

## CHAPTER XI

## THE BEST DEMOCRACY

*Certainly the ancestors of these people were wayward. Rebellion is their birthright. Then there is the land. There is a surprise in every turning of the various landscape of Vermont—a mellow field, a dark woods, a merry lake, a somber gorge, a bold mountain. And so it is with the people. Perhaps the strength of the hills is theirs also.*

—Ralph Nading Hill<sup>1</sup>

It's been a long haul. The parameters of real democracy have been established on four dimensions: attendance, participation, women's equality, and the amount of time spent in deliberation. Variations in these measures and how these variations link up with the kinds of communities that house them were noted. Normative assumptions were straightforward. The classic model of real democracy demands first of all presence. Next there must be talk. Third, real democracy is diminished to the extent that a major cohort of society is absent. In Vermont town meetings inclusion of women is the best indicator of this requirement. Finally comes the amount of time available for deliberation: the more the better.

Here and there along the way an interesting conundrum cropped up; these measures are not associated with each other. The percent of registered voters present tells very little about the distribution of talk. Nor does it predict the ratio of women's participation to men's. Women's participation (presence and talk combined) is related to the overall participatory character of the

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph Nading Hill, *Contrary Country* (New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1950): 292.

meeting. But the simple “r” is only .34, which means that verbal participation in a town meeting explains only 12 percent of the variance in how women fare. These non-associations hold when controls are applied. Thus, for instance, the percent of registered voters in attendance *taking town size into account* is similarly not correlated with the distribution of verbal acts of participation *taking meeting size into account*. These associations are found in Table XI-A.

[TABLE XI-A ABOUT HERE]

We already know, for example, that Newark had the highest attendance of all when 72 percent of its registered voters appeared at the 1974 meeting but the 1988 Thetford meeting was best on attendance when town size was taken into account. On the other hand, Panton’s 1982 meeting was highest on the Gini index of participation equality both on the original measure and when attendance was controlled. Belvidere’s 1980 meeting ranked ninth from the top on women’s participation, but jumps to third when the early date (1980) of the meeting is considered. The citizens of Middlesex spent the most time discussing issues at their meeting in 1972 when they met for eight hours and 42 minutes. When the actual number of people and the equality of the talk distribution were controlled, they dropped only a notch to second. In 1982 Roxbury ranked 18<sup>th</sup> on total minutes but with the amount of people and talk going on their ranking increased to eighth.

Since these measures are not systematically related to one another the door is opened for a ranking of meetings on all four measures in combination. While it is not the case that those meetings with high attendance, for instance, may automatically be presumed to have high participation as well, there are meetings where this does occur. Those that do best on all four measures in combination can be judged, under the normative assumptions that support each

table 11 A

individual measure, to have the most democratic *cultures*. The task is to describe the dimensions of the measure itself and then to consider the settings of those meetings that score high and those that score low. I will call this measure the Best Democracy Index (BDI).

To consider the quality of real democracy from a cultural or holistic perspective, three different variations of the BDI are used. The first applies no controls. Town size does not qualify attendance, meeting size is not factored into participation, when the meeting was held does not condition women's equality and neither attendance nor participation are used to adjust the length of the meeting. Label this ranking the Raw Best Democracy Index (RBDI). The second takes these qualifiers into account. For instance the attendance measure ranks meetings *given* the size of the town in which they were held. Label this ranking the Controlled Best Democracy Index (CBDI). The first measure (RBDI) asks no questions. It says, "This is what the most (or least) democratic meetings look like. Take it or leave it."

The second measure (CBDI) says, "These are the most (or least) democratic meetings given the conditions in which each component of the measure operates." The first describes a place where the real *democracy* is either good or bad. The second describes a place where the citizens practice real democracy well or not so well given the fundamental handicaps or lack of handicaps associated with the town. Later a third and final BDI is used which considers all the other variables that have demonstrated a capacity to identify ups and downs in real democracy. This is called the *Achieved* Best Democracy Index (ABDI). It scores meetings (and in the aggregate, towns) on the degree to which they (or better put, the citizens in them) manage to achieve better democracy in light of factors such as the Australian ballot, when the meeting is held, and so forth.

How does one weight contributing elements of the basic score, the Raw Best Democracy Index? Is talk as important to real democracy as presence? Would a meeting that was 25 points low on attendance break even if it was 25 points high on women's participation? Should the amount of time spent discussing the issues weigh as heavily as the egalitarian distribution of the talk or the attendance or women's involvement? The literature provides few clues. There are limited references to democratic priorities here and there but weightings are non-existent. The bottom line is that if weighting is necessary the algorithm must be informed by judgment.

To wit: I combined what insights were available from previous scholarship and the counsel of four excellent theorists in my department with my own instincts framed over forty years and reached the following rather simplistic conclusion: (1) Attendance must be given priority.<sup>2</sup> (2) It is hard to make a case that either of the other variables ought to trump the other. Accordingly I combined the Z-scores of each of the four variables after weighting them as follows: attendance (.40), participation (.20), women's involvement (.20), and time (.20). Table XI-B has illustrations of how this works out for four meetings: the best, the worst, and one in between for both the first two indexes, the Raw Best Democracy Index (RBDI) and the Controlled Best Democracy Index (CBDI). Figure XI-A shows their distributions.

[TABLE XI-B and FIGURE XI-A ABOUT HERE]

### REAL DEMOCRACY IN THE RAW

This is democracy from the citizen's point of view. In the towns that score high in these towns the democracy is easier. Live in these communities and the probability you will participate

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<sup>2</sup> As my colleague Alan Wertheimer reminded me, this paradigm has the support of Woody Allen who once said: "Eighty percent of life is showing up."

table 11 B

fig 11 A

in the practice of real democracy improves by definition. What kind of town has the largest or smallest proportion of its citizens in attendance? What kind of meeting has the greatest proportion of its attenders participating, the most equality for women, lengthiest deliberations? Never mind what the reasons are. What matters is a greater proportion of the citizens practiced democracy more completely in (for instance) Belvidere than in Richford. This ranking has everything to do with description and nothing to do with causation. For whatever reason the people of Belvidere have a better chance to do real democracy than do the people of Richford.

### Belvidere

Belvidere is a tough place. There isn't much good land to live on and what there is is rugged and lonely. Over the millenniums the north branch of the Lamoille River cut an east-west trough between the Cold Hollow Mountains to the north and Butternut and Bowen Mountains to the south. A decent blacktop road now angles along the river most of the way through town. On its banks in this hollow between the hills the people live. In 1980, before the road was completely paved, there were 218 of them. One hundred and thirty-six of these were registered to vote. In Vermont's advisory only presidential primary that year the turnout was 35 percent. Seventeen voted for Reagan and George Bush got two. Independent John Anderson got eight. Three others shared the remaining eight. On the Democratic ballot Jimmy Carter got 17 and Teddy Kennedy one.<sup>3</sup> Come fall the general election turnout increased to 62 percent. Reagan got 48 votes, Carter 24, John Anderson 8, Barry Commoner one, and the libertarian candidate, Clark, three.

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<sup>3</sup> Secretary of State, State of Vermont, *Primary and General Elections 1980*, (Montpelier, Vermont: Office of the Secretary of State, 1981): 21, 29, 105 and 178.



The 1980 town meeting was held on the same day and in the same building as the presidential primary. The people had been “warned” to attend:

WARNING  
for the  
ANNUAL TOWN MEETING OF THE TOWN OF BELVIDERE, VERMONT  
and the  
ANNUAL TOWN SCHOOL MEETING OF THE  
TOWN SCHOOL DISTRICT OF BELVIDERE, VERMONT  
March 4, 1980

The inhabitants of the Town of Belvidere, who are legal voters in Town Meeting and Town School District Meeting of said Belvidere, respectively, are hereby notified and warned to meet in Town Meeting and Town School District Meeting at the Town Hall in said Belvidere on Tuesday, March 4, 1980 at ten o’clock in the forenoon, to transact the following articles of business:<sup>4</sup>

When Janice Rubin and Pat Watkins took the first count of attendance at 10:20 a.m. there were 61 people (22 women and 39 men) occupying the 63 chairs that had been set up for the meeting. This was the highest count of the four taken that day. The average (it dropped off after lunch) was 48. Since the loss of attendance was greatest for men, women made up 44 percent of the attendance overall. The meeting lasted for three hours and 15 minutes not including a 90-minute break for lunch and in that time 44 different people spoke a total of 166 times on the 17 articles on the warning. A majority of the speakers (52 percent) were women. They were responsible for 58 percent of the individual acts of participation.<sup>5</sup>

By the time the moderator Richard Spaulding gaveled the meeting to a close at 2:55 p.m. Steven Locke had turned out one of the three incumbent selectmen (and chairperson of the

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<sup>4</sup> Town of Belvidere, *Town Report*, (Year ending December 1979): 3.

<sup>5</sup> Janice Rubin and Pat Watkins, “The 1980 Comparative Town Meeting Study: Town of Belvidere.” (Burlington, Vermont: University of Vermont, the Real Democracy Data Base, March 1980.)

selectboard), Mark Schroeder. Locke's spouse Penny had won a seat on the school board vacated by 21-year incumbent, Joycelyn Adams. She defeated Beverly Bennett and Kathy Hobart, whose spouse Geoffrey was reelected second constable without opposition. In the closest race of the day the moderator's spouse, Charlene Spaulding defeated Warren Thomas for the office of auditor 25 to 20. The town and school budgets were approved. The selectmen were authorized to buy land to establish a town forest.<sup>6</sup> Town officer salaries were set at \$3.25 per hour. After ten minutes of debate (2:43 p.m. to 2:53 p.m.) the town rejected the following: "Article 16: Will the town vote to install and maintain a uniform system of accounting as established by the auditor of accounts under 32 V.S.A. Section 163 (1)?"<sup>7</sup>

#### WITNESS

#### THE COST OF BUREAURACY IN THE TOWN OF BELVIDERE

##### Town Expenditures Selectmen's Account<sup>8</sup>

Administration:			
Town Officers:			
Town Clerk & Treasurer:			
Larry Brown, Salary	\$300.00		
Larry Brown, Civil Board & Selectmen's Meetings	<u>25.00</u>	325.00	
Listers:			
James Bennett	286.76		
Geoffrey Hobart	178.75		
James Adams	<u>66.63</u>	532.14	

<sup>6</sup> This article appeared for years on town warnings because the state required it. Town's nearly always approved it without debate. It took Belvidere two minutes to do so by a voice vote. Only one person spoke on the issue, a woman, my students identified by her "flowered red shirt." *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> The presence of this article was yet another requirement by the state. Towns usually took great delight in rejecting it out of hand. Belvidere did so on a voice vote after five participations shared by four people (two men and two women). *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Town of Belvidere, *Town Report*, (Year ending December 1979): 9.

Selectmen:			
	Mark Schroeder	178.50	
	Kenneth Tallman	64.50	
	Glenn Davis	<u>71.00</u>	314.00
Auditors:			
	Michael Coccoli	163.25	
	James Bennett	59.25	
	Earl Domina	<u>97.50</u>	320.00
Board of Civil Authority:			
	Amsden Brown	10.00	
	Maefred Barry	10.00	
	Mark Schroeder	10.00	
	Hugh Tallman	<u>10.00</u>	40.00
Town Meeting Expenses:			
	Town Report	341.20	
	Larry Brown, Clerk of Meeting	16.25	
	Richard Spaulding, Moderator	16.25	
	Maefred Barry, Ballot Clerk	16.25	
	Hersa Eldred, " "	16.25	
	Winnie Lanpher, " "	16.25	
	Mary Tallman, " "	<u>16.25</u>	438.70
School Bond Issue:			
	Maefred Barry, " "	29.25	
	Hersa Eldred, " "	29.25	
	Lena Rich, " "	29.25	
	Mary Tallman, " "	29.25	
	Larry Brown, " "	<u>29.25</u>	<u>146.25</u>
TOTAL ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSE			\$2,116.09
(for the year 1979)			

The Belvidere meeting of 1980 was the meeting that scored highest of the 1436 in the data base on the four-item, no-strings-attached democratic indicator, the Raw Best Democracy Index (RBDI). On attendance (45 percent of the registered voters were present at the highest count) Belvidere ranked 32 overall. Its Gini index of participation equality (48.5, with 44 of the 61 attenders speaking a total of 166 times) placed it 13<sup>th</sup> among the 1446 meetings. Its strong showing on women's involvement left it ninth from the top. The length of the meeting, however,

(three hours and fifteen minutes) was below average, ranking Belvidere 736<sup>th</sup>. Here then is a statistical snapshot of the best real democracy in all the meetings studied:

- 61 of 136 registered voters present
- 44 of 61 attenders speaking
- participation divided evenly between the sexes
- three hours and fifteen minutes of deliberation

### Richford

Exactly 19 hours and 23 minutes before the gavel fell on the best meeting of the 1436 meetings studied between 1970 and 1998, the worst meeting was gaveled to order about 20 miles (as the crow flies) due north of Belvidere in the Richford village town hall. Richford is one of those fascinating old towns created by people who believed natural things and human activity were inexorably intertwined. It sits where the hard ridges of the Green Mountains join the flowered hills and pasture of the Champlain Valley basin. There millenniums ago the glacier twitched ever so slightly and carved out a soft hollow interrupting the Missisquoi River's southwestern journey to the lake. It flowed north for a bit as if to return home to Canada but soon changed its mind again and fell off south again to meander through time and build topsoil. It is the kind of river that brought joy to thousands of Vermont farm boys on dreamy June days when chores were done and the hay was not yet ready. Missisquoi is an Abnaki name for "great grassy meadows." They knew how to name their rivers.

As the river made its hairpin turnabout, it split and left a huge island. This was irresistible to the planet centered, 18<sup>th</sup> Century psyche. Just east of the island the people built a town. Still

the streets bespeak the compromise fashioned between citizens and land: Elm Street and Maple Street, Sweat Street, and ones named Church, School and Home. Because the river carved a pathway east across northern Vermont just under the Canadian border and southwest down to St. Albans Junction, there soon came a railroad, the Canadian Pacific hooking up with the Central Vermont just south of town.<sup>9</sup> In 1878 the people in this place along and within the river's bend incorporated a village in the town of Richford in order to tax themselves the extra revenues necessary to provide the kinds of services villages require but the rest of a town's "outback" do not.<sup>10</sup>

There are several other nooks and crannies in Richford where people have also clustered, South Richford, East Richford and Steven's Mills. But as the 20<sup>th</sup> Century unfolded and the trains<sup>11</sup> and the farms began to fade from the valley of the Missisquoi, the village began to die as well. In 1950 the population of the town was 2643. Nineteen hundred and sixteen of these people lived in the village. By 1980 town population was down to 2206.<sup>12</sup> The village lost population

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<sup>9</sup> As a boy of 18 I hired out for the summer working for the state geologist mapping green stone outcroppings in northern Vermont. Our wanderings brought us through the mountains on several occasions following the Missisquoi's cuts through the summer landscape. I remember several lunches under the elms of Richford with sandwich and soda and the company of Lance Meade and our boss Jason Wark. This was the summer of 1959. In the two years I lived and worked with Jason he (unbeknownst to him I suspect) did much to father my life. Then in the dusk of a late August evening he dropped me off in front of my mother's place in Newbury 150 miles to the southeast and drove away down the street, the little red tail lights of his 1951 Studebaker disappearing under the dying elms like fireflies over a misty, midnight meadow. Although we worked for forty years within a half mile of each other (he became an orthodontist in downtown Burlington), I never saw him again.

<sup>10</sup> The voters made this decision pursuant to No. 259, *Laws of Vermont, 1872* on November 21, 1878. Cynthia M. Bensen, (ed.), *Vermont Legislative Directory and State Manual 1983-1984*, (Montpelier, Vermont: Office of the Secretary of State, 1983): 32.

<sup>11</sup> Richford was once the home of a "station" for Chinese immigrants who came to help build the railroads. Close observers of Vermont history and in fact of rural life in many places know that cultural diversity was never as weak as the stereotypes of rural life (penned assiduously by urban scholars in the first two thirds of this century) portray.

<sup>12</sup> Richford, unlike the vast majority of Vermont towns, did not experience a population renaissance in the post war period.

much faster than the town. It dropped to 1471 in 1980. By 1990 the village had disappeared as a legal entity as the town and village reincorporated as one. Meanwhile “Downtown Richford” (the old village), like other New England town centers since mid-century, began to go the way of the great elms that once brought a distinctive majesty to the Yankee thoroughfares over which they presided.

In 1980 the people attended town meeting in what my students described as “a small auditorium” on the second floor of the Town Hall in Richford Village. The meeting began at 7:32 p.m. At 7:45 there were 117 in attendance. This increased to 135 at 8:15. At 8:22 the school district meeting began and as the students put it, “several people left.” By 8:40 attendance was down to 111. At 8:57, an hour and twenty-five minutes after it started, the meeting ended. Throughout more seats went unfilled (an average of 159) than filled.<sup>13</sup> There were ten articles (not including the “new business” article) on the town warning. All but two were decided the next day by Australian ballot. There were six on the school warning. No votes at all were taken during the meeting. All came the next day by ballot.

At the highest attendance count men outnumbered women three and one half to one. Only 24 people participated at the meeting. Two of these were women and they both spoke on educational issues.<sup>14</sup> Only 88 participations were made in all. The issue that received the most attention was warned as follows: “To see if the Town will vote to authorize the selectmen to purchase a new gas truck at a cost not to exceed \$21,000 to be paid for from Revenue Sharing

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<sup>13</sup> David Dumont and Carl Johnson, “The 1980 Comparative Town Meeting Study: Town of Richford,” (Burlington, Vermont: University of Vermont, the Real Democracy Data Base, March 1980).

<sup>14</sup> One of the two women on the five-member school board spoke four times, once on the budget (Article 4) and three times on new business. The other, the school accountant, spoke twice on new business. *Ibid.*

Funds.”<sup>15</sup> Twenty-one of the 88 participations occurred on this issue. The bottom line? Richford’s meeting ranked 1234<sup>th</sup> on the percent of registered voters attending town meeting out of the 1434 meetings for which data were available. It ranked 1300 out of 1375 on the Gini index of participation equality, 1372<sup>nd</sup> out of 1413 on time the meeting lasted, and dead last on women’s participation—1374<sup>th</sup> of 1374. This was as bad as it got.

### REAL DEMOCRACY IN CONTEXT

In 1980 the citizens of Belvidere produced the most democratic town meeting. But we know some of the reasons for this may not be directly related to the people’s democratic inclinations. I am going to refer to these reasons (variables) of the Controlled Best Democracy Index (CBDI) as ascribed variables because they are things (particularly the size of the community and consequently the size of the meeting) that are more or less givens. In Belvidere, for instance, the percent of registered voters in attendance was most likely enhanced by the town’s tiny population. Verbal participation was most likely stronger because the actual number of persons at the meeting was lower. On the other hand women’s attendance would most likely have been a bit higher had the meeting been held, for instance, in 1998 rather than 1980. Yet women’s involvement itself seem independently associated with town size. The time spent in discussion would have been longer had the actual bulk of attendance been greater along with the

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<sup>15</sup> Town of Richford, *Town Report*, (Year ending December 1979): 5. Town truck debates are often derided by critics of town meeting. Many of my students reacted similarly. But then the Vermont legislature was also called down for its “raccoon debates,” especially the issue of shooting does in deer season or how long a trout must be before it becomes a “keeper.” Personally I view these debates as a glorious manifestation of democracy as I would, of course, a debate in New York about subway tokens or in California about drive-by shootings.

actual number of persons who spoke. There are similar qualifications one might make, remember, to explain Richford's dismal meeting, the worst of the 1434.

Fortunately the wizardry of statistics makes it possible to take all these qualifiers into account. Each of these factors can be considered, for instance *as if* the meeting was held in the same sized town (for attendance) and *as if* the actual number of attenders at the meeting was equal (for participation). Similarly, it is possible to statistically adjust each meeting to standardize the year in which it was held (for women's equality) and the number of attenders and participators (for time spent in discussion). The combination of the four variables would then identify the most democratic meeting *given* the conditions under which it occurs.

## North Hero

When this is done the meeting in North Hero in 1994 turns out to be the most democratic of the 1357 for which data on all four measures were available. Alexander Wilcox was the student who studied North Hero that year. His paper began as follows:

As described by the pamphlet in North Hero's general store "The Hero's Welcome," North Hero is the middle town on the middle island in the very middle of the lake. The position of the town is indeed central, and North Hero is officially described as both the Shire Town and the county seat of Grand Isle County. The words North Hero describe both an Island (more accurately two islands with a link no wider than Route #2) and a town. (The words, island and town are used interchangeably in the vernacular, and this paper will reflect that convention.) North Hero is named, along with South Hero (one island containing the towns of Grand Isle and South Hero) after Ethan and Ira Allen, also known as the "two heroes."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ethan Allen was to Vermont what Sam Houston was to Texas and had a profound impact on the American revolution when he captured the largest British Fort in North America dramatically upping the anti thrown on the table only five weeks earlier at Lexington and Concord. His brother Ira is best known for his negotiations (some say traitorous – but then – we were at the time an independent republic) with Canada on the question of Vermont becoming a province of that country. He was also the founder of the University of Vermont.



Wilcox continues with Samuel de Champlain's description of the area in 1609:

There are also several rivers that flow into the lake that is bordered by many fine trees of the same sorts that we have in France, with a quality of vines more beautiful than many I had seen in any other place, many chestnut trees, and I have not seen any at all before, except on the shore of the lake, where there is a great abundance of fish of a great many varieties...beautiful valleys and open stretches fertile in grain, such as I had eaten in this country with a great many other fruits.<sup>17</sup>

To bring his description up to date Wilcox provided a delightful counterpoint written 385 years later; a synopsis of a flood insurance report issued by the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA):

North Hero is 12.5 square miles including its satellite islands, with most of its population residing near the shore and some in a small village area. The climate is moderated by the lake, which extends the growing season to 160 days. The valley location of North Hero protects it from most northeasterners and tropical storms. North Hero's topography is uniform with gently rolling hills. The highest point is 175 feet above mean sea level (MSL) (Lake Champlain is around 100 feet above MSL) and North Hero contains some of the best agricultural land in Vermont, with soils deposited by the post glacial Lake Vermont.<sup>18</sup>

The 1990 Census counted a population of 546 in North Hero. Sixty-three percent of these were born in Vermont. The average meeting in the sample was held in a town where 57 percent of the population was born in Vermont. The percent of the population over 25 with a college degree was 30. The average for the towns in which meetings were held was 24 percent. The percent of professionals in the work force in North Hero was about average, 24 percent. Median

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<sup>17</sup>Allen L. Stratton, *History of the South Hero Island*, (South Hero, Vermont: Queen City Printers, 1980): 10 in Alexander D. Wilcox, "North Hero 1994," (Burlington, Vermont: University of Vermont, March 1994). Following Champlain's description Wilcox, a full-time resident of the islands, wrote dryly: "It is obvious that Champlain spent time in the islands only in the summer..."

<sup>18</sup> The Federal Emergency Management Agency, *Flood Insurance Study: Town of North Hero, Vermont, Grand Isle County*, (Washington, D.C.: Federal Insurance Administration, 1980) in Wilcox, "North Hero 1994."

family income was somewhat higher (\$38,572 vs. 31,595). Oddly only four percent of the population was found in the Census employment category of farming, forestry and fishing. The average for the towns in which meetings were held was seven percent. North Hero, like many small Vermont towns since the 1960's, *looks* farming but its people are not. Much of its economy is based on the summer tourist trade. Anchor Island Marina, Northland Boat Shop, Holiday Harbor (sporting goods), and Carry Bay Camp Grounds are examples. In 1998 there were seven lodging places. But there was also a manufacturer of pet products, a small publishing firm, a crushed stone company, and five contractor/builders. The population of 546 supports a 4-H Club, a Parent-Teacher-Youth organization, a volunteer fire department and a volunteer fire department auxiliary.

In 1994 North Hero had 485 registered voters. Three hundred and twelve of them (64 percent) voted in the general election. For the state as a whole turnout was 58 percent. The Democratic candidate for governor that year got 64 percent of the vote in North Hero and 69 percent statewide. Independent/socialist Congressional candidate Bernard Sanders received 41 percent of the vote in a five-candidate race in North Hero. Statewide he received 50 percent. In 1992 Ross Perot got 22 percent of the vote in North Hero (the lowest of the five towns of Grand Isle County) and 23 percent at the state level. North Hero had cast 41 percent of its votes for Vermont's ERA eight years earlier in 1986 while the state as a whole cast 48 percent. But overall North Hero scored a bit higher on the liberalism factor score than did the average town in which a meeting was held.

Douglas Tudhope, North Hero's town moderator, brought the 1994 town meeting to order at 6:07 p.m. March 1, 1994, at the Town Hall. The weather was excellent; the day had been

sunny, the roads clear. Two minutes after he had opened the meeting Tudhope had been reelected moderator by a unanimous voice vote.<sup>19</sup> At 6:23 the first count of attendance was taken. It was 268. By 7:40 the meeting was in the middle of its most controversial issue. It involved town roads, back taxes, selectperson's promises and even school buses. It was debated for an hour and nine minutes by 29 different people who spoke a total of 67 times. At that time attendance was counted at 315. More people showed up at the 1994 town meeting (315) than voted in the general election.

Over the course of the evening the attendance averaged 233; 58 percent of these were men and 42 percent were women.<sup>20</sup> Forty men and 20 women spoke at least once. The total number of participations was 227. The men who spoke averaged 4.3 participations each and the women averaged 2.8. The meeting lasted 363 minutes. When these statistics are placed *in context* North Hero ranked second of 1357 on attendance, in the top 25<sup>th</sup> percent on participation, in the top third on time and above average (the 46 percentile) on women's equality. In combination, with attendance accounting for 40 percent of the weight, North Hero turned out to be the most democratic town meeting, given the constraints under which it labored.

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<sup>19</sup> Aimee Rousseau, Alex Wilcox, Bert Wilcox, and Catherine Wilcox, "The 1994 Comparative Town Meeting Study: Town of North Hero," (Burlington, Vermont: University of Vermont, the Real Democracy Data Base, March 1994). Alex Wilcox recruited his mother, father, and a friend to help him record the data. The first order of business in a town meeting without an Australian ballot is the election of a moderator. The incumbent moderator reads the article then turns the gavel over to a selectperson who then asks for nominations from the floor.

<sup>20</sup> There was an exodus of attenders between 10:13 and 10:26, which was a recess between the town and school meetings. The meeting adjourned at 10:31. At 10:20, four hours and 13 minutes after the meeting began, the attendance was 107.

## Swanton

It accents the difficulty of using community context variables to predict variations in democratic performance to note that on both the raw and adjusted best democracy scores the best and the worst meetings took place high in the northwestern region of the state. This is an area known for its homogeneity of culture (French-Canadian and Catholic) and, not surprisingly, its politics (Democratic). There are commonalities between the lowest and highest scoring communities across both measures. Swanton, which produced the meeting that scored lowest on the Controlled Best Democracy Index (CBDI), like Richford, which scored lowest on the Raw Best Democracy Index (RBDI), is on the border with Canada in Franklin County. Although Swanton has twice the population of Richford (5887 to 2253 in 1990), both towns are in the top 20<sup>th</sup> percentile of the sample on town population. Belvidere and North Hero are further south and more isolated, Belvidere by the ridges of the mountains and North Hero by the waters of the lake. Belvidere has half the population (228) of North Hero (546) but both are very small compared to Richford and Swanton.

Swanton is the last place that might be called a commercial center north of St. Albans. It has the regional high school for the area (Missisquoi Valley Union) and it is through Swanton that the interstate (#89) cuts on its way to Montreal. The exit there features a Montana-like truck stop where county music tape cassettes can be purchased along with cheap gas and all manner of sticky buns. It is also the last chance to go west along over through to New York on the marsh roads and bridges of the northern Lake Champlain basin. It is here too that the Abnaki still lay claim to the lands of their ancestors who, as the first residents of Swanton, are also most likely

the first human beings ever to live in Vermont. The *Vermont Yearbook* for 1998 listed 80 merchants and 24 manufactures for Swanton along with 11 contractors, four insurance companies, five doctors, three lawyers and eight restaurants. There is a Dunkin' Donuts, a McDonalds and three cemeteries.

This is a working class, conservative town. In 1990 it ranked in the 88<sup>th</sup> percentile on percent of the population over 25 years old with a college degree and the 85<sup>th</sup> on professionals in the work force. It was well above average on median family income (the 35<sup>th</sup> percentile) but nevertheless ranked in the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile on the 13-variable upscale factor score. In politics it votes for Democratic candidates if they are not running against Bernie Sanders. Then Swanton votes for Sanders. Swanton ranked in the 93<sup>rd</sup> percentile on the liberalism factor score, helped mightily by its 96<sup>th</sup> percentile score on the Vermont's equal rights for women amendment. Seventy-seven percent of the population in 1990 was born in Vermont. The 210 towns holding meetings in the sample averaged 57 percent. Swanton has a heavy French-Canadian flavor and French-Canadians in Swanton are more and more apt to be the second- and third-generation native Vermonters.

In 1996, 2101 people voted in the fall general elections in Swanton. In 1998, 1921 did. As percentages of registered voters these two performances (58 percent in 1996 and 47 percent in 1998) fell well below the statewide vote. The state's percentages were 68 percent in 1996 and 56 percent in 1998. At 8:10 p.m. on March 3, 1997, at the town meeting held at the Swanton Central School there were 54 people in the 226 seats available. Forty-one of these were men and thirteen were women. Twenty participated in the discussion. Four were women. The 10 percent of the attenders who spoke the most were responsible for 54 percent of the participations. It was

a woman who participated the most. Her name was Lauri and she did the accounting for Missisquoi Valley Rescue, Inc. The other three women participated a single time each. The meeting adjourned at 9:07, one hour and twenty-eight minutes after it had begun.

Like Richford, Swanton held its town meeting Monday night. The nine articles on the Warning were voted by Australian ballot on Tuesday. The actual town meeting was billed as informational only and did not appear in the formal warning, which read as follows:

WARNING  
TOWN OF SWANTON  
ANNUAL MEETING

The legal voters of the Town of Swanton, who are legal voters of the Town Meeting, are hereby identified and warned to meet at the Swanton Municipal Complex, First and Elm Streets, Swanton on March 4<sup>th</sup> 1997 at 7:00 p.m. to vote on all the articles herein set forth. All articles are to be voted on by the Australian system. The polls open at 7:00 a.m., and close at 7:00 p.m.

Thus the people were not “warned” to meet. They were warned to vote. The announcement of the Monday night meeting appeared after Article #9 and read as follows:

The legal voters of the Town of Swanton are further notified that an informational meeting will be held at the Swanton Central School on Monday, March 3, 1997 at 7:30 p.m. for the purpose of explaining all budget items to the voters.

The people were not invited to talk. They were invited to listen. But they did talk, of course, and they did ask questions. An indicator of this willingness to participate is the fact that even though no “new business” article was presented to them on the warning they spent close to one third as much time discussing new business items as they did the nine formal articles; items such as what was going to happen to the land of the old bag factory, impact fees and the Swanton Meadow’s project. They spent almost as much time listening to and questioning their state

legislator from Montpelier (who spoke at the end of the meeting) as they did on the town's agenda. In fact half of the participations came at the end of the meeting on new business and legislative matters.

The 1997 meeting in Swanton ranked 1435 on attendance, 1285 on participation, 1370 on women's equality and 1072 on time spent in discussion. The combination of these scores placed it dead last on Controlled Best Democracy. It didn't get any worse than it was in Swanton.

### CORRELATES OF THE CONTROLLED BEST DEMOCRACY INDEX

With these brief snapshots in hand, it is time to look at all 1357 meetings to see if commonalties emerge that help explain the differences between the good ones and the bad ones. Here we shift from description to the search for causality, keeping in mind, however, the caveat that defines the methodological motif under which I operate: the search for causality (whether or not successful), begets the best description. In this regard it obviously makes no sense to treat the uncontrolled measure (democracy in the raw), as the purpose of the exercise is to systematically introduce factors that may or may not explain the variations in this basic best democracy score. The first variables to include in such an exercise would be town size for attendance, meeting size for participation and both of these for time spent discussing issues. The year the meeting was held needs to be controlled for women's participation. These are called ascribed variables. Since they are already part of the Controlled Best Democracy Index, however, it now becomes the dependent variable. Three categories of independent variables (governmental structure, SES, and political culture) are the independent variables. These are

called achieved variables since they relate to people; how they behave in the aggregate and what they have done to their town meeting structure over time.

### The Structure of Town Meeting

The structural arrangements under which town meeting operates and how they affect the tone and direction of a community's democratic impulses have been explored throughout this book for each of the four components (attendance, participation, women's involvement and time) of the Controlled Best Democracy Index. These structural variables are the ballot system, day vs. night meetings, how the school meeting is involved, and the size of the meeting place. When all was said and done in the analysis of these individual components, the following conclusions were obtained: The Australian ballot reduced attendance. Holding the meeting at night seemed to reduce participation equality but this was explained by the shorter time the meetings lasted at night. No structural variables were importantly associated with women's attendance. Both the Australian ballot and holding the meeting at night were associated with the length of the meeting. But when controls for these variables were introduced only holding meetings at night remained important.<sup>21</sup>

The final, weighted combination of these variables (the CBDI) behaves as one might expect given these associations. Meetings using the Australian ballot average -.15 on the index and meetings that do not average .19. Hold the meeting at night and the index registers -.40. Hold them during the day and it registers +.13. If school items are imbedded in the town meeting or the school meeting is held during an adjournment of the town meeting, the Controlled

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<sup>21</sup> Bear in mind that three of these measures already control for key elements; town size for attendance, meeting size for participation and attendance and equality of participation for the length of the meeting.



Best Democracy Index registers .14. When the school meeting is held before or after the town meeting on the same day, it drops to -.09. If the school meeting is convened on a different day entirely, it declines to -.15.

We know that these factors are important because they influence other intervening variables, which in turn have a more direct role to play. The Australian ballot produces higher attendance, which has a disproportionate influence on the CBDI. The scheduling of school matters is related to the time spent discussing issues, which in turn is linked to participation and both of these variables boost the index upward. Holding the meeting at night has the most depressing effect on the index and that is because it shrinks the time spent discussing issues (and thus decreases participation) even more than the school variable. But reasons for the structure-associate gaps in the CBDI noted here extend beyond these fundamental causes.

The scatterplots in Figure XI-B demonstrate this. They also provide our first visualization of the CBDI in action. Plot 1 suggests, for instance, that the reason meetings with school issues treated either during a town meeting or while a town meeting is in adjournment have higher index scores overall is that they last longer than meetings where educational issues play no role at all. There are exceptions. Plainfield's 1994 meeting had a high CBDI score given meeting length even though the school meeting is held on another day. It was also on the upper end of the length of the meeting variable. Waitsfield in 1995 and Plymouth in 1970 have lower scores even though they did discuss school issues. Their discussion time was much shorter. Still, discussing school issues does boost the controlled best democracy score a bit over the range of the meeting length variable as demonstrated by the parallel regression lines. Both kinds of meetings improve with meeting length. When school issues are either integrated into the town meeting or

discussed in a separate meeting during an adjournment of the town meeting, it helps the CBDI. But not a lot.

[FIGURE XI-B ABOUT HERE]

This kind of relationship is more pronounced for the difference between day and night meetings. Democracy is better during the day because the meetings last longer. (See Plot 2 of Figure XI-B.) None of the night meetings land in the upper third of the length continuum. The average length of day meetings (represented by the solid vertical line) is considerably larger than the average length of night meetings (the dashed vertical line). But the trend line indicates longer meetings would most likely have better democracies even if they were held at night. Still, there is something about night meetings that reduces the Best Democracy Index because all along the length of meeting axis night meetings average lower Best Democracy Indexes. Only eight of the 46 night meetings exceed the average best democracy scores for day meetings when length is held constant by the regression line the best of all meetings (see above). The 1994 meeting in North Hero made the sample of 200. The scatterplot demonstrates what a unique meeting it was. The meeting was not particularly long (given the amount of people there and the participations that took place) but the gap between the kind of CBDI a meeting that long should generate and the actual CBDI for North Hero was massive.

The Australian ballot's linkage to the controlled democratic culture index is almost purely a function of its connection to attendance. Attendance is strongly related to the CBDI by definition, since it was weighted 40 percent and the other three variables were each weighted 20 percent. When this relationship is controlled by the scatterplot, non-ballot meetings are not above ballot meetings on the best controlled democracy index. The ballot's linkage to low attendance is

fig 11 B

demonstrated by the greater number of meetings with ballots at the low end of the size-controlled attendance index. Since only day meetings were considered, the night meeting connection to the Australian ballot is neutralized. In that context it is difficult to see a connection between use of the Australian ballot and higher controlled best democracy scores with the naked eye. But for the regression lines it would sneak by us like a white tail deer in a hemlock swamp. (See Plot 3 of Figure XI-B.)

### The Socioeconomic Context of Good Democracy

A consideration of the top ten and bottom ten meetings on the controlled democratic culture index provides an important clue to the link between socioeconomic settings and the political culture of real democracy. At the top of the list were meetings held in places like Craftsbury, Strafford, Thetford, and Charlotte as well as North Hero, which led the field. Six of the top ten meetings were in towns that exceeded the average town on median family income. Seven of ten were higher on managers and professionals in the work force and most importantly nine of ten were higher on the education index. The result was that eight of ten were above average on upscale, the factor score that combines an array of 13 social and economic indicators.

Data on the ten meetings that ranked lowest on the CBDI, although more ambivalent, lay in a direction that suggests that social and economic factors are related to real democracy when it is defined in terms of a combination of variables. Five meetings were held in towns below average on income and five were held in towns that scored above average. The ten towns also split on managers and professionals. The education index was below average in six of the ten towns. Eight of ten had negative upscale factor scores. What happens when this first peek is

extended to experimentation with a series of multiple regression models using the whole data set?<sup>22</sup>

The education index of the town in which the meeting was held proved most capable of predicting what the meeting's democratic culture scores would be. The simple correlation coefficient was very weak (.12) but it was strengthened under controls to .21. Most importantly it was the only SES variable able to fight off the effects of the two other variables which were independently associated with democratic culture. These later were both spatial variables. The population per road mile indicator of population density is negatively associated with the CBDI (the partial "r" was -.26) since it rewards towns with a few people scattered over a lot of roadway. The time to work variable is weakest (partial "r" is .18) but continues to suggest in a very modest way that the further people travel to work the better their democracy. As I suggested earlier my sense is that this is a serendipitous indicator of "rural isolation" and "community boundriness," concepts I previously tried (unsuccessfully it appears) to operationalize with a bit more empirical sophistication.<sup>23</sup>

The results of the multiple regression equation using these variables are in Table XI-C. Included are the variables contributing at least one additional percent of variance explained to the model. Fourteen percent of the variance in the CBDI is explained by the variables in combination. Not earth shaking. But each variable contributes a meaningful proportion to the final result and all predict independent and statistically significant slopes in the distribution of

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<sup>22</sup> Given their lack of association to the components of CBDI, I was highly suspicious of most of the "community dynamics" and "community boundriness" variables used in earlier chapters. I thus considered them within the general framework of social and economic variables. As expected with the exception "time to work" none of the variables in the two categories added insights to the final model.

<sup>23</sup> This judgment is enhanced by the fact that, while time to work is positively associated with democratic culture, the actual percent of people working out of town registers a mild (-.12) negative association with the CBDI.

democratic culture. Figure XI-C plots the results for a sample of 200 meetings. Meetings like those in Victory and Stannard are predicted to have stronger best democracy scores primarily because of their thin population density. But they also are a long way from job locations. These two items overcame their lower education index scores. A meeting in a town like Shelburne ranks low. Although Shelburne scores high on the educational index, it is actually in the state's principal job center and also scores poorly on scattered population because it has so many people on so few roads. Many towns on the upper end of the distribution (Strafford is the best example) have substantial commuting distances to work, respectable education levels and a complex road network. St. George, with its high people per road mile statistic combined with a short commute and moderate education levels is an excellent model of the kind of town that ought to produce meetings with lower democratic culture scores.

[TABLE XI-C AND FIGURE XI-C ABOUT HERE]

That Victory in the deep forests of the Kingdom would be *expected* to have better democracy than Shelburne, the upscale bedroom town in the heart of Vermont's upscale Chittenden County would not be predicted from the standard paradigms. With the size variable already included in the CBDI and considering only social and economic variables, however, it seems that low density communities with an extensive road system which are geographically independent, *and* have a better educated citizenry practice real democracy most fully.

### The Political Context of Good Democracy

Several variables have been used to test the linkages between a town's politics and individual components of the CBDI. They were the degree to which a town's vote leans to the

table 11 c

fig 11 C



Democrats, liberalism in the electorate, the competitiveness of the party division (irrespective of which party usually wins), the percent of voter turnout at the polls and the electoral influence of independent/socialist Bernard Sanders. The vote for Bernie Sanders was marginally associated with both participation and time spent on deliberation, ranking last of five predictor variables in each case. The liberal factor score showed more strength, however, explaining an additional 2.5 percent of the variance as the third most important variable in the equation to explain deliberative time.

Thus it is not a surprise that a town's proclivity to participate in representative democracy at the ballot box is not associated with the Controlled Best Democracy Index. Still, it is disquieting for reasons that are not clear. I found myself hoping some mystic causation would emerge from the CBDI's unique combination of variables, transcend the pure mathematics, and allow ballot box participation to squeeze through to the regression equation. Alas, nothing. To demonstrate the acrimony between the culture of representative democracy and real democracy examine Plot 1 in Figure XI-D. A few meetings do suggest ballot box democracy and town meeting democracy can get along. Norwich, Huntington, Charlotte and Underhill had high turnout in the general elections surrounding the year in which their town meeting also scored very high on the CBDI. In Bloomfield, Wilmington, Corinth and Proctor low turnout at the polls matched low best democracy scores. But Lunenburg, Brighton and especially Eden combined low voter turnout with strong real democracies while in Shelburne, Berlin, Fayston and Kirby precisely the opposite was true. I wish my Remington twelve-gauge produced a pattern as circular as the one in Plot 1.

[FIGURE XI-D ABOUT HERE]

fig 11 D

Liberalism, however, did use its association with deliberative time, one of the components of the CDBI to lever the index upward a bit. Plot 2 of Figure XI-D shows that *how* a town votes is a somewhat more important predictive variable for democratic culture than *if* it votes. When the liberalism factor score is -2.0 the CDBI averages about -.3.5. When liberalism is at +2.0 the CDBI averages +.3.5. There is great discordance around these means, however, which results in an equation that explains only five percent of the total variance in the liberalism factor.<sup>24</sup> Yet it is still fair to conclude that those towns where electorates are more apt to support liberal issues and candidates generally produce slightly higher real democracy scores than those towns that support conservative candidates and causes. In short it is hard to find variables spawned by representative democracy that tell us much about the political culture of real democracy. But in this context even the very modest contribution liberalism makes to an ordered causal universe is appreciated.

### All Variables Considered

It is time to combine all the achieved variables heretofore discussed by category and summarize those that accompany the meetings up and down the best democracy scale as it is here defined – a four-variable, weighted amalgam of attendance, participation, women’s equality and deliberative time. By measuring the gap between the expectations for democracy and each meeting’s actual performance, we can reassess our original list of the “best democracies.” Remember, the CDBI we have been predicting came with several built-in controls mostly

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<sup>24</sup> The standard error was .55. When other variables were entered into the equation and all cases were used instead of the sample of 200, general election turnout was the only other variable to influence the CDBI in a way that was statistically significant. Turnout increased the percent of variance explained from 5.4 percent to 6.0 percent. With liberalism entered, turnout’s standardized slope was only .08 compared to liberalism’s .21.

relating to size factors. In light of the array of new variables perhaps Swanton will not look so bad. Perhaps North Hero will not look so good.

Since we know size variables already took huge chunks of variance in the CDBI out of play, expectations for further reductions should be appropriately muted. The data we are looking at will answer the following question: how much of the variance in CDBI can be explained in light of the fact the range of variance has already been squeezed rather tightly by the size variables? The arrangement of explanations that emerges from such a regression equation in which all variables passing muster on earlier routines are entered is found in Table XI-D.

[TABLE XI-D ABOUT HERE]

Holding meetings during the day with no Australian ballot in use in towns with more liberal choices in electoral politics, more distant work destinations, lower population density per road mile, and a location in the northern region of the state seem to offer the best situation for real democracy. Having school matters considered on town meeting day and higher turnout in general elections also helps ever so little. Several notations on this final equation are in order. The first is the appearance of the liberalism factor score as a significant element. In the analysis of individual components of the CDBI in earlier chapters its presence was noted only in its positive association with deliberative time, where it came in third, explaining 2.5 percent of the variance. When its influence on the CDBI was considered in the context of political variables only, its influence expanded to explain 5 percent of the variance.

Under controls for structural, socioeconomic and community boundriness measures the liberalism factor pretty much held its own, entering the equation second behind night meetings. The standardized slope in the relationship between the liberalism factor score and the CDBI is .23. It

table 11 D

explained an additional 4.5 percent of the variance after night meetings is controlled. The *mix* of democratic variables produces a result more in synch with theoretical expectations. Communities most apt to vote for liberal candidates and issues which were fundamentally pro “government” ought (at least on the margins) to be more apt to have stronger democratic cultures given the fact the measure of this culture was defined in terms of activity in and about a public arena in which government programs are considered.

Second, given its absence in my earlier analyses, is the sight of region limping into the equation at the last minute. My strong impression over thirty years is that the northern regions of Vermont seem to have stronger town meetings overall. It is in the Kingdom and the hill towns of Franklin County where one has traditionally expected to find the more robust democracies. Yet my tripartite regional index (above the Winooski River, below Route #4, and the lands in between) never seemed to hold up where controls were applied. With liberalism taken out of the equation, however,<sup>25</sup> the mix of indicators associated with town meeting democracy does appear to be a little stronger in the north. This is also a satisfying result. While the association is weak, it quiets my fears that something went wrong in the analysis. Especially pleasing is the fact that it was the *mix* of indicators that empowered the relationship. The ambivalence of the index matches my mood as to causation.

Finally there is a complete lack of any important socio-economic linkage between community and real democracy in the final equation. Time to work places only seventh and as I

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<sup>25</sup> There is a clear association between region and the liberal factor score. The towns holding the 603 meetings in the sample conducted north of the Winooski River averaged -.38 on the liberal factor score. The towns holding the 829 meetings south of the Winooski, averaged +.27. I have noted this relationship develop in Vermont since the early 1960's. See Frank Bryan, “Reducing the Time Lock in the Vermont Constitution: An Analysis of the 1974 Referendum,” *Vermont History* 44 (Winter 1976): 38-47 and Clark Bensen and Frank Bryan, “Strengthening Democratic Control: Vermont's 1986 Election in Historical Perspective,” *Vermont History* 56 (Fall 1988): 213-229.

have stressed earlier this is most likely a surrogate for community isolation, another spatial variable. Although the education index was quite strong when SES variables were considered alone, when controls were introduced in the form of structural, spatial, and political variables, it disappeared. Tying with the equation to jack up the SES influence proved fruitless. The upscale factor score, for instance, was introduced instead of the education index (as was income alone) with no effect.

The liberal factor score was the culprit. Liberalism and education share an  $R^2$  of .39, strong enough to cause mischief when both are considered simultaneously, but not strong enough to preclude analysis of each variable independently. When the two are paired against each other in an interaction with CBDI the liberal factor score prevailed. This was also the case when various combinations of other suspect variables were entered into the mix. Figure XI-E notes the strong association between education and liberalism. Only three of the meetings in the sample of 200, Fairfax, Dorset, and Winhall, were held in a town that ranked above the mean on education<sup>26</sup> and below the mean on liberalism.

Overall it is clear that liberalism's upward slope on the CBDI is not dependent on the fact that towns whose citizens have more formal education tend to score higher on the democratic culture index. But education does specify the relationship. It is the strong upward slope in the liberal factor score within the group of meetings held in towns with high levels of education and the group held in moderate education towns that snaps the lock on the overall relationship. It is also the case that when variations in the towns' education indexes are arrayed along the "X" axis, increases in education are associated with an extremely mild but nevertheless *downward* slope

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<sup>26</sup> Towns were scored "high" if their education index was a standard deviation above the mean, low if they were a standard deviation below the mean and "medium" if they were within a standard deviation of the mean.

on the CBDI whether or not the meetings are held in towns defined as liberal, moderate or conservative.<sup>27</sup>

[FIGURE XI-E ABOUT HERE]

When push comes to shove, however, it is the continued negative impact of the two “reforms” (holding meetings at night and the Australian ballot) brought on to help local democracy in Vermont that needs emphasis. Earlier it was noted that the Australian ballot used during day meetings had almost no impact. But a combination of night meetings with Australian ballot the next day enters the equation first and gobbles up more than twice as much variance explained (17 percent) than the other six variables in combination, which together pushed the final total to 28 percent. The new measure, Australian ballot and night meetings, also needs explanation. The independent effect of the Australian ballot as a causal variable is limited to town meetings held during the day since nearly all night meetings use the ballot. Night meetings have a weak influence on women’s participation and a strong influence on deliberative time. This caused night meetings to enter the equation early in several trials of the equation and weakened the Australian ballot’s capacity to make a strong showing. Even so the Beta weight for the Australian ballot, which entered these trial runs sixth in a field of eight, was the third strongest (.16) of the eight and the relationship covered the statistical significance bar by plenty.

It is also the case that the years of greatest impact for the Australian ballot were prior to 1977 and they are stripped from the equation because of potentially faulty SES measures. Since

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<sup>27</sup> This relationship is obviously not visible in Figure XI-E. For the full sample, however the slope between education and the CBDI among the meetings held in the most liberal towns is -.01. It is -.03 for moderate towns and -.03 for conservative towns. None of these relationships was statistically significant. For the full sample the slopes for the relationship between liberalism and the size controlled best democratic culture index are .17 in the high education towns, .24 among the moderate towns, and .04 for the low education towns. The first two are statistically significant at the .01 level, the latter is not.



fig 11 E

only one SES variable, time to work, entered the final equation and it barely slipped under the wire and entered seventh, little harm was done by cutting this variable and letting the regression run back to 1970. This increases the number of meetings in the analysis from 1176 to 1254. It also kicked the Australian ballot up from sixth place to third in the trial heats, doubling the variance it explained. Since this was so it seemed clear that “night meetings” in these early equations was in strong measure a surrogate for use of the Australian ballot. It was to give the Australian ballot its due that the combined variable was created to provide a more accurate description of the situation. Meetings held Monday night using the Australian ballot for at least the elections of town officers were coded “1”. Day meetings on Tuesday using the Australian ballot for at least the elections of town officers were coded “2” and “traditional” town meetings held during the day on Tuesday with no Australian ballot at all were coded “3”.<sup>28</sup> This combined variable, which gives the Australian ballot the credit it deserves, took its place at the head of the equation.

At the beginning of this chapter we touted those places that held the best meetings under conditions that controlled for several powerful variables related to size. We also noted those that did poorly. With seven additional variables accounted for, what happens to the meetings heretofore exhibiting the very “best democracy” and the “worst democracy”? Leading the size-controlled only list in the sample of 1176 was the meeting in North Hero in 1994. The second was Thetford’s meeting of 1988 and the third was Charlotte’s 1998 meeting. All three emerged unscathed by the more complete equation. The 1991 meeting in Burke also maintained its ranking (5<sup>th</sup> from the top) as did the 6<sup>th</sup> placed meeting which took place in Huntington in 1998.

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<sup>28</sup> The few Monday and Tuesday night meetings with no Australian ballot along with the handful of newer Saturday meetings were not considered.

Four others in the top ten slipped a rank or so. The Huntington meeting of 1988, for instance, dropped from 8<sup>th</sup> place on the size controlled index to 13<sup>th</sup> on the final index. Remembering that the index runs from 1176 to 1 a drop from 1169 to 1164 is hardly worth mentioning. Only one meeting in the top ten on the size controlled index, the one held in Strafford in 1986 was noticeably less democratic on the final, all variables considered index. It dropped 83 ranks from 1167 (the 10<sup>th</sup> highest) to 1084 (the 93<sup>rd</sup> highest).

The kinds of meetings these were and their community context explain the stability and change in the rankings. Reviewing them enhances our appreciation of the contextual nature of real democracy. Here is what happened. For the meetings that held their positions, the impacts of the variables that might cause a meeting to shift position were divided. For instance, North Hero was a conservative town with a night meeting. These were the two most powerful variables in the final equation and they worked *against* the town's 1994 best democracy potential when only size variables were controlled. Consequently holding them constant in the final equation released a potential for a higher score.

On the other hand population density was low in North Hero, the town is located in the north, school matters were part of the meeting, and North Hero's meeting did not use the Australian ballot. These factors produced higher scores on the original index when only size was controlled. Although not as individually energetic as night meetings and conservatism, when combined and then statistically accounted for they pushed the meeting's final index score downward. The most tepid indicators in the final equation, turnout base and time to work, were both about average for North Hero. What we have, therefore, is a wash. The variables cancel each other out. This is reflected in the fact that when all eight variables are held constant North

Hero's 1994 meeting remains precisely where it was atop the best democracy list. The same dynamic, the splitting of the causal variables, was equally true for Thetford in 1988 and Charlotte in 1998.

Strafford's 1983 meeting dropped 83 ranks from its number ten position on the size-controlled index to 93 on the final index. It is easy to see why. Strafford held its meeting during the day, did not use an Australian ballot, and discussed school matters. It has low population density, its "time to work" indicator is above average, and it has very strong turnout at the polls. It is also one of the very most liberal towns in the state. Its geographical position in the middle of the state was neutral. In short Strafford's 1986 meeting had everything going for it when these variables were left out of the equation. Their score *ought* to have been high. When their influence is removed by including them in the equation, the meeting's position is significantly reduced. Put another way with all it had going for it Strafford's 1986 meeting was not as impressive as it seemed. Bear in mind, however, it was still in the tenth percentile of the 1176 meetings.

This kind of analysis fine tunes the assessment of why some meetings are more democratic than others when democracy is defined as a blending of attendance, participation, women's involvement, and deliberative time. It is intuitively satisfying to note that the three other meetings in the top 20 that *lost* the most status under controls were located in Greensboro, Newark and Barnard. They too held traditional town meetings (during the day with no Australian ballot and school matters on the warning) and their communities shared the characteristics that make for stronger democracies. There's more. After watching town meeting work in Vermont for forty years it makes *sense* that meetings in these towns would score high on democracy. It

also makes sense that some of the strength in these scores had to do with variables which, in the final equation, were not allowed to operate.

The reverse is also true. Many of the meetings that ranked last on the Best Democracy Index generated by the first reckoning improved their positions when the qualities they lacked were neutralized. The worst meeting of all, which was held at night in a conservative town, improved 11 rankings when these other variables were considered. The second worst meeting, held in Proctor in 1983, improved nine slots. Most of these meetings, of course had nowhere else to go but up. But several improved dramatically. The ninth ranked meeting was convened in the Connecticut River valley town of Weathersfield. It improved 80 ranks when its night meeting, a more conservative voting record, location in the south, and other negatives were taken into account. The town of Proctor had four meetings in the bottom ten on the size controlled real democracy index. When other variables taken out of the mix as well (especially its population density, which is very high—it is geographically one of the smallest towns in the state) Proctor's ranks for the four meetings increased an average of 57 points.

The scatterplot in Figure XI-F demonstrates how meetings held at night with Australian ballots used (at least) to elect town officers the following day is the most powerful consideration of the lot. Those meetings above the diagonal line improved their rankings on the Best Democracy Index when variables other than size variables were controlled. Those below the line lost position. Meetings in towns like Proctor, Fair Haven and Brandon, which were saddled by the negative circumstances of real democracy, improved their standings dramatically when given credit for these handicaps. Meetings in towns like Strafford, Calais and Greensboro suffered huge losses on the Controlled Best Democracy Index because their environments raised

expectations far above the level their performances were able to match. While other variables had an impact, the influence of “night meetings with ballots the next day” on this dynamic is clear. Figure XI-F does not imply (it is critical to understand) that night meetings and ballots are good for democracy. They hurt it. A lot. But they do *excuse* citizens of these towns for a good portion of their lack of involvement. These are handicaps the citizen must overcome. Remove them (the full sample analysis says) and the town’s position in the catalogue of meetings will improve.

[FIGURE XI-F ABOUT HERE]

A meeting’s total *achievement*, of course, is a *combination* of the gain (or loss) it registered when these achieved variables (from meeting structure to political context) adjusted the Controlled Best Democracy Index and the gain or loss it registered earlier when the Controlled Best Democracy Index adjusted the original Raw Best Democracy Index. The CBDI explained exactly half of the variance in the RBDI. Thus it can be said that half of the reason a meeting looked, for instance, so good on the RBDI was because it was held in a small town, which produced high attendance rates which was a positive indicator of good democracy. The smaller town also produced smaller (absolute) numbers of people in attendance. The smaller number of people in attendance in turn enhanced participation and so on. These indicators were called ascribed variables because they were more or less defined by the nature of the place. Factors employed to explain the variance in the CBDI, called achieved variables because they were more or less caused by the kinds and behaviors of people living in the community,

fig 11 F

explained only 14 percentage points of the 50 percentage points of the variance left over in the RBDI after the CBDI was considered.<sup>29</sup>

Thus the importance of the achieved variables in explaining why or why not the meetings ranked so high (or low) on the original variable (the RBDI) was much less than the original control variables summarized in the CBDI. The changes noted above were dramatic deviations relative to a standard that already precluded a lot of change, much in the same way a second taken off a mile run is huge to real runners whose standards are set on the outer edge of human capacity but mundane to the rest of us. Looking at structure, SES, and political variables as potential explainers of 100 percent of the variance in meetings that were statistically free of the impact of size (represented by the CBDI) is like looking at a frog through a microscope. It helps us describe a complex organism but it can confuse the real picture. The value of looking at the impact of the achieved variables on the CBDI (which controls for the ascribed variables) rather than the RBDI (which does not) is that it *magnifies* the role of ascribed variables. It allows a more refined description. It's good to know in detail if and how and to what degree the achieved variables mattered. Considering them as adjustments to the CBDI lets us do that. But when we shut off the microscope it is also good to remember the real picture is dominated by the ascribed variables of the Controlled Best Democracy Index, which were related to community size and not the variables of the ABDI (The Achieved Best Democracy Index) which were related to the kinds of people in the towns, how they live, and what they have done or not done over the years to their town meetings.

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<sup>29</sup> Table XI-D indicated, therefore, that seven achieved variables explained 28 percent of the variance in the CBDI, which itself explained 50 percent of the variance in the RBDI. Thus these variables accounted for 28 percent of the 100 percent of the left over variance (after the CBDI was taken out and 14 percent of all the variance).



## WITNESS

**How Children Learn About Real Democracy**

*In 1949 when Susan McBride was twelve, her eighth grade teacher sent the class to town meeting. Here is her report (for which she received an A-) exactly as she wrote it in 1949 and gave it to me at a UVM women's basketball game in 1998.<sup>30</sup>*

Yesterday I attended the South Hero town meeting. I enjoyed it very much. Guy B. Horton called the meeting to order. The election of a moderator and town clerk was first. Mr. Horton himself was elected moderator. Mr. William Norman nominated Ray Mooney for town clerk. The nomination was seconded and he was elected. The health report was read by Dr. Buerman. It was accepted as read.

Next came the election of town officers. The town treasurer was Ray Allen and still is by the nomination of Mrs. E. Gardner. The previous selectmen were Henry McBride, Alan Kinney and Guy Horton. Mr. Peters stood up and nominated Henry Robinson in place of Mr. Horton and he was elected. The school directors were next. They were John McBride, Bea Gardner and Helen Kinney. Mrs. Gardner was nominated; also Bob McBride. This needed a vote by ballot. Mrs. Gardner won by 79 votes, while Mr. McBride had 48. I would have voted for Bea I think because she has been in before and is used to it. Henry Robinson, George Phelps, and Jack Friend were the town auditors. Darwin Branch was nominated in place of Henry Robinson. I don't think I would have voted for him because he is so busy in the store.

The previous listers were Raymond Larrow, Norman Lawrence, and Charles McBride. Raymond Larrow was nominated by Alan Kinney and seconded by Henry McBride. The road commissioner was Pat Patno. Ed Gardner and Charlie Troville were nominated and a ballot was taken. No one got this one so another was necessary. Mr. Patno got it with 63 votes. I would have voted for him if I was twenty-one, because he has had experience for a long time.

Next question was should the roads be open for winter travel? It was voted yes. I think they should be because of the school bus and the people living on the back roads. The next question was can the town borrow money? It was voted yes. I don't see why we can't if it is paid back. Shall all taxes be paid to the town treasurer? was the next question. That was voted yes also. I think that the town treasurer should handle all the town money. The vote was yes to whether or not we should pay the Public Health Nurse \$276. I certainly think we should for all the work she has done around South Hero. We are going to be on daylight savings time if Burlington does. That was a very sensible answer.

The last question shall the town sell malt and vinous beverages? The vote was yes on beer and no on liquor. I think I would have voted no for both of them.

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<sup>30</sup> In 1948, South Hero had 352 registered voters and 81 percent of them turned out to vote. Dewey got 159 and Truman 125. We know by Susan McBride's account (the town report contained no minutes) that if everyone in attendance at the South Hero Town meeting in 1949 voted in the school board election 127 of the 352 registered voters (36.1 percent) were in attendance. My size-based model from 1435 meetings held between 1970 and 1998 predicted attendance should have been 27.4 percent. If I could find more essays by 12 year olds I could do some serious research on town meeting in Vermont before 1970.

## BEST DEMOCRACY IN THE TOWNS

Some towns have higher combined democratic scores than others when the meetings held in them are averaged. Is it because of the nature of the town or the structure of the meetings held there or (as the meetings-based analysis suggests) a combination of both? Towns like Huntington often show up as producers of more democratic meetings and others like Proctor appear again and again near the bottom of the list. Towns as cases have been used throughout the book as a check on the findings obtained when the meeting is the unit of analysis. It is time to return for the last time to the set of 55 towns that contributed at least ten meetings each to the sample; now to determine if the aggregated democratic indicator of attendance, participation, women's equality and deliberative time is tied to towns in the same way it is tied to their meetings.

The first measure to check is the Raw (no considerations given) Best Democracy Index. (RBDI). We already know that the very best meeting of the 1434 on the RBDI was held in Belvidere in 1980. This was not a fluke. In the other 12 meetings we measured for Belvidere it consistently did better than the average town and became the best of the 55 towns with at least ten meetings studied. (See Plot 1 of Figure XI-G.) The worst meeting occurred in Richford the same year as Belvidere's best meeting. But Richford was not studied often enough to make averages meaningful. The second worst meeting however (Proctor in 1983) was held in a town with enough meetings to make the 55-town subset. My students traveled there ten different times in ten different years beginning in 1971 and ending in 1998. Was 1983 a fluke for Proctor? No. Proctor's meetings were consistently in the cellar. (See Plot 1 of Figure XI-G.)

[FIGURE XI-G ABOUT HERE]

fig 11 G

The next measure was the Controlled Best Democracy Index (CBDI) in which important size variables are statistically equalized; population of the town (for attendance) attendance at the meeting (for participation) and participation in the meeting (for length). Earlier we explored the very best meeting on the CBDI, which occurred in North Hero in 1994 and the very worst which occurred in Swanton in 1997. Swanton did not make the town-based data set. North Hero, with 11 entries in the meeting-based sample did. But it failed to become the top town overall. In fact the North Hero meeting of 1994 represented a remarkable deviation from the town's norm. (See Plot 3 of Figure XI-G.) North Hero's CBDI in 1994 (2.35) was 300 percent higher than its next highest score, .57, achieved in 1986. With 1994 included North Hero's CBDI average was .38 and it ranked 15<sup>th</sup> among the 55 towns. Without it the town fell to .16 and ranked 22.

It was the citizens of Huntington just down Big Hollow and then Huntington Hollow Roads<sup>31</sup> from where I live in Starksboro who produced the most democratic town of the 55 when the various size-related handicaps under which they labored are taken into account. Huntington ranked seventh on the Raw Best Democracy Index. But with the seventh and twelfth best meetings in the entire list of 1434 its 15 meetings in the sample returned an average *Controlled* Best Democracy Index of .69, the best of the lot. Moreover, Huntington achieved this status with steady improvements in their town meetings during the two decades between 1978 and 1998. No wild outliers inflate the picture. (See Plot 2 of Figure XI-G.) Proctor, which was poorest on real democracy with nothing controlled, occupied the same position when controls were applied to relieve it of its size-based handicaps. For purposes of discussion I therefore substituted the second worst town on the CBDI, Salisbury. Salisbury was even more consistent than Huntington

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<sup>31</sup> In its gorges and gaps this is northern Appalachia country.

and, interestingly, shows a mild improvement over the years. But overall its CBDI of .72 was lower than 53 of the other 54 towns in the study.

Comparisons of the two indexes show a wide gap between the best and the worst towns on the Raw Best Democracy Index (RBDI). Belvidere never dipped and Proctor never rose even close to the average. Note also that the trend-line for both is nosing slightly downward over time. Some of this is caused by the increase in town population which is weighted 40 percent in the measure and which (when left uncontrolled) works to depress attendance. The best and worst towns on the Controlled Best Democracy Index (CBDI), Huntington and Salisbury, are closer together. With size factors held constant (removing a good deal of the variance) the range of the CBDI is tighter than the RBDI. Still in the 24 meetings the two towns conducted over the period there was only one case when Huntington had a worse meeting than Salisbury. The first meeting done for Huntington (in 1978) was below the 1974 and 1983 meetings in Salisbury. Yet the gap between the two towns is still substantial in light of the fact that the two towns were statistical equals on population size, which has a lot to do with attendance, on numbers in attendance, which has a lot to do with participation, and the amount (and distribution) of participation, which has a lot to do with the length of the meeting. These three variables account for 80 percent of CBDI. Of note also is that with these factors controlled (especially population size) both towns' real democracy slopes trend *upward* between 1970 and 1998.

Considering all 55 towns together by their size is a handy way to focus on the towns as sponsors of meetings rather than the meetings as offspring of the towns. It also renews acquaintances with towns that have come and gone throughout the book in the context of real democracy considered as an aggregate of values (presence, participation, women's involvement

and duration) and in the context of each other's performance. (See Figure XI-H.) The book began, for instance, with a visit to the towns of Newark, Athens, Hinesburg and Shelburne in 1992. Newark, the little town about as far back in the Kingdom as one can get, is not the best democracy of the 55 in the town pool. But it came very close, a step below Belvidere and far above the third place town (Panton) on the Raw Best Democracy Index. Importantly it held its position in second place when its principal advantage (its small size) was neutralized by the Controlled Best Democracy Index. Belvidere, for instance, dropped from first on the RBDI to 17<sup>th</sup> on the CBDI. Newark has more than big deer and little lost trout steams. It has democratic citizens.

[FIGURE XI-H ABOUT HERE]

The southern Vermont town of Athens appeared only five times in the meeting sample and was excluded from the town-by-town analysis. But in those five meetings its RBDI average was strong enough (1.28) to place it a strong third between Newark and Panton and its CBDI (.59) would have placed it fifth. Given its size the Champlain Valley town of Hinesburg fell just about where it should have on the uncontrolled index, sixth from the bottom. (See Plot 1 of Figure XI-G.) Under controls it stepped up ten ranks. (See Plots 1 and 2 of Figure XI-H).

Finally the upscale town of Shelburne with its famous harbor on the lake, its first class museum, and its short commute to Burlington finished third from the bottom on the RBDI above Proctor and Williston. It was by far the biggest town in the sample, registering 2000 more voters than the next largest town, Jericho. Under controls, however, it didn't budge and remained

fig 11 H

locked third from the bottom. Nearby Williston, however, did improve.<sup>32</sup> A quick reflection on the *curvilinear* model used to size-handicap the meetings (and consequently the towns) helps explain. Increases in size at the extreme large-town end of the distribution do not penalize real democracy as much as they do at the front end of the distribution. Therefore removing the size handicap with statistical controls doesn't help much either.

Comparing Plots 1 and 2 of Figure XI-H shows how very useful the juxtaposition of the *raw* and *controlled* indexes can be. It is also a real pleasure to the sensibilities of one who has been intimately involved with the democracies of Vermont for forty years. I would have bet the house and the car that towns like Huntington, Strafford, Hyde Park, Fairfield, Craftsbury, and Greensboro would be buoyed to the top of the list of the best real democracies when their size and other size-related handicaps were controlled. Likewise I didn't have much hope for towns like Proctor, Salisbury, Bolton, Addison, Grand Isle and Alburg. Part of the explanation for this resides in the other considerations that affect town meeting democracy that have been the subject of a good portion of this book and which were considered on a meeting-by-meeting basis earlier in this chapter. Could it be, for instance, that towns, which looked so good on the CBDI, did so

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<sup>32</sup> Both Williston and Shelburne are adjacent to the Burlington-South Burlington complex (Williston to the east and Shelburne to the south) and the major highway arteries east and west go through them. Thus Route #2 east is known as "Williston Road" and Route #7 south is known as "Shelburne Road." When I was a teenager (before the interstates came), I hitchhiked 120 miles each way to and from work every weekend from Newbury to Vergennes (22 miles south of Burlington on Route #7) in the summers of 1958 and 1959. This was when I became interested in quantitative social science even beyond what my high school teacher Scott Mahoney had instilled in me. To kill the boredom of lonely country roads I kept a journal of my rides. (It became the first of several books I never finished writing.) But I did get to know a lot of Vermont a lot better and got to talk with a lot of interesting people. Now and then with one too interesting. Hitching from little town to little town for a total of about 3,000 miles over the two years, I averaged about 12 rides on a one-way trip. There were 18 towns between Newbury and Vergennes and a lot of rides were short. One of the things I remember most vividly was coming into Burlington from Williston from the east on late Sunday afternoons at chore time when my rides still stopped to let cattle cross the road within sight of the city. Heading south from Burlington toward Shelburne in the twilight of the summer evenings, there were still more barns than motels. Now, over forty years later, only the mountains' distant horizons remain the same.



because their positions were enhanced by variables yet to be considered like night meetings, the Australian ballot and population density?

To find out a regression model was crafted that defined the CBDI as the dependent variable, used the 55 towns as cases, and inspected a series of “usual suspect” independent variables established for the meeting-based equations used throughout the book. The expectation was of course that the earlier results based on the pooled 1435 meetings will reappear substantially intact in the aggregated 55 town model. This turned out to be the case. Both equations feature the combination of night meeting with an Australian ballot used the next day. Population density (people per road mile) was one of the strongest variables in each routine even though it entered second in the town-based regression and fourth in the meeting-based exercise. The upscale factor score made a strong showing for the towns while the liberal factor score did for the meetings. But these two variables share considerable variance (50 percent) and in this sense identify similar kinds of towns. Region, time to work, and turnout base failed to make the cut in the town-by-town analysis but this was because the smaller “N” increased the difficulty of reaching required levels of statistical significance.

[TABLE XI-E ABOUT HERE]

The basic difference in the two models was the appearance of the “Democratic base” vote in the towns. (This is the average vote for the Democratic candidate for governor for the elections surrounding the year each meeting was held.) I was pleased that the Democratic Party base vote made a last-minute appearance since it matches my hunch that towns that more strongly support Democratic candidates have (on the margin) more participatory cultures than those that do not. In Vermont the Democratic vote identifies two kinds of situations, blue collar

table 11 E

(often Catholic and conservative) towns of the north and especially northwest and grass roots progressive towns found here and there throughout the state, often near colleges. Both groups have participatory ethics in Vermont. The former is linked to lunch pail populism, the latter to ideology.

These variables in combination adjusted the positions of the towns on the best democracy index considerably. Hinesburg went from 40<sup>th</sup> on the CBDI (the Controlled Best Democracy Index) to the first position when the variables in Table XI-E were controlled. Remember Hinesburg began ranked 50<sup>th</sup> of the 55 towns on the Raw Best Democracy Index (RBDI). The size related variables in the CBDI improved it 9 ranks and the other achieved variables in Table XI-E added on 39 ranks of achievement. Other towns improved substantially as well. In the Burlington “metropolitan” area Williston, St. George, and Shelburne gained 30, 29 and 24 ranks respectively. Up in the Kingdom the old railroad town of Brighton improved 27 ranks (from 45<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup>). The neighboring town to me (in Starksboro), Lincoln, improved 21 ranks and Proctor, the old company town next to Rutland (Vermont’s second largest city) improved 21. Newbury, my original hometown, went from 31 to 16 but Starksboro where I live now lost position falling from 39 to 49.

Towns that lost the most tended to be towns that ranked higher on the CBDI in the first place. Four of the ten biggest losers ranked in the top ten of the CBDI, Strafford, Charlotte, Fairfield and Warren. Only three were in the bottom half. This leads to the point (that was made for the meeting-based analysis) that gains and losses for towns based on differentials from a ranking that already had taken a considerable amount of variance out of the picture should be viewed with caution. We can say with certainty that Hinesburg was helped the most on the Best

Democracy Index when variables such as meeting structure, town SES characteristics and town political culture were controlled and we can say with certainty that Norwich and Strafford (the adjacent towns over in the Connecticut River Valley near Dartmouth College) were disadvantaged the most. But we know from the all-town analysis that these advantages and disadvantages paled considerably when they competed with the size-related variables in the CBDI, which were neutralized in the equation that (in the first place) produced the advantages and disadvantages of the variables in Table XI-E. Looking at them as we have is a handy way to magnify the impact of these variables. But this magnification must be placed in the context of the total picture.

Thus the final exercise is to combine the CBDI with the variables in Table XI-E. This will produce a more accurate view of the degree to which citizens overcome the handicaps of ascribed variables (like living in a big town, one of the components of the CBDI) *and* the achieved variables arrayed in Table XI-E (like living in a town where the town meeting is held at night and voting for town officers is done the following day by Australian ballot). Instead of looking at reasons why the size-controlled variable (CBDI) varied the concern must be shifted to how the CBDI and all the other variables in Table XI-E combine to account for the variance in the towns' original rankings on real democracy. In other words we need to adjust the Raw Best Democracy Index (RBDI), when a town's performance is taken at face value, in light of *everything* we know about what makes for good or bad real democracy.

When this is done the CBDI gobbles up most of the credit for most of the explained variation in the RBDI and the variables in Table XI-E feed on the rest. Since this is so we should expect Hinesburg, which gained only nine rankings with the shift from the RBDI to the CBDI, to

fall considerably from its lofty position (a 39 rank gain to first place) achieved when the variables in Table XI-E were considered alone in their relationship to the CBDI: this because the CBDI's weight in the final equation was so strong. It does. Hinesburg fell from first to twenty-first. What is the best we can say for Hinesburg? Think about it this way. The *town* of Hinesburg clearly deserves its 51<sup>st</sup> ranking (out of 55) on the independent condition of its democracy as expressed in the RBDI. But the *citizens* of Hinesburg do not. They overcame a series of handicaps (especially the size-related variables in the CBDI) and finished above average on democratic achievement, ranking 21<sup>st</sup> among the 55 towns. And the reason they did is *not* explainable by the kinds of people in their town (in the aggregate) or their population density per road mile or the number of Democrats in town. All these reasons and a dozen more used here and there throughout the book have been neutralized by the regression equations.

Figure XI-I compares the towns on their raw and final achieved democracy ranks providing a picture of town performances both for their democracy, the probability that any single citizen will be involved in town meeting, and their citizenship, the capacity of citizens to overcome the handicaps to democratic performance associated with the place they live. Note that there is a relationship between the original score and the final score. This means there is something in towns like Panton, Belvidere and Newark that worked to give them higher citizenship scores for which none of the variables used can account. Whatever that is it means that Newark, Belvidere and Panton ought to have higher final scores because their position on the original score gives them a leg up. It also means that towns like Stowe, Williston and Proctor ought to have lower final scores for citizenship achievement because they were handicapped by something residing in their original scores which to this point has escaped detection.

[FIGURE XI-I ABOUT HERE]

Thus it could be said that Panton is truly the worst town for citizenship, not Proctor because its negative residual from its predicted achieved democracy score is much larger than Proctor's. And perhaps the very best town for citizenship is Stowe, not Huntington, because its final achieved democracy score was further above the line of best fit between the RBDI and the ABDI established by the 55 town data base. Seen in this light Hinesburg looks better still. Figure XI-J plots the various meetings in Stowe and Panton for their raw and achieved scores, Plots 1 and 2, and for their achieved scores controlling for their position on the original ranking.

[FIGURE XI-J ABOUT HERE]

Again the emphasis is important: pick a citizen at random for Panton and one from Stowe and the probability that the Panton citizen is partaking of town meeting democracy is greater than the probability that the Stowe citizen is. But given the handicaps with which Stowe is burdened (mostly size related) the citizens of Stowe have participated far more than the lessons from all the towns predict they would and the citizens of Panton have participated less. Stowe has distinguished itself from the great number of towns on the lower end of the RBDI by doing more real democracy. Panton has distinguished itself from the great number of towns on the upper end of the original real democracy scale by doing less.

These are the extreme deviations. But Figure XI-I displayed lots of deviations that must have been caused by something not yet considered. This now becomes the critical question. What do we know about these towns and their meetings that elevate them above or depress them below the manifest expectations that have been the subject of so much of our discussion to this point? What makes the citizens of Stowe, Hyde Park, and Huntington, for instance, more

fig 11 I

fig 11 J



inclined to practice real democracy than the citizens of (for instance) Addison, Elmore, and Panton? Statisticians would call the exercise of finding out “exploring the residuals” or “looking at the outliers”—those cases that deviate the most from expectations. This is our final task. I doubt the answer will surprise. It has been dangling in front of our noses for some time.