

## Political Science

**Bryan, Frank M. Real Democracy:  
The New England Town  
Meeting and How It Works.**

Univ. of Chicago. Dec. 2003. c.297p.  
index. ISBN 0-226-07797-7. pap. \$19.

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This book is a labor of love for Bryan (Univ. of Vermont); to do a thorough study of the New England town meeting, he began his research in 1969. Since then, utilizing the assistance of many students, he has obtained data on 1,669 town meetings (as of 1998). The results presented in the book are derived from 1,435 meetings, only 2 percent of which were held in towns of more than 5000 people. Bryan's narrative contains personal accounts from some of these meetings, as well as tables and graphs covering turnout and participation. A web site provides an additional 300 tables and various supplementary material. Bryan offers reflections on the political and social history of Vermont, the changing fortunes of participatory democracy in

the United States, and fascinating footnotes (over 500) that reflect a deep familiarity with the literature of political science. He concludes with a series of theoretical questions (e.g., "Is the town meeting a true paragon of participatory democracy?") that will stimulate further research. This book is informative and entertaining, a rare combination for a scholarly study, and is highly recommended for academic and public libraries.—*Thomas A. Karel, Franklin & Marshall Coll. Lib., Lancaster, PA*