly less of the variance in the total number of participations that occur in the meeting (35 percent). For every additional hour of time the meeting lasts the number of participations increases by about 18. (See Plot 2 of Figure VII-F.)

[FIGURE VII-F ABOUT HERE]

It is also a reasonable assumption that there is a core number of people at every meeting who are disposed to participate and as the meeting progresses and this number is reached increases in the length of the meeting do not produce additional new participators at the same

[31]This statistic is exaggerated to the extent that some towns do not have discussion while voting by ballot is taking place. Others have visits from state legislators who give a short speech that takes up additional time.

rate. It is also the case that the longer the meeting lasts, the more apt people are to leave and this will reduce the number who might participate. A leveling of the curve representing the relationship between length of the meeting in minutes and the aggregate number of attenders who participate would, therefore, be expected. In effect this does seem to happen. At about the three-

Fig 7 E

Fig 7 F

hour mark (180 minutes) the slope of the line does seem to change. Before this time, 30-minute increments of time are associated with about four new participators.[32] A similar effect seems to be present in the total number of participations. Here an increase of 30 minutes of meeting time is linked to an additional 20 participations in meetings of four hours or less. In meetings of over four hours a half an hour increase in time is associated with only 11.5 additional participations. When the two variables are joined (participa*tions* and participa*tors*) the length of the meeting explains 47 percent of the variance in the combination.[33] (See Plot 3 of Figure VII-F.)

The "Hubbub" Factor

One of the questions that is important for the notion of deliberative democracy is the rate of participation. We already know that on average each participation lasts about 1.3 minutes. This is not, of course, a fair average. As we shall see in Volume II of this book, participation is often typified by a high incidence of very short participations and a much smaller number of significantly longer participations. But at the aggregate level it does give us a relative measure of the relationship between time and talk from one meeting to the next. Clearly the atmosphere of participation was different in the town meeting at Norwich in 1982 when 29 participations were spread out over 132 minutes (the minutes per participation score was 4.55) or Derby's meeting in 1978 when it took 200 minutes to complete 41 participations (for a rate of one

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[32]As in all instances where aggregate data are used assigning causality is a tricky business. I will be able to say more about the actual sequence of participation when I consult the sample of 400 town meetings, which were selected for issue-by-issue analysis in Volume II.

[33]I combined the variables by standardizing both, combining them and standardizing the result. Although there is a bend in the data the logged expression of time increases the amount of variance explained by only one percentage point.

participation every four minutes and 52 seconds) than it was in Waltham's 1988 meeting when there was a different participation every 22 seconds or Goshen in 1990 when 287 discrete acts of participation took place in 156 minutes for a participation rate of about two per minute.

On this matter the myth that surrounds town meeting democracy is bifurcated. One view holds that town meetings are staid political institutions where wise citizens rise to address their fellow townspeople in measured tones reminiscent of Puritan theologues or Roman senators. The other is that direct democracy town meeting style is a hubbub of give and take where swamp Yankees and populist rowdies sass each other above the plaintive admonishments of mostly ineffective town moderators. Indeed it is a distaste (even fear) of the verbal "mob" that has permeated American thinking about real democracy ever since the founders scrambled to preclude its existence in the new republic they created at the end of the 18th Century. To what extent are these fears justified in town meeting? In order to measure the question of "din" we need to incorporate the total number of participators with the total number of participations and the time it takes to make them.

Consider for instance the paired town meetings held in Dorset in 1970 and Richmond in 1977. Both lasted exactly 97 minutes and in this time both had 109 separate acts of participation. But in Dorset these participations were conducted by 30 different people and in Richmond they were conducted by 53 people. The meetings in Pittsfield in 1989 and Belvidere in 1986 both featured participation rates of one per minute--207 participations in 207 minutes. But in Pittsfield over twice as many people (46 as compared to 22) squeezed themselves into the discussion. 1.6 minutes per participation was the talk rate in both Eden in 1980 and Huntington

in 1984 and these town meetings both lasted four hours and 46 minutes. But in Eden only 32 people spoke and in Huntington it was double that number, 65.

In order to better compare meetings on the basis of whether or not it was a "hubbub" of conversation or a more sedate discussion involving fewer people who spoke fewer times for longer periods I simply grafted a standardized time variable onto a measure of participation which combined standardized participation and participator scores. This three variable indicator weights large amounts of talk and large numbers of talkers equally with shorter periods of meeting time as it gauges the amount of "hubbub" from one town meeting to the next.[34] It ranges from 0 to 1. (See Plot 1 of Figure VII G.)

[FIGURE VII-G ABOUT HERE]

Of the 1389 meetings studied between 1970 and 1998 the ski town of Warren led in "hubbub" at its 1987 meeting. There, 78 people spoke 430 times in 3½ hours. In fact Warren had three of the top four hubbub scores even though it contributed only 11 meetings to the sample. Rochester, a bigger town down the road a ways from Warren on Vermont's historic "Route 100" was also high. In 1995, the meeting had 194 participations in 246 minutes by 95 people (the standardized hubbub score was .83). Others were Fletcher in 1983 (72 participators speaking 245 times in 173 minutes (standardized score = .88), and my home town of Newbury

[34] Bear in mind we are engaged in description here not causal analysis. If the number of people who speak is a baseline component of the "din" variable, we know that small towns will by definition have less of it because they send smaller totals to town meeting. We have already seen that more attendance means more speakers and more speakers means more talk. In short we are not (at this moment) in the business of "crediting" some meetings over others. We simply want to describe the parameters of a condition.

which earned a standardized hubbub score of .83 in the meeting of 1982 when 55 people spoke 245 times in a bit over two hours. The lowest din indicator (.00) was for the town meeting in Berlin in 1983. There 26 people spoke 93 times and it took them 367 minutes to do so. In a marathon meeting in the Kingdom town of Brighton in 1978, 253 participations by 59 different individuals were spread over an eight and one-half hour meeting. The standardized hubbub score was .05.[35] Average meetings on din were those like Roxbury in 1992 (286 participations by 50 people in 284 minutes), Tunbridge—home of Vermont's most famous country fair—in 1984 (232

[35]Brighton is a wild town of bog and mapled hillside where lovers of moose annually confront shooters of moose on the streets of town. A bygone railway center, the old buildings still carry the smudge and soot of the great engines that long ago make their lonely way through the frosted nights of northern New England. In the 1960's it became a haven for counter-culturalists of both left and right--thus carrying on a tradition that still pulses deep in the sinews of Vermont. It is also a place of happenings like the shootout of 1985. A couple was making out in the cab of their pick up in front of the general store when another pickup careened to a stop beside them in a screeching power skid. In it was the woman's husband. He grabbed his twelve gauge off the rack in the back window and came out shooting. Buck shot on full choke. The lovers were badly wounded but the man managed to run into the store, grab a shotgun from behind the counter, stumble out the front door and blast away from the porch. When it was over two lay wounded and one lay dead. The husband.

Fig 7 G

participations by 46 people in 245 minutes) and Alburg in 1971 (52 participations by 22 people in 90 minutes).

Since we know that longer meetings have more participators and more participations and that the hubbub statistic credits both these factors positively, the relationship between the length of the meeting and the hubbub score will be negative only if the length of time of the meeting (which pulls the hubbub score down) overcomes the positive influence of participations and participators. Longer meetings might well have higher hubbub scores since one half of the size of these scores relies on the total of the numbers of speakers and the amount of talk that they produce during the meeting. Both of these factors increase as time passes. But the other half of the score relies on the amount of time that passes--the more time the lower the score. Plot 2 of Figure VII-G shows that the amount of participation does not keep up with the length of the meeting and the result is that although longer meetings have more participation it is relatively more spread out over time. The regression equation between time and hubbub shows that the standardized hubbub score declines by .10 for every two hours of expanded meeting time. Increase in meeting time explains about 33 percent of the variance in hubbub. Thus the quieter meetings are more long running by definition.

THE EQUALITY OF PARTICIPATION

Central to any definition of democracy is equality of participation among citizens. Descriptive statistics used so far jump start our understanding of the fairness of verbal participation in town meeting. They show that 44 percent[36] of those in attendance will speak at

[36]Thirty-seven percent when the highest number in attendance was used instead of the average number.

least once, there is enough time available at town meeting to allow everyone present about two minutes of talking time and there is enough talk going on to mean that if participations were shared equally each person present would get about two. We also know that in actuality each of the people who did speak spoke on average 3.9 times.

The problem with all these measures is that they are capable of camouflaging inequality in the distribution of participation. The participations per attender measure does not distinguish a meeting where a lot of participations were made by a few people from the meeting where the same number of participations were made by many more. Participations per participator on the other hand says nothing about the distribution of the participation within the group that participates. What is needed is a statistic that can distinguish meetings on the extent to which participations were spread out among all of those present at the meeting.

The percent of attenders who participate accomplishes part of this task. On this measure for instance Whiting (1983) and Danville (1980) had equal participation rates of 25 percent, 15 participators out of 60 attenders for Whiting and 64 of 252 for Danville. Bear in mind that both the participations per participator and participations per attender ratios place Whiting "ahead" of Danville. Whiting's 15 participators participated 77 times for a rate of 5.1 times per participator and 1.28 times per attender. Danville's 64 participators participated only 157 times for a rate of 2.4 per participator and .62 per attender.

But at the extreme it could be the case that 14 of the 15 participators in Whiting participated but once and the other one participated 63 times while in Danville 29 different participators spoke three times and the other 35 spoke twice. Looked at this way the percent of the attenders who spoke more than once in Whiting would be two and the percent that spoke

more than once in Danville would be 25. Or consider this. Under the assumptions of this worst case scenario, in Danville the bottom half of the participators (the 50 percent of the participators that had the fewest number of participations) accounted for 41 percent of all the participations. But in Whiting the 50 percent having the fewest participations had only 10 percent of the participations. This would also mean that in Whiting the 90 percent of the *attenders* who had the fewest participations would have only 12 percent of them while in Danville had this hypothetical situation been true the bottom 90 percent of the attenders on participations would have 52 percent of all the participations.

Obviously a meaningful picture of the equality of participation at town meeting requires a measure sensitive to both the percent of those in attendance who speak at all and the degree to which some individuals dominate the discussion within the participating group. There are several ways to measure the distribution of a value across a series of observations. I have chosen what statisticians call the "Gini" coefficient of inequality because it is the most intuitively pleasing of the lot. The logic behind the Gini coefficient is often used by economists (and politicians) for describing the distribution of wealth (or income) within the population as in: "The wealthiest ten percent of the population earned 30 percent of the income last year while the poorest ten percent earned only one percent of the income." The Gini index itself is a summation of this logic for a series (and inclusive) set of cohorts across an array of cases. It ranges from 0 to 1.0.

Here we need to know the proportion of the participations (values) issued by percentage cohorts of those in attendance at town meeting (the population). First the attenders are ranked according to the number of times each of them participated. This list is then divided into tenths

so that the ten percent of the attenders with the smallest number of participations (always zero participations in town meeting) is at the bottom and the ten percent of the attenders with the most is at the top. Then the percent of the total participations accounted for by each of these ten-percent cohorts of the attendance is figured. The horizontal axis of a bivariate graph is divided into tenths representing ascending decennials of the attenders. The percent of the participations credited to each decennial of attenders is then plotted on the vertical axis.

If perfect equality existed each 10 percent cohort of attenders would have ten percent of the participations producing a linear diagonal upward across the graph. To the extent that perfect equality does not exist a gap appears between the line of perfect equality (the diagonal) and the line connecting the points representing the actual situation. The total area between the diagonal of perfect equality and the line of actual distribution is the area of inequality. The proportion of the total area under the diagonal line that the area of inequality represents thus becomes a handy measure of inequality. Conversely, one minus this proportion represents the area of equality and can be thought of as the percent of total participatory equality a town meeting achieves.[37]

I applied this technique to 1376 town meetings between 1970 and 1998. Only ten had Ginis over 50 percent. Figure VII-H displays the distribution of the Gini index for all the meetings. It clearly demonstrates the real democracy practiced in town meetings is far from "pure" if purity means egalitarianism in the public talk of politics. In 60 percent of the meetings

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[37]The Gini index, of course, is strongly related to other measures we have been using, namely the percent of the total attenders who participate and the number of participations per attender. It explains 83 percent of the variance in the former 49 percent in the latter. It explains 74 percent in the standardized participation variable I created that credits each meeting equally for its score on both participations and participators. (The "r" is .86.)

(829) the distribution of the participations was not wide spread enough to elevate the Gini equality score above the 25 percent mark. The average Gini index for the entire sample of meetings was in fact only 24. If it is a goal of direct democracy to push the curtains of inequality completely aside, town meeting gets only a quarter of the way there.

[FIGURE VII-H ABOUT HERE]

fig 7 H here

This disproportionate participation is better visualized by a comparison of the four plotted examples of the Gini index in Figure VII-I. The shaded area under the diagonals represents the degree to which the meetings have met the expectations of a perfectly egalitarian system. The best performance turned in occurred in the town of Panton in 1982. It was there in 1777 that Benedict Arnold built a little fleet out of green timber on the shores of Lake Champlain and put forth against the British in one of the American navy's first battles. Two centuries and five years later the average attendance at Panton's town meeting was 47. The number of participators was also 47.[38] One woman (an officer of the town) spoke 12 times, two people spoke 9 times each, four seven times, four six times, four five times, two four times, four three and seven two. Each of the remaining 19 people spoke only once. This total of 155 participations thus spread out over the 47 citizens in attendance produced a Gini index of .58. I did a similar analysis for 1376 other town meetings. It didn't get any better than that.

[FIGURE VII-I ABOUT HERE]

On the other extreme were town meetings like that of Shelburne in 1979 in which there were not enough participants to require more than a single ten percent cohort of attenders to contain them. There were 348 present at this particular meeting in Shelburne and only 35 of them spoke.[39] Thus all the participators fell in the last cluster, which covered only ten percent of the area under the diagonal. Seven other town meetings scored the same as Shelburne.

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[38]I used the average attendance in calculating the Gini Index because it is a better indicator of the number of people at town meeting at any given time during the meeting. The highest attendance recorded is a better measure of how many people came to town meeting but is less salient when the intent is to judge the distribution of the participations over the body of attenders as a whole.

[39]Since I built the Gini coefficients by breaking down participations into ten percentage point cohorts the index can go no lower than .10. This happens because in cases like Shelburne where less than ten percent of the attenders

The average situation is found in meetings in the towns of Starksboro and Waterford. Both had Gini indexes of 24. I have lived in Starksboro since 1972. It is a foothill town that lays at the juncture of the Green Mountains and the Lake Champlain basin. In 1997, 53 of the 122 attenders produced a total of 188 individual participations. This created a Gini of 24. Far to the

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speak at least once all the participators are in the last ten percentage point cohort so that at least ten percent of the area under the diagonal must be covered.

Fig 7 I here

east on a huge bend in the Connecticut River the town of Waterford (the only town in Vermont that looks southward across the river into New Hampshire) also had a Gini score of 24 at their town meeting in 1987. There 33 of the 87 attenders participated 120 times. These visual examples of participation equality at town meeting emphasize the degree to which direct democracy strays from the ideal.

Almost 90 percent of the variance in the Gini index is explained by the percent of the attenders who participated at least once. (See Plot 1 of Figure VII-J) Yet there are meetings in which the Gini is substantially higher than it "ought" to be given the participation percentage and there are those towns where it is lower. In other words there are those towns in which the participations are more spread out among the attenders than would be predicted by the simple percent of the attenders who participated at least once and there are those towns in which the participations are less well distributed.

[FIGURE VII-J ABOUT HERE]

What we need is a microscope to check out these possibilities more closely. Generating a scatterplot featuring the same variables for the two-year sample of 81 meetings (the meetings of 1989 and 1990) does the trick. These years were selected because the relationship between percent participating and the Gini index of this two-year group of meetings closely resembles the overall sample. (See Plot 2 of Figure VII-J.) The microscope can be focused still more closely by considering the two meetings of Roxbury (1990) and Mendon (1990). Were we to use the percent of the total attenders that spoke as our primary measure of participation distribution we would score these two meetings about the same, 61.0 percent for Mendon and 59.5 percent for Roxbury. But Mendon scores seven points higher on the Gini index than it ought to given its

Fig 7 J

participation percentage and Roxbury scores six points lower than it ought to. Thus the difference between the meetings in Roxbury and Mendon on the Gini index of participation equality is 13, not a small matter when one considers the fact that the entire range of the Gini is about 40 points.

Moreover when we compare Mendon and Roxbury on the participation per attender statistic Roxbury comes out much better than Mendon. (See the X-axis of Plot 3 of Figure VII-J.) In Roxbury there were 240 actual participations and an average attendance of 69 (3.58 per attender) and in Mendon there were only 168 participations for 88 attenders (1.9 per attender). There is also theoretical reason to suspect that as the number of participations that occur in a town meeting in relation to the number of people at town meeting increases the distribution of that participation will become more spread out. This is in fact the case. As Plot 3 of Figure VII-J indicates, participations per attender explains about 60 percent of the variance in the Gini index of participation equality. Mendon once more far exceeds its expectations based on this variable and Roxbury falls short. In short towns with higher ratios of participations to attenders have more egalitarian participation.

But, once more there is variation. Consider again Roxbury and Mendon. According to the general case expectation generated by the lines of best fit between participations per attender and the Gini index, Roxbury, with 3.58 participations per attender should have a Gini index of 30. But it does not. The Gini for Roxbury is only 24, six points below the prediction. On the other hand the Gini for Mendon, where the participations to attender ratio was only 1.9, should have been only 26 according to the equation. But it was 12 points higher at 38. In short Mendon had far more equality of participation than Roxbury given the prediction based on participation

per attender. Were we to use the participations per attender ratio only as a measure our view of the relative merits of democratic participation would be far different than if we use the Gini index.

Whether we compare it to either the percent of attenders participating or the participations per attender ratio the Gini index ranks Mendon substantially higher than Roxbury. While the percent of attenders participating ranked them even and the number of partipations per attender actually had Roxbury ahead. The reason for this is found in the participation profile for these two meetings. In Roxbury 45 of the participations were used up by one individual. Two others had 23 participations each and two more had 17 each. Five citizens had over 50 percent of the participations. In Mendon the highest participator had only 13. Another had 11 but all the rest were under 10. The top five had only 24 percent of the total. In short because the Gini is related both to the percent of the attenders who speak at least once and the total number of participations that take place in relation to the number of attenders and adds a third dimension—the distribution of the participations among the attenders—it is our best indicator of how democratic participation in town meetings really is.

VARIATIONS OVER TIME

The nature of public talk has changed dramatically since I began this study in 1969. The street talk and communal expression of the 1960's, fashioned in the rough by people only a bit younger than me, is gone, replaced by electronic techno-talk, organized and merchandized for mass, rather than human scale audiences. Nevertheless, the legitimacy of public talk has accelerated over the last quarter century. Many of us question the sincerity of its sources, the

legitimacy of its application and its value to democray, whether it takes the form of conservative talk radio, liberal focus groups or instant political polls by the national media. But there it is, and clearly one would expect it to have an impact on real talk democracy in town meeting.

During the last three decades of our national life the term "town meeting" has for the first time been nationalized. And bastardized. It has become the description of choice for structured, mass communication. What matters here is that the meaning of town meeting has been established in the national consciousness as talk, not governance. It symbolizes advice not decision, discussion rather than action. Ridicule follows the tracks of small things massified and definitions universalized. I saw it coming and warned of it years ago to no avail.[40] In any event Vermonters are aware of and probably influenced by the new national consensus on the value of public talk. At a minimum one would expect it to do no less than reinforce what has been a deep rooted tradition even in an a state in which tight-lipped Yankees are not hard to find.

What then has been the fate of "talk democracy" over the last quarter century? Have the absolute numbers with which talk democracy is measured gone up or down? That is, are there more or less people who show up at town meeting and actually say something? Is there a trend in the actual number of acts of participation? Is participation measured in terms relative to the number in attendance the same as it was in the early 1970's? In short has the percentage of those in attendance who speak out remained stable? Finally and perhaps most importantly what has happened to the equality of distribution of participation? Has the Gini index varied over time and if so how?

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[40] See my extended discussion in Chapter II.

In raw numbers the fate of talk democracy did not suffer between the years of 1970 and 1998. There is an ever so slight increase in the number of people speaking at town meeting. The number of participations rose slowly through the 1980's but fell off in the 1990's after a 15-year high reached at the beginning of the decade. (See Plot 1 of Figure VII-K.) In the four years of town meetings studied between 1970 and 1973, 41 persons spoke at the average town meeting. Between 1983 and 1986 an average of 43 persons spoke. Between 1995 and 1998 it was the same. In the earlier meetings 176 individual participations were heard on average. In the middle four this number dropped to 165 and in the final four to 160.

[FIGURE VII-K ABOUT HERE]

But relative to the number of people in attendance participation has been inching upward. In the beginning 35 percent of those in attendance spoke at least once. By the final four years of the study (1995-98) it was 46 percent. A linear predictive model based on nearly three decades of evidence shows that participation is increasing at a rate of about one percentage point every three years. The Gini index of participation equality (which we know to be strongly associated with the percent actually speaking) also rose over the life of the study--from an average of 21 in the four sets of meetings (148 in all) studied between 1970 and 1973 to 26 in the 214 meetings analyzed between 1995 and 1998. The Gini index has been increasing at a rate of one point every five years. (See Figure VII-K Plot 2.) Talk democracy seems to have held its own over the 28 years of the study.

SIZE MATTERS (AGAIN)

Considering the impact of the passage of time on participation in town meeting brings us face to face with an important concept. As time has passed, the size of the towns has changed

and this affects the size of the meetings. What role does the size of the meeting (in absolute numbers) have on the nature of participation?[41]

Fig 7 k

[41] Rosner found meeting size to be related to rates of verbal participation in the Israeli Kibbutz. Rosner, *Participatory Political and Organizational Democracy*, 12.

In 1980 in the jagged little town of Bakersfield in the northwest corner of Vermont 99 people came out to town meeting. The meeting started at 10:16 a.m. When it adjourned at 3:22 p.m. 48 percent of the attenders had participated in the 245 minutes the meeting had been in session. The same year over the mountains to the east and a bit more to the south in the town of Groton, only 27 percent of the attenders participated in almost exactly the same time (243 minutes). Both towns are about the same size (between 400 and 500 registered voters) and both held their meetings during the day. But Groton, which had 44 percent lower participation than Bakersfield, had 36 percent better attendance.

Or consider North Hero and Coventry when they convened their meetings about a decade later in 1991. Again, they are towns of approximately the same size that met during the day for about the same length of time. In North Hero (named after one of Vermont's two most famous brothers, Ethan and Ira Allen) 25 percent of the registered voters turned out for town meeting. In the Northeast Kingdom town of Coventry only 16 percent went to town meeting. But in Coventry 63 percent of those in attendance participated at least once and in North Hero only 30 percent participated.

In both of these examples the towns with the smallest number of people in attendance had the largest percentage participating. This negative relationship between the number of people at town meeting and the spread of the participation over the meeting appears constantly over the years and across the sample of towns. What it means, of course, is that turning out attendance *at* town meeting does not translate into an equal increase in participation *in* town meeting. This observation makes a lot of sense and is no more sophisticated than the notation that a student's

likelihood to be a participant is greater in small seminars than in large classes[42] or that large groups in general tend to increase public speaking anxiety and aversion.[43] In short, town meetings with only 50 people in attendance "ought" to have a larger percentage of those participating than a meeting with 200 present. Would it be fair to judge (or "score") a town meeting's participation without taking size into account?[44]

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[42] Actually there is a substantial literature on class size and student behavior. Unfortunately most of this is related (as one might guess) to performance not verbal participation as an independent construct. See the treatment of this point in: Glen E. Robinson and James H. Wittebols, *Class Size Research: A Related Cluster Analysis for Decision-Making*, (Arlington, Virginia: Educational Research Series, Inc., 19??). Also there are many kinds of participation. One study, for instance, found no relationship between class size and participation in "class-run tasks." Stan M. Shapson, Edgar W. White, Gary Eason and John Fitzgerald, "An Experimental Study of the Effect of Class Size," *American Education Research Journal* 17 (Spring 1980): 141-152. But beginning as early as 1934 [Helen C. Dawe, "The Influence of the Size of Kindergarten Groups Upon Performance," *Child Development* 5 (1934): 295-303.] there has been continuing evidence that the bigger the class the less verbal participation and the less equally it is spread over the class population. An exception is: James L. Scott, "The Effect of Class Size on Student Verbal Interaction in Five English Classes," (Dissertation, Rutgers University, 1972). For a summary of this scholarship see: L. S. Cohen, N. Filby, G. McCutcheon and D. Kyle, *Class Size and Instruction: A Field of Study*, (New York: Longman, 1983) and G. V. Glass, L. S. Cohen, M. L. Smith and N. N. Filby, *Social Class Size: Research and Policy*, (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1982).

[43] The relationship between the size of the audience and fear of public speaking is not as clear as one might imagine. Michael Beatty, Chairman of the Department of Speech Communications at the University of Missouri and a central figure in the literature of the field argues that while there are clear positive correlations between audience size and fear of speaking, the causal chains are complicated and less clear. They may in fact be curvilinear whereby speaking before a very large group allows a certain disassociation between the speaker and the audience (reducing anxiety) and speaking before a very small group may trigger anxiety based on familiarity and thereby a threat to one's status. Nevertheless in the four fundamental settings for communication (diads, groups, meetings, and public audiences—smallest to largest) fear is most acute in the latter. Michael Beatty, Personal telephone interview, August 31, 2000. The research on size and "fear" of public speaking is further complicated by the ordering of different constructs in the causal sequence says Karen Dwyer, Associate Professor of Communication at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. "Shyness (fear of communication of any kind), reticence (not believing one has the requisite skills to speak) and apprehension (fear generated by either personal trait defenses or situation variables) have not been adequately sorted out in the literature. Karen Dwyer, Personal telephone interview, September 12, 2000.

[44] One of the "improvements" made to town meetings in recent decades is more use of microphones when the number in attendance is large. But they don't seem to help. Since 1996 I have been including microphone use in the data base. In the 216 meetings where data were available 109 used a microphone and 107 did not. The percent of attenders who spoke when microphones were used was 38. It was 53 when they were not. This is a substantial difference. A good deal of it is attributable to meeting size. Bigger meetings have relatively fewer speakers *and* tend to use microphones. Still microphones do add their own influence to nonparticipation. The reason seems obvious enough. Degree of "conspicuousness" has been shown to be associated with fear of public speaking as has degree of "formality" in the speaking situation. Using a microphone (even from one's seat) in a town meeting hall

Let me specify the problem more tightly. The broad outline of talk democracy sketched out earlier (44 participators in a town meeting of 137 attenders in a town of 890 registered voters) is driven in ways that again emphasize the influence of size on direct democracy. Lurking behind the domineering *negative* relationship between town size and the *percent* of registered votes in attendance at town meeting is a weaker (but still strong) *positive* connection between town size and the *number* of registered voters present, $R^2 = .42$. But while increasing numbers in attendance at the meeting pushes the number of speakers upward (just as the number of voters in town pushes the number of attenders at town meeting upward), it does so (as was in the case of the town size-attendance relationship) with less force than it pushes the percent of speakers downward.

Because the increase in the number of people who speak at town meeting does not keep up with the increase in the number of people who attend, the relationship between the number of people at town meeting (its size) and the percent participating is negative—strongly so. (See Figure VII-L.) Like the bond of town size with attendance, the connection between attendance and speaking is also curvilinear. A summary of these relationships is found in Table VII-A. It is essential to understand that size produces a negative return for talk democracy. It is equally critical to know that this return is itself dynamic. Also, it is intriguing to notice that the relationship is almost exactly the same for both attendance *at* town meeting and verbal participation *in* town meeting. The logged number of registered voters in town explains 58

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certainly adds to both. Beatty, "Situational and Predispositional Correlates of Public Speaking Anxiety," 28-39 and A. H. Buss, *Self-Consciousness and Social Anxiety*, (San Francisco, California: W. H. Freeman, 1980).

percent of the variance in the percent of registered voters in attendance and the logged number in attendance explains 57 percent of the percent of attenders who speak.

[FIGURE VII-L AND TABLE VII-A ABOUT HERE]

The curvilinear relationship between talk and the size of the meeting is graphically magnified in Figure VII-M. Here in Plot 1 I drew down on the 100 meetings in the 1983 and 1984 sample which approximates the overall distribution. The linear regression line in Plot 1 clearly does not do justice to the observed pattern. This is especially true for the towns with the fewest people in attendance. Were we to use it to measure the effect of size, for instance, we would be making the claim that the town of Woodford, which, based on the size of the meeting, was predicted to have 60 percent participation, had 18 percentage points of speakers more than it ought to have had, when in fact it doesn't seem to be doing that much better given the fact that all four of the very smallest meetings had very high participation. Under the linear model the town of Belvidere had 28 percentage points more participation than expected (given the size of the meeting) in 1983 and 31 percentage points more in 1984. Yet, given the scores of Woodford and West Haven, Belvidere does not seem to be as far "out of line" as the linear model suggests.

[FIGURE VII-M ABOUT HERE]

On the other end of the distribution the linear regression line predicts that Williamstown would actually have negative attendance (-6 percent, an impossibility) and therefore its actual participation of 13 percent lands it 19 percentage points higher than predicted. Similarly, Georgia and Bradford would be credited with especially high participation under a rigid linear prediction while a visual inspection of the data reveals that their participation levels are not

FIG 7 L and TABLE 7 A

FIG 7 M

as exceptional if a curvilinear expression was used. What is obviously happening is that the negative effect of meeting size on participation is sharp in the beginning but begins to level out at when the meetings reach the 160 attender level.

The curved line in Plot 1 puts the distribution in context by applying a line of best fit to the data that takes its bend into account. Now we find that Woodford, which had only 18 in attendance at its 1984 meeting and was credited by the linear model as being above "average" on participation when the number of people at the meeting is taken into account, is below average when the curvilinear model is used. Belvidere's residuals (the difference between the expected percentage of attenders who spoke and the actual number that spoke) drop from 31 to 17 in 1984 (when there were 33 in attendance) and from 28 to 22 in 1983 (when there were 50 in attendance). In 1984 West Haven dropped from 36 to 27. In 1983 the Athens town meeting had 52 in attendance scoring three percentage points above what was expected under the linear prediction and three percentage points below what was expected under the curvilinear prediction. Meetings with the highest attendance also lost ground when the straight line prediction is changed to a curved line.[45] Williamstown's residual in 1984 was reduced from 19 to 3, Georgia's from 13 to 4, and Jericho's from 8 to -2.[46]

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[45] The estimates were created by plotting the meetings by the log10 of attendance along the "X" axis. This "stretches" out the distance between data points at the left-hand end of the scale and squeezes them in on the right hand end. In effect we have tricked the computer into giving us a curvilinear result while using the linear (least squares) formula by building the "curvilinearity" into the data itself.

[46] Finding comparative data in the literature on group size and participation in other settings is difficult because seldom do the groups vary in size as much as the town meetings I am studying. Also these situations are usually collapsed into ordinal groupings and the "N's" are often very small. One study I found useful indicated that in 12 college classes of from 6-20 students 41 percent of the students participated. In 12 classes of 21-50 students 19 percent participated and in 27 classes of 50+ students seven percent did. In our town meetings participation levels for similar sized groups were much higher. This ought to be the case given the fact they lasted longer and town meetings are *designed* to be more participatory than college classes. But my rough estimates of the curvilinear

Rating meetings on the percentage of attenders who actually spoke, given the total number of people at the meeting and taking into account how this attendance size actually affects participation is far more realistic than using the simple descriptive indication discussed earlier. This same logic must also be applied to the Gini score. Remembering that the Gini index of participation equality is also related to raw attendance ($r = -.61$), it is equally important to adjust the Gini coefficient of participation equality to the number of people in attendance at the meeting. Once again the argument is straightforward: it's easy to have a relatively high egalitarian distribution of participation when the meeting is small and it is difficult to do so when the meeting is large. Although the curvilinear pattern is not as apparent in the relationship between the Gini index and attendance and there is more variation from the prediction (see Plot 2 of Figure VII-M), the log(10) of attendance improves our estimate of the Gini somewhat and will be used to establish a baseline score for participation equality.[47]

By adding the number of participations and their distribution among attenders into the equation the Gini index changes the complexion of the scatterplot in ways that are theoretically helpful. Compared to the rankings generated by the percent of the attenders who "speak out at least once" the Gini index gives Belvidere's 1983 meeting the top participatory score, replacing West Haven. In 1983 Belvidere also exceeds its own score a year earlier. The meetings in both

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decline of participation in the classroom data closely matched the curvilinear decline in the town meeting data. See: Franklin D. Becker, Robert Somer, Joan Bee and Bart Oxley, "College Classroom Ecology," *Sociometry* 36 (December 1973): 514-525. For supportive findings see: R. Barker and P. Gump, *Big School, Small School*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1964).

[47] The percent of the variance explained is improved from 37 to 43.

Woodford and Athens are also considered less participatory in the eyes of Gini. On the low end of the line Georgia and Williamstown's residuals become negative.[48]

In short as we begin to search for the reasons why some meetings are more "talkative" than others it is obvious that we must, as we did in our search for the correlates of attendance itself, first control for size. Earlier the concern was the size of the town. Now it is the size of the meeting.[49] Thus from this point on when meetings are judged for rates of participation it will be by means of a statistical qualifier (the residual when participation is regressed on meeting size) that reads: "given the actual number of people in attendance..."

The actual measure that I will use to compare towns on their amount and distribution of verbal participation among the attenders of a town meeting is (as it was for attendance itself) the

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[48] The Gini index, by measuring to what degree the number of participations are "spread out" equally over the members of a group, comes a bit closer to the issue of group size and maximum participation among members, a problem that drew the attention of sociologists at mid century. Unfortunately, since participation in town meeting is for the most part "moderated" by the town moderator (each interaction with another member of the group almost always travels through the moderator) the construct is quite different. Nevertheless sociologists did provide us with a measure for the number of possible interactions between members of a group (Bossard, 1945) [Interactions = $(N^2 - N)/2$] and the less useful measure of the total number of interactions including relationships between subgroups. (Kephart, 1950) [Interactions = $(3^N - 2^{(N+1)} + 1)/2$]. The more moderate curve produced by Bossard produces a close approximation of a reasonable model of town meeting participation. See: J. J. S. Bossard, "The Law of Family Interaction," *American Journal of Sociology* 50 (January 1945): 292-294; W. M. Kephart, "A Quantitative Analysis of Intergroup Relationships," *American Journal of Sociology* 55 (May 1950): 544-549. As I have noted the difficulty in using group analysis is that nearly all their research is conducted on groups which by definition are too small to approximate town meetings. The magic number seems to be about thirty. After that a group breaks up into a "multicentric entity." It becomes a society. George Simmel, "The Number of Members in Determining the Sociological Form of a Group," *American Journal of Sociology* 8 (1902): 1-46 quoted in J. S. B. Lindsay, "On the Number in a Group," *Human Relations* 25 (February 1972): 47-64..

[49] An interesting explanation for this (beyond the obvious time constraints and the inclination to fear public speaking more as audiences get larger) is that larger gatherings are more apt to *draw* persons with speaking anxiety because they feel less threatened in a larger group. In other words a larger meeting may be large in part because it attracts people who would not attend a smaller public setting. While this has negative implications for attendance in small towns (keeping shy people away) it also means that after the meeting size has been controlled larger meetings may have relatively more people in attendance who have higher speaking apprehension. K. David Roach, "Teaching Assistant Communication Apprehension, Willingness to Communicate and State Communication Anxiety in the Classroom," *Communication Research Reports* 15 (Spring 1998): 130-140.

ratio of what was expected, given size, and what was actually attained. Consider the three meetings listed in Table VII-B. The final position of Bakersfield demonstrates the importance of the ratio. The other two meetings not only have higher absolute levels of participation, 91 and 82 percent as compared to 48 percent, they also have higher participation when one accounts for their size. Bakersfield's residual (7.55) is well below the other two, 12.76 and 15.22. Yet Bakersfield's ratio between what it should have had, given its size, and what it actually attained was equal to the other two. If a meeting's participation level was exactly what it should be given its size, its participation ratio will be 1.0. Each of these three meetings had about 19 percent more participation than expected, given their size.

[TABLE VII-B ABOUT HERE]

We have carefully walked the statistical boundaries of the amount, duration, and equalitarian distribution of the talk of real democracy. The purpose as Frost suggested (seriously I believe, although there is disagreement) was to keep the pine trees separated from the apple trees and mark clearly the outlines of our common exercise. The task now is to see if it is possible to match up the variations in the talk of town meeting that occur from meeting to meeting and from town to town with the kinds of meetings and the kinds of towns in which this discussion takes place. If we can, we may be able to inch a bit further toward a proper understanding of what real democracy looks like and how it works.

TABLE 7 B