CHAPTER IV

WHAT IF WE HELD A DEMOCRACY;
WOULD ANYONE COME?

> *If liberty and equality, as is thought by some, are chiefly to be found in democracy, they will be best attained when all persons alike share in the government to the utmost.*
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> —Plato (From *Politics, Book IV*)

It is March 3, 1992. Vermont lies white across the mountains of northern New England. The winter has been normal—too long and too cold for most of the people of the planet who live somewhere to the south. But now this part of America's great north woods is stretching ever so slightly. The natives sense it and take heart in the hint of nature's connections; the seasonal bends of cold and warm that wind behind them along a lost river of time. The very coldest and the very loneliest corner of this little American state is what Vermonters call the Northeast Kingdom.

Here 2000 square miles of tough sledding pitch and snarl hard on the Canadian border while off to the east New Hampshire's high peaks stand guard. Here 48 little towns have reached accommodation with the land and the moose and the bear and the beaver that share it with them. Here on this day in the center of the Kingdom in a town called Newark, citizens will once again navigate a yearly enterprise of their own connections. They will come together to govern themselves—face to face. This kind of politics has been flowing through the Kingdom for two centuries in a way that seems as untouched by the years as the great cedar swamps that mark the

lower contours of the hardwood hills. This is how the people fashion their living place no less than

the snow and the sun.

DEMOCRACY IN THE KINGDOM, ATHENS, AND THE GREAT VALLEY

The day began clear, the sun bright across the long rolling Connecticut[1] which some thirty

miles to the east, separates Vermont from New Hampshire. Later in the morning if one were

perched atop the hills of the Kingdom looking down over the land one would see what might appear

to be tiny ants creeping along trails through the bog and fir. These are people in cars and trucks

traveling toward their democracy. In Newark they are going to a little schoolhouse on a three-mile

patch of paved road at the town's center. The other 33 miles of town highways in Newark are made

of gravel and dirt. It is a town that, those who know Vermont best would wager, leads the state in

per capita chain saws.[2]

The Canadian border town of Newport is 25 miles to the north and St. Johnsbury, the

gateway to the Kingdom, is 25 miles south. These are tiny little places by American standards but in

Newark they seem big. There are street lights and a movie theater in each. Newark has but one

store, and (unless you know the lay of the land) it is not advisable to head out of town to the east or

west, especially in the winter. When the U.S. Census Bureau took their readings in 1990, they found

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[1]The Connecticut is to New England what the Mississippi is to America. It runs down the middle and marks a division that makes a difference.

[2]In the *1988-89 Vermont Yearbook* were listed two cemeteries, a church (Methodist), one organization (the Newark E-Z Riders—a snowmobile club), and believe it or not a golf course called Grandad's Invitational. National Survey, Inc., *The Vermont Yearbook 1988-89* (Chester, Vermont: National Survey Inc.): 330.

the typical family made $24,000 in Newark while statewide the figure was $42,000. Most of the

residents are working people. Only nine percent were classified as professionals (the statewide

figure was 23 percent) and only 12 percent of those over 25 years old had college degrees. The

state's percentage was 34.

The citizens of Newark had been "warned" to be at the school by 10 a.m. to begin their town

meeting. The first order of business was to deal with eight issues concerning the schools. This took

less than an hour.[3] Then the official town meeting began. It too had been "warned" in the official

town report earlier in February. The Warning read as follows:

> The legal voters of Newark are hereby warned and notified to meet in the school in
> said Town on Tuesday, March 3, 1992, immediately following the Annual School
> Meeting to transact the following business:[4]

A list of 32 items followed including:

> (8) To see if the Town will vote to have Newark town roads open to snowmobiles
> which use these highways according to highway rules and do not exceed 25 miles
> per hour. The town will not be responsible for any accidents caused by
> snowmobiles.
>
> and
>
> (22) To see if the town will appropriate the sum of $100 to Umbrella, Inc. to be used
> to provide services for adults and children in areas of domestic violence, sexual
> assault, child abuse prevention, child care and support groups.[5]

The snowmobile debate started just before lunch and lasted 14 minutes. In that time 13

people spoke. Two of these spoke twice: Violet Carr, who had defeated incumbent Tom Girard for

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[3]The "town meeting" actually begins with the school meeting even though the two are legally separate in some towns like Newark. For a full explanation see page _____ below

[4]Town of Newark, *Town Report*, (Year ending December 1991): 28.

[5]Town of Newark, *Town Report*, 28-29.

Selectman at 11:30, and a man my students identified as "Bill with the plaid shirt and glasses." At

11:10 there were 87 people at the meeting, 46 men and 41 women. Ten of these were standing in the

back and along either wall of the school's "all purpose room." There were 18 empty seats. This

means that all but eight of the seats would have been filled had everyone been seated. By the time

the snowmobile question came to the floor at 11:51, there were 96 attenders, 51 men and 45 women.

This was the highest of the four counts taken during the meeting. There were two voice votes taken

on snowmobiles; "yea" to shut off debate on the question and "nay" to allowing them on town roads.

Money for victims of domestic violence and child abuse (Article 22) was approved after a vote to

include it with 12 other funding proposals for regional service providers and resolve them as one.

The process began at 1:51 and the bundle passed by a voice vote at 1:59. At 2:40 there were 34 men

and 30 women remaining at the meeting. At 2:45 they adjourned and left the little schoolhouse.[6]

The sun was easing downward in the west preparing to settle behind Vermont's Green Mountains. It

would freeze hard again that night, but the sun had been as high that day as in early October.

Tomorrow it would be even higher. This made the people happy.

WITNESS

> *In December of 1998 I went to a Christmas Party for the staff of the Addison Career Direction Center in Middlebury, Vermont, where my wife taught office practice skills. There I met the author of the following witness, Sas Carey, who 37 years earlier had been what the politically correct would call a "counter-culturalist" and the rest of us called hippy. Very young and idealistic, she and a friend had moved to what she called "the closest approximation to God's country we could find," Newark, Vermont. She told me she still had the notes of her first experience at a town meeting which occurred in Newark in 1967. She agreed to dig them up for me. Here they are exactly as she scribbled them down, stored them in an old box and preserved them through three decades of a mobile and fascinating life.*

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[6]Stephanie LaPoint, "The 1992 Comparative Town Meeting Study; Town of Newark," (Burlington, Vermont: University of Vermont, The Real Democracy Data Base, March, 1992).

A Hippy's View of Newark

For the first time we had the opportunity to see all the old timers of the town, and all congregated, so the day promised to be an exciting one. We wondered how these individuals would act when they were together.

No one seemed too out of character from what we had seen before. Al Cole was moderator and he remained the gentleman we knew him to be. On the other hand, wheeler-dealer twinkle-eyes Cross was trying to get whatever he could out of any situation. He ran around trying to get other people to say things for him and trying to sway votes all the time. A new (to us) town character was Violet (?) Carr who told Al from the back of the room that his teeth would fall out it was so cold. Then she told Cross to go right up we could hear him all right. Next she informed Merton Corriless that she would be glad to go out on a ski doo with him to list.

The plan of attack was to pass over items, thus leaving them for next year to pass over.

The atmosphere of the room or the physical features were as life must have been 30 years ago. The pot bellied wood stove burned inefficiently in the back of the room where all the old men and some sensible women and others crowded for warmth. Jean nursed Cathy there, with the little girls watching and giggling. That is, one watched fascinated while the other giggled, not quite brave enough to look. The two women who through hard work looked quite "tough" were the ones most enthralled with the baby and did not move too far from her except to vote. The deacon's benches were placed along the walls facing one another like at a Quaker meeting. There were 45 people attending and of them 33 voters. Upon the raised platform in the front there was a table where three women sat and the moderator stood beside it. When one vote needed to be cast, the woman farthest to the right would mark a piece of paper, hand it to Evelyn Cross, who handed it to Rose Baird, then to Al Cole who immediately dropped it in the conveniently located waste basket.

The big issues were whether Donn and Jean could vote, whether Newark should have a state lister come in and whether the tax should be raised to $9.20 from $7.20. The closest election was for road commissioner. Al won 16-14. As soon as Donn and Jean were assured a vote, Donn was nominated lister and elected. Then Jean was nominated Auditor, she lost the first time and won the second time. Cross was all for a state lister but good old independent Vermonters don't want the state meddling in the town affairs, so that was voted down. As to the tax, that was a question as to whether the tax should be raised or the grand list ($2613). The tax was raised.

The first amazing thing that I noticed was that the figures and business was down to terms that I could easily understand. The largest sum of money mentioned was $9000 needed for high school students (13). Another thing that seemed funny was that they could vote someone in to plow the roads. It is amazing to see a farm community left in this country. Ken says anyone brought up on a farm could drive a big truck, plow, and grate the roads. Also, a farmer would have the time to devote to the job, whereas a businessman has to report to his job every day. I couldn't see the town meeting in Newtown elect a road commissioner, although maybe they do.

It was nice to see democracy working. Every time people had to vote, they wrote the vote on a piece of paper and filed up on the platform, depositing their vote in a little wooden box. Then the civil court, made up of three people, went up to count the ballots. One man couldn't write so his daughter (I guess) took out paper for him each time, he told her his vote, she wrote it down and he proceeded to the platform to deposit it. The meeting was informal enough so that anyone who wanted to say anything could without feeling out of place. The people were mostly farm people, with about ¾ over 50 years of age. Al said it was nice to see some young people there for a change. Others must have thought so too because they elected Donn and Jean right away. As Donn said, we must have a better standing in the community than say the Learnards because they would never be elected. They are considered odd-balls (we are too but to a lesser extent).

I doubt if I have said anything profound, but wanted to record this really great event, so I could remember it in future years.[7]

Leaving the Kingdom and traveling south out of Newark 20 miles puts you on an interstate highway that runs the ridges west of the Connecticut River. Down the valley 100 miles it is a few degrees warmer, but there is more snow.[8] The hills are steeper and the gullies sharper. Up in these hills about 10 miles west as the crow flies from where the Connecticut separates Bellows Falls, Vermont, from Walpole, New Hampshire, is the town of Athens. At 10 a.m. the people there also began their town meeting. They too met in the elementary school. The citizens of Athens deliberated until 12:14, broke for lunch, and began the meeting again promptly at 1:00 p.m. They adjourned at 1:40 and got home an hour earlier than the people of Newark.

Athens is geographically smaller than Newark and a bit closer to some bigger places like Brattleboro, population 12,241, and Springfield, population 9,579. There are 57 miles of maintained roads in town. Three are paved. As in Newark, it is easy to go north and south in Athens but tough to go east and west. Unlike Newark, however, once you get out of town, east-west travel is much easier and, while there is no reason one would want to go east from Newark (unless you hunt, log, or

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[7] Sas Carey, "Town Meeting of Newark, Vermont," March 7, 1967.

[8] In the hill country of northern New England, unlike in most other places in America, 100 miles is a very long way.

snowmobile), traveling east from Athens puts you in the more developed section of the lower Connecticut valley in fairly short order. It is only two hours to Boston and a bit less to Hartford, Connecticut, with its 320,000 people (more than half the population of the entire state of Vermont). The citizens of Athens are in some ways different from those of Newark. The median income of Athens ($27,778 in 1990) was higher as was the percentage (21) of the town's population over 25 years old who held a college degree. The Census Bureau classified 22 percent of the town's employed as professionals.

The attendance at the town meeting in Athens averaged 81, 38 men and 49 women. Thirty-one of these (16 women and 15 men) participated verbally at least once. Eleanor Bemis, who held two elective offices, school director and library trustee, led the list of speakers with 13 participations scattered over nine different issues.[9] The article which took up the most time was the election of town officers (Article No. 4). Action began at 11:05 and continued until adjournment for lunch at 12:14. Seventeen different people participated a total of 29 times (not counting the "seconding" of nominations). In 69 minutes the townspeople filled 17 different offices. They held five secret ballot elections; that is, after nominations are made, paper ballots (simply blank slips of paper) are handed out and the people file to a ballot box and vote. They gave a standing ovation to Marjorie Walker, a retiring town officer to whom the Town Report for that year was dedicated, heard two people decline nominations, and filled 13 uncontested offices.

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[9]David Bemis, who held the town's most prestigious office, one of the three elected selectmen, and was also on the Housing Grant Committee, spoke seven times and Robert Bemis, who was a Campbell Fund Trustee, a fence viewer, a tree warden and a state appointed Forest Fire Warden spoke once. Kary Bennett, "The 1992 Comparative Town Meeting Study: Town of Athens," (Burlington, Vermont: The University of Vermont, the Real Democracy Data Base, March, 1992). Town of Athens, *Town Report*, (Year ending December 1991). Town of Athens, Marjorie Walker, Town Clerk, "Minutes: Athens Town Meeting March 3, 1992," *Town Report* (Year ending December 1992).

Here is how town clerk Marjorie Walker's minutes described the most contested race:

Constable 2-Year Term: Philip Reeve nominated John Price. Motion seconded by James Waryas. David Bemis nominated David Ryan. Motion seconded by Norman Knight. Ileane Fine nominated Don Elliott. Motion seconded by Patricia Noyes. Paper ballots prepared.

John Price	25
David Ryan	20
Don Elliott	39

Moderator Fine declared no majority. Paper ballots prepared.

John Price	25
David Ryan	15
Don Elliott	42

Moderator Fine declared Don Elliott elected.[10]

Back up north but clear over on the state's western border where Vermont and New York face each other across Lake Champlain (the sixth largest in America), the people of two of that region's valley towns have already been to their town meetings the night before. Shelburne and Hinesburg are both an easy commute to Vermont's largest city, Burlington, which has a population of 39,300 and is in the state's only "standard statistical metropolitan area," Chittenden County. There one finds the state's major hospital, its only commercial airport, its university (and several other smaller colleges), its television station and its major employer—the IBM Corporation—which employees more people than the combined populations of 35 of Vermont's cities and towns.

The towns of Shelburne and Hinesburg are flatter than Newark and Athens. Consequently, the people there can see the mountains of Vermont (and New York, for that matter) better than most Vermonters even if they don't live in them the way the others do. This is a place where the roads are more numerous and easier traveled. (76 percent of the roads in the two towns are paved.) This is a

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[10]Town of Athens, "Minutes Town Meeting 1992."

place that is warmer than the Kingdom and has less snow than southern Vermont. This is a place

where the people have more formal education, higher incomes, and are more apt to have been raised

outside Vermont. In a word they would be considered by most standards to be more cosmopolitan.

And they are younger. The median age of Shelburne and Hinesburg is substantially lower than the

statewide average. In Newark and Athens it is substantially higher. The two towns share a short

border where the northeast corner of Hinesburg abuts the southwest corner of Shelburne. Shelburne

is on the lake; Hinesburg is not, and they are both members of the same union high school district.

The Hinesburg meeting began at 7:00 p.m. on Monday night at the Champlain Valley Union

High School's auditorium. More people came to the Hinesburg meeting than came to either Newark

or Athens. By 9:00 p.m. there were 145 people, 84 men and 61 women. When Article 11 was on

the floor at 10:15, a standing vote indicates attendance was 171. Attendance varied more here than

at Newark or Athens. At 7:10 there were only 69 people present and at 10:45, twenty-five minutes

prior to adjournment, there were only 73.

Over the course of the meeting 74 different people spoke at least once. They resolved 14 of

the 17 articles on the Warning, leaving the other three, including the election of all town officers, for

a paper ballot vote on Tuesday when the polls would be open all day. Twenty-seven voice votes

were taken along with two standing votes. Article 3 caused the most debate and took the most time.

This was the town budget. It included all general purpose government expenditures except for

highways which were considered later on. It read as follows:

> Shall the town appropriate $408,411 to defray the general expenses of the town?
> (Report on page 8. Budget on pages 41-43.)[11]

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[11]Town of Hinesburg, "Warning for 1992," *Town Report,* (Year ending December 1991): 2-4.

Discussion began at 7:32 and lasted 52 minutes. There were 55 different acts of participation on Article 3 by 25 different people, 14 men and 11 women. Robert Bast, chairperson on the selectboard, spoke nine times and Lisa Carlson, a town auditor spoke eight. Four votes were taken all by voice. One added $5,000 to create a baseball field. Two "nay" votes were recorded, one to raise the budget by $25,000 and another to lower it by $18,000. The final budget was approved at 8:24 p.m.

Hinesburg wrapped up its town meeting with the "new business" article found on all town warnings. It was worded as follows: "Article 17: To transact any other business proper to be brought before said meeting."[12] Discussion began at 11:06. The people still present voted 23-40 not to require "warning" the use of surplus funds in future town meetings. By a voice vote they decided not to advise the selectboard "to call a special meeting regarding use of any surplus funds applied to the Town Hall renovation bond, if the bond issue passed."[13] They also voted to advise the board of selectmen to "carefully consider" the option of moving town meeting to another day, and not to accept Roger Kohn's proposal (he was a member of the town planning commission) for "facilitating voluntary quarterly payment of property taxes." The meeting was adjourned at 11:15 p.m.[14]

Just northwest of Hinesburg the town of Shelburne started its meeting at 7:34 that same Monday evening in the gymnasium of the middle school. Shelburne, unlike Hinesburg, has lake

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[12]Town of Hinesburg, "Warning for 1992," 4.

[13] Town of Hinesburg, "Minutes of the 1992 Hinesburg Annual Town Meeting," *Town Report* (Year ending December 1992): 49-51. Laurie Harbour, Evan Goldstein and Jay Schwartz, "The 1992 Comparative Vermont Town Meeting Study: Town of Hinesburg," (Burlington, Vermont: The University of Vermont, the Real Democracy Data Base, March 1992).

[14]*Ibid.*

frontage. It is closer to Burlington. It is the home of one of America's finest museums of 19th

Century rural life (the Shelburne Museum), the sprawling "Webb Estate" and a plethora of upscale

resorts. On clear quiet mornings in the early fall, balloonists float their colorful craft over the

countryside while in Shelburne Harbor hundreds of elite sailboats begin a day on the ice blue lake

surrounded by mountains bathed in the brightness of New England's upland fall foliage. Both

Hinesburg and Shelburne are far different from Newark and Athens. But Shelburne is even more so.

In Hinesburg the gasoline culture of the old Vermont is still visible here and there. They play more

tennis in Shelburne.

Preliminary to placing the first article on the floor town moderator Sam Bloomberg called

upon Reverend Alfred Stefanik of the Trinity Episcopal Church to give the invocation. The flag

salute was led by members of Junior Girl Scout Troop 98 and Brownie Troop 50. A moment of

silence was observed for two deceased local citizens. One was Richard Snelling, former

representative from Shelburne to the state legislature and chairperson of the New England and

National Governors Association. He had been elected to serve more years as Governor of Vermont

than any person since 1820. He was also appointed by Presidents Carter and Reagan to the

Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations. There is no doubt that he was one of

Vermont's most successful public figures in the second half of the 20th Century. The other, Joan

Ellwood, was a former schoolteacher who had served as Chief Dispatcher for the Police Department

for twenty years. The town report was also dedicated to Snelling and Ellwood. Both received a

page describing their lives. Snelling got 322 words. Ellwood got 369.[15] In death and democracy

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[15] Town of Shelburne, *Town Report*, (Year ending December 1991).

their time was equal. Town officers were then introduced and two state legislators representing

Shelburne in Montpelier spoke for 12 minutes about events at the state level of interest to the town.

There were only five articles on the Warning. Articles 3, 4, and 5, the election of town

officers, approval of the budget, and a $15,000 request to support the acquisition of land to "preserve

open space and natural resources," could not be decided at the meeting. Discussion was allowed

under the "other business" article (Article 2) but the voting would take place the next day. Thus the

first article was the only one that required a decision: "To hear and act upon the report of the town

officers and the Auditor's Report for the budgetary period July 1, 1990, through June 30, 1991." It

took less than a minute for the 131 people (69 men and 62 women) present to approve Article 1.

The town meeting was then recessed and the school meeting opened. There were seven

articles on the school warning. The first five were to be dealt with then and there and the final two,

election of the school directors and a budget of $4,978,108 would be voted on the following day by

Australian ballot. Articles 1 through 4 were resolved in nine minutes with 11 acts of participation

shared by five people. Pamela Pierce, a member of the school board, led the discussion with six of

the 11 participations.

The new business article (Article 5) was dominated by presentations by the town's two

school principals and a budget explanation by the chairman of the school board.[16] The presentations

and the discussion attending them lasted 39 minutes. Fourteen people participated, three who had

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[16]The unsigned minutes of the school meeting reported it this way: "School Board member Mike Errecart presented the 1992-1993 school budget to the *audience*." (Emphasis my own.) I doubt whether the people at the meetings in Newark, Athens, or Hinesburg would have considered themselves members of an audience. Perhaps the attenders at Shelburne did not either. But somehow the term does seem to fit Shelburne better. Town of Shelburne, "Minutes 1992 School Meeting," *Town Report*, (Year ending December 1992).

already done so and 11 new participators. Each of the 11 new speakers participated only once,

however, so the total number of participations was only 16.

After the adjournment of the school meeting, the town meeting reconvened and took up a

discussion of the budget. This lasted 68 minutes. It featured 20 new participators and three people

who had already participated. The meeting recessed at 10 p.m. "until Tuesday, March 3, 1992, to

reconvene at the fire station at 7 a.m. for voting by Australian ballot." When the polls closed at 7

p.m. Tuesday evening the town budget had passed 827 to 463, the school budget had been approved,

849 to 450 and open space had been funded 921 to 384. Alice Winn defeated Roderick Fisher for a

three-year term as selectman and incumbent selectman Barbara Mann defeated Christopher Davis

756 to 494.

It is clear that the settings *for* town meeting democracy and the processes *of* town meeting

democracy vary considerably. If that be so, then the question is on us like a chicken on a bug. To

what extent are these variations associated with concomitant variations in the quality of real

democracy?   While there is debate over the link between the quantity of participation and the

quality of democracy, I see no need to reject the assumption that the first and most important thing

we need to know about real democracy is the extent to which it is practiced. Fundamental to real

democracy is being there. Participation as *presence* is the threshold concept. Once we know more

about the levels of attendance at town meeting and after we have determined the degree to which

these levels vary, the conditions that coincide with both can be sought out. But that is for later. For

now I begin with the most natural of questions: if a democracy were held, how many would come?

WALKING THE FENCE

Consider Maidstone, Vermont. On Monday evening 1996 at 9:53 p.m. James "Pete" Fay made the last participation at the town meeting there. Maidstone is a town in the Northeast Kingdom on the border with New Hampshire along the Connecticut River. It's a wild place offering over 150 acres of land for every man, woman and child who lives there – a population density of about four per square mile.[17] Fay asked about the status of the town's old school bus. At that time there were 14 people left in the town hall, which measures 20 feet by 40 feet. Five minutes later the meeting adjourned. When the seven men and seven women walked out of the Maidstone town hall at 10:00 p.m., light snow was falling. Within yards of the little building began the forest. There the bobcats stalked their prey, great lonely owls swept silently through the spruce tops and the moose stood stoic in the thickest fir, waiting for another dawn. Pete was with his wife Marie. She was an elected town officer, one of the most important, a lister. The Fays got into their car and drove away down the dirt road into the still, cold, black Kingdom night.

We counted attendance about 5100 times in 1435 meetings between 1970 and 1998 and Maidstone's 14 was the lowest count of all. But town meetings are dynamic ventures. Like legislative bodies everywhere the attendance ebbs and flows. Accordingly we counted it at least four times during every day meeting and three times at night meetings. That night in Maidstone the town moderator, Shawn Connant, called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.[18] At 7:30 there were 51 people

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[17] Maidstone is best known for its beautiful lake, campground and state forest.

[18] A few towns hold their meetings on Tuesday evening. Tuesday is by law town meeting day and meetings can be held that evening only if no "Australian ballots" are to be used since all voting must take place on Tuesday. If paper ballots were used for voting during the day on Tuesday and the meeting were held Tuesday evening, town officers might be voted out of office before the meeting began.

present. At 9:31 the town meeting was adjourned and the school meeting began. At that time 24

people remained. The average attendance for the evening was 38.[19] "Round numbers," Samuel

Johnson once said, "are always false." Actually they can be worse than false. They can be boring.

Unfortunately that is the way with so much of importance in the world.

Skinny Dipping with Raw Numbers

In Vermont public nudity is a crime. Skinny dipping is not. It is time to look closely at a

series of town meeting attendance numbers in the raw. I find them fascinating. If they seem boring it

may help to remember them as they are. Naked. Consider first the extremes. How many people

present at the average town meeting when attendance is high? How many when it is low? What is

the gap between the two? Second, what is the average attendance for the average town? This is the

most useful number. It can also be the most misleading. Averages hide things. A third measure is

needed; the variance of the attendance – its distribution along a continuum that begins in the meeting

where attendance is the lowest (Maidstone in 1996), travels through the mean and finally arrives at a

point where the meeting with the highest attendance is located.

1435 town meetings supply the data to construct these measurements. All were held between

1970 and 1998 and most were not unlike the four meetings in Newark, Athens, Hinesburg, and

Shelburne. One of the hundreds of data points we recorded in each of these meetings was a series of

counts of those in attendance.[20] The first came one-half hour after the meeting began. The second

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[19] The three attendances we used for the average (beginning, middle and end) were 51, 49 and 14. Todd Stewart, Lee Stewart, and Mary Stewart, "The 1996 Comparative Town Meeting Study: Town of Maidstone," (Burlington, Vermont: University of Vermont, the Rea1 Democracy Data Base, March 1996). Town of Maidstone, *Town Report,* (Year ending December 1995).

[20]Attendance was the easiest variable to measure. After the first cuts were made leaving 1438 cases in the data base, only

was taken one-half hour before the noon lunch break. Counts were also made one-half hour after the

afternoon meeting began and before the next to the last item on the town warning was taken up.[21]

Three simple statistics were constructed from these data to form basic measures of town meeting

attendance. The first is the highest of the four counts recorded during the day. The second is the

lowest and the third is the average.

Which statistic to use depends, of course, on one's purposes. Combining the counts to form

an average underestimates town meeting attendance if the purpose is to report how many people

expended the necessary effort to come to town meeting and remain for a significant amount of time.

But using the highest attendance recorded overestimates the number of people at town meeting if the

purpose is to approximate a measure that might be called "attender minutes" of town meeting. Under

such a measure, for instance, a town meeting lasting 100 minutes with 100 people in attendance

throughout would have a potential of 10,000 attender minutes. To the extent that some of these

people come late and/or leave early attender minutes declines.

A brief return to the towns of our earlier analysis provides illustrations. Attendance reached

its highest point in Newark just before lunch when there were nine percent more people in

attendance than when it was recorded the first time. Seventy-eight percent of these returned after the

noon break. Five minutes before adjournment this number was reduced by 15 percent. In Athens the

attendance was more stable. At its lowest point it was 84 percent of what it was at its highest point.

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five of these had missing data on attendance. All resulted from the fact that only one count was taken.

[21]The last item is typically labeled "new" or "other" business. Since the time spent on this item varies from none to over an hour, it was necessary to take the last count of the day before new business was taken up. For meetings held at night, attendance was counted three times: one-half hour after the meeting began, when one-half of the warning items had been resolved and prior to the time the next to the last warning item arrived.

(In Newark this figure was 67 percent.) In Hinesburg the meeting adjourned at 11:15 p.m. At 10:45 only half of the voters present at 9 p.m. (when attendance was the highest) still remained. In Shelburne the attendance at 9:45, fourteen minutes prior to adjournment, was 72 percent of what it was at 9 p.m.

Most of the variation in attendance is caused by an exodus that often occurs near the end of the meeting. But it can also be the result of the positioning of critical issues on the town's "Warning" which, by law, must be published 30 days before town meeting day. If important issues appear near the end of the meeting, attendance is more apt to be stable than if they appear right before lunch or early in the afternoon. At night meetings especially, the resolution of a particularly controversial issue can signal a sharp decline in attendance. This is one reason why using the highest attendance recorded may be a more accurate reflection of the true attendance at any one point in time.[22]

There are other reasons to use the highest count measure. It is conservative since there is little doubt that even at the point when the highest count was taken there were people who had already come and gone or who would appear later on in the meeting and thus not be counted. The highest count measure really means that at least this number went to town meeting and very likely a few more. Important also is the suspicion that the effort to attend at all carries more conceptual importance than sticking it out to the end. Other measures of participation used by political scientists do not adjust for the boredom factor. We may know how many people voted. We don't ask if they filled out the entire ballot. Indexes of individual political participation that code

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[22]We know from the town of Hinesburg, for instance, that the highest number present when we recorded attendance may hide higher attendance levels. At that meeting a standing vote count revealed that there were more people present when

respondents on whether or not they have attended rallies or other types of political meetings, seldom

ask if they got there on time or stayed to the end. In any event since highest attendance and average

attendance are so highly correlated, it makes almost no difference which one is used in the equations

I will create to explain variations in town meeting attendance from town to town. Whenever

relevant both measures will be reported. The highest count is my measure of choice for purposes of

testing hypotheses.

Although the Maidstone meeting of 1996 produced the lowest of the low attendance counts

(14), another Kingdom town, Victory (in 1988), and the Massachusetts border town of Woodford (in

1984) both had meetings where the smallest number of attenders counted was only 17. Other low

counts were Winhall in 1980 (18) and Stannard and Belvidere in 1987 and 1986 respectively (both

at 20). On the other hand the largest *low* counts of the 1434 town meetings were recorded in the lake

side town of Charlotte in 1992, which is located just south of and is very much like Shelburne, the

ski town of Stowe in 1997, and Shelburne itself in 1979. The lowest attendance recorded in

Charlotte's town meeting was 356. The lowest in Stowe was 354 and the lowest in Shelburne's was

320. The average low count of attendance at all 1435 town meetings was 91.

The very highest attendance count we took happened clear over on the other side of the state

in the Connecticut River valley town of Thetford on February 29, 1988. There at 8:10 p.m.

Kimberly Crossley and Katherine Glendenning counted 547 attenders.[23] Other high counts occurred

in Charlotte's 1992 meeting (449) and a meeting in Stowe in 1990 where 438 were present. The

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that vote was taken than were there when we took the count that produced the highest attendance of the four counts.

[23] Kimberly Crossley and Katherine Glendenning, "The 1988 Comparative Town Meeting Study: Town of Thetford," (Burlington, Vermont: University of Vermont, the Real Democracy Data Base, March 1988).

smallest high count was 18 and occurred in Woodford which, it will be remembered, also had one of

the lowest low counts, 17. The average high count was 137. This left an average difference between

the number of people at a town meeting when the lowest count was recorded and when the highest

count was recorded of 46.

This range between high and low attendance counts is an important indicator of attendance

stability. Considered as a ratio it shows that on average 1.51 *times* as many people will be at town

meeting when attendance is high as when it is low. A town meeting with 100 present at its lowest

point will likely have 151 present at its highest point. This ratio ranges from a low of 1.00 in those

few towns where the attendance didn't vary at all to 6.44 in Thetford in 1988. At this meeting there

were almost six and one half times as many people at the meeting when attendance was at its highest

as when it was at its lowest. As expected, this ratio is weakly related to the highest count taken.[24]

The more people present when the highest count is taken the larger the ratio becomes.

In Figure IV-A this connection is charted for the 99 meetings studied in 1995 and 1996. A

small number of meetings lets more light into the array of cases and puts the relationship into clearer

focus. Fortune helped out in that the statistical relationship in 1995 and 1996 almost perfectly

mirrored the entire sample. There in the scatterplot is the 1996 meeting in Maidstone. Its huge

variation in attendance stability was produced by the fact that attendance dropped off first after the

officers were elected (from 51) and then again when the town meeting was adjourned and the school

meeting began (to 24) and finally to 14 when the last count was taken. The 14 to 51 ratio, 3.6,

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[24]For the entire sample of 1434 towns every increase in 100 persons in attendance at the highest count taken increased the
ratio of the highest count to the lowest count by .35. The constant is 1.17. Thus with 100 people in attendance the
expectation is that the ratio of the highest count to the lowest count would be 1.52. The highest attendance recorded
explained about 12 percent of the variance in the ratio. For the 99 meetings of 1995 and 1996 the constant was 1.16, the
slope was .36, the mean 1.62, and the R^2 .13.

thrusts Maidstone high above the mean for other towns with very low attendance like Belvidere and Victory.

Figure IV-A also previews some of the parameters of real democracy with which I will be dealing later on by laying out attendance figures for many of the towns that will reappear in later pages. Note how attendance varies from year to year in Norwich, a town just across the Connecticut River from Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. It is 175 in 1995 and 289 in 1996. A similar change occurs in the famous ski town of Warren. In 1996 Warren's meeting was much like Maidstone's, far above the mean for instability, given the size of the meeting. Another ski town, Stowe, had the highest attendance of the 99 meetings, and, given this, below average attendance instability. In Stowe those who came, tended to stay. Other town names that will become more and more familiar as we go on also appear in Figure IV-A. The town with the quintessential meeting house, Strafford, is there along with Danville, the town atop the hill east of St. Johnsbury. Pomfret the rugged hill town adjacent to Woodstock, Vermont's most famous upscale community, and Williston, town of Vermont's greatest battle over development are also there.

[FIGURE IV-A ABOUT HERE]

fig 4 a

The ups and downs of attendance are often troubling to townspeople. In the minutes of the

1995 town meeting in Maidstone, Susan Irwin, the town clerk, let this frustration slip through:

> Article 2: To elect a school director for three years.
>
> James Foy nominated Kristine Potter and Harold Ramsay recorded it. James moved we vote and Harold seconded it. *There were 24 voters left at this time as a considerable number of people had left town hall by this time* (emphasis my own). The ballots were cast: 23 for Kristine Potter and 1 for Judi Conant.[25]

In Maidstone the attendance usually drops off dramatically when the town meeting is adjourned and

the school meeting is called to order. In 1995 this moment of opportunity to leave came at

9:30 p.m., two and a half hours after the town meeting had begun.[26] But unlike 1996, in 1995 most

of the 24 who stayed for the school meeting remained until the end. Thus this meeting in Maidstone

was closer to the stability its size would predict.

Enough about the extremes. What about the more normal situation? When all the

attendance counts are averaged (four counts for day meetings and three for night meetings) the

average number of people at a town meeting is 115. The lowest average attendance was the 17

recorded in the Woodford meeting of 1996. The highest average attendance was 418 from the

Charlotte meeting of 1992. Pared to its very core this is what real democracy looks like. The towns

of Vermont convened 6815 regular town meetings since this study began in 1969. Every registered

voter in these towns is a legislator. Nearly all residents who are 18 years old are registered voters.

The doors of the town halls were opened. Students were present (gavel to gavel) at 1439 of these

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[25]The thoroughness of the minutes vary wildly from town to town. Some towns publish none. Others have a brief "recapitulation" of the meeting. Many are quite thorough. Maidstone's minutes were excellent. But it is rare indeed when a value judgment of any kind slips past the taciturn fence lines placed by these Yankee clerks and finds it way into the minutes of a town meeting. Town of Maidstone, "Minutes of 1995 Town Meeting," *Town Report*, (Year ending December 1995): 39.

meetings and counted the people inside. If you had dropped in unexpectedly at any time while one of these Vermont town meetings was in session, about 115 citizens would have been there. If you had arrived when the attendance was the lowest for the day, it would have been 91. If you were there when it was highest, it was up near 137. Given the scale of life in America today these are very small numbers indeed.

Figure IV-B (Plots 1–3) shows frequency distributions for the low, high and average number of people in attendance at all 1434 meetings. They are quite normal, approximating a bell shaped curve in all three cases. There is, however, some skewness on the upper end of each statistic, especially on the average and lowest counts. Skewness is not surprising since it is likely that attendance would vary more on the upside since the lower limit of attendance (zero) is impossible. Meetings can be counted on to have some threshold number of town officers attending almost by definition. Given a mean of 115 it is practically impossible to have 100 fewer than that at a town meeting and truly impossible to have 200 fewer. But it is not impossible to have 200 more. The bottom line? We have taken the lens cap off a microscope that can peer into constellations deep in the uncharted inner space of real democracy. The first important images that appear orbit around a simple little number. One hundred and fifteen.

[FIGURE IV-B ABOUT HERE]

On Tuesday, March 1, 1977, the people of Walden, Vermont, met in a town meeting that exactly matched this number. This little town up in the Kingdom on Joe's Pond is as good a place as any to demonstrate an example of the model town meeting. The townspeople were warned to meet as follows:

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[26]Town of Maidstone, "Minutes of 1995 Town Meeting."

fig 4 B

The citizens who are legal voters in the Annual Town and School District in the Town of Walden, Vermont are hereby notified and warned to meet at the Firehouse in said Town of Walden, Vermont, on Tuesday, March 1, 1977, at ten o'clock in the forenoon, to act upon the following business: (Voting for Town Officers to be by Australian Ballot, polls to close at 3:30 p.m.)[27]

My students, Roger Prescott and Emily Fox, described the meeting place (the town fire station) and the weather conditions for the meeting (which began at 10:05 a.m. on a workday – Tuesday) as follows:

Between 9:30 and 10:15 there was a blinding snowstorm. But then it turned nice. The paved roads were clear but the dirt roads were very icy and snowed in. [The meeting room] looked like a large garage, a one story building, high rafter ceiling, folding chairs, a few people stood in the back and along the sides. Hearing was good. Eye contact with speakers was poor if the speaker chose not to stand. Almost every speaker did rise and spoke loudly and clearly though. Lighting was good.[28]

Attendance was 110 at 10:30 a.m., 129 at 11:45, 102 at 1:25 p.m., and 118 at 2:30 when Article 28 ("To see if the town will discontinue printing the Grand List in the Town Report") was resolved – they voted (by voice) not to discontinue printing it. The average attendance was 115 and it was quite stable. Fifty-nine percent of those present were men. In the three hours and a half the meeting was in session (they took an hour and seventeen minutes off for lunch) sixty-one different people spoke at least once. Twenty-seven (44 percent) of these were women. In that time (among

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[27] Town of Walden, *Town Report*, (Year ending December 1976): 46. The Australian ballot is simply a paper ballot that allows people to vote for town officers (in this case) and other issues (in other cases) without attending (hanging around for) town meeting. I will say more about this in Volume II but it is interesting to note that in the town of Walden in 1977 the total number voting in the Australian ballot election was exactly the same as the count for the highest attendance of the day at town meeting. This may have been because only one of the 16 elections for town officers was contested. There were also two elections in which write in candidates did quite well, however.

[28] Roger Prescott and Emily Fox, "The 1977 Comparative Town Meeting Study: Town of Walden," (Burlington, Vermont: University of Vermont, the Real Democracy Data Base, March 1977).

other things) they divided up Federal revenue sharing money and turned down a request by the selectmen to spend $20,000 on a loader. The latter was the second most contentious issue of the day. It took 19 minutes. They also voted $417,446 for the school (this took five minutes), $500 for the cemetery (this took five minutes as well), $400 for (out-of-town) ambulance services and $300 for (out-of-town) mental health and home health care "not-for-profit" public services organizations. They passed over a token appropriation for a "Food for the Neediest" program.[29] The most debated issue of the day was whether or not to exempt improvements for "alternate energy sources" from property tax assessments. After 21 minutes of discussion the town decided not to. At about 3:00 p.m. the town moderator, Joseph Smith declared the meeting adjourned and the people went home.

This is a good example of what a town meeting with average attendance does. With an appreciation for the absolute number of attenders at town meeting squared away, the more important question becomes apparent: what is the relationship between the actual number of voters who attend and the potential number of voters in town. The valley towns of Hinesburg and Shelburne had more people at their town meetings than either Newark or Athens. They should have. These towns of the valley have much larger populations than the hill towns of Newark and Athens. This relationship can be rough cut with a scatterplot comparing attendance at the 1434 meetings with the population of the towns in which they were held. Plot 1 of Figure IV-C resembles a spurt of water from the nozzle of a hose. Attendance goes up sharply in a tight pattern at first but as town population grows it begins to spray out and then drop as if influenced by the forces of gravity. A key notation, however, is that

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[29] The article was worded as follows: "Will the town vote a token appropriation for the 'Food for the Neediest' emergency food shelf program which is sponsored jointly by churches throughout the Northeast Kingdom, the Ecumenical Council and the Orleans County Council of Social Agencies?" It was defeated by a show of hands (35 to 31) at 1:30 p.m. after four minutes of debate. Just before this article came to the floor (at 1:23) the students counted 102 people at the town meeting. An hour later (at 2:35 p.m.) there were 118 in attendance.

the huge percentage of meetings in the plot were held in the smaller towns. Thus the relationship is

statistically disfigured.

[FIGURE IV-C ABOUT HERE]

What we need to do is hold the "X" axis (that is town population) of the scatterplot under a

microscope. Plots 2, 3 and 4 of Figure IV-C do this by looking at attendance in differing levels of

town size: the 631 meetings held in towns with less than 1000 population, the 488 meetings in towns

with between 1000 and 2000 population and the 315 meetings in towns with more than 2000

population. The linear slopes of the best estimate of the relationship between town size and the

number in attendance flatten out from Plot 2 to Plot 4. Attendance at town meetings in towns with

less than 1000 population improves by 11 attenders for every increase in 100 people in town. But it

increases at a rate of only five per 100 in towns of between 1000 and 2000 people and one per 100 in

towns of more than 2000 population.

Note too that in Plot 2 the meetings are more closely clustered around the line that represents

the relationship between town size and town meeting attendance (especially at the lower end) than

they are in Plot 3 or Plot 4. This means estimates of attendance made for a given meeting based on

the size of the town in which it was held inspire more confidence if the town had less than 1000

population. We know this by the size of the R^2 statistic, which grows larger as the danger of the

estimate being off base grows smaller. In Plot 2 the R^2 is .39. Statisticians will tell you that this

means the variance in attendance at town meeting can be reduced by 39 percent if the population of

the town is taken into account. In towns with populations of from 1000 to 2000, however,

fig 4 c

considering the population reduces the variance in attendance by only seven percent. For towns of

over 2000 the variance is reduced a mere two percent.[30]

What we have is a non-linear relationship. As the independent variable increases (in this

case town size) the dependent variable (in this case the number of people at town meeting) increases

too but at a declining rate. One way to get a better picture of this phenomenon is to define town

population in terms of a logarithmic scale. This has the mathematical effect of stretching out

differences between the populations of the smaller towns and compressing the differences between

populations of the larger towns. The logarithmic transformation refines and summarizes the

relationships we sought to establish in Plots 2, 3, and 4. The new scatterplot in Plot 5 makes the

relationship *seem* linear and allows the use of a standard linear regression line to predict attendance.

By stretching out the distribution of the smaller towns and compressing it for the larger towns, it also

allows closer inspection of the small town end of the size continuum. What we have done, actually,

is to trick the data into producing an equation that better fits a curvilinear distribution. Plot 5 of

Figure IV-C superimposes the "curve" that results when the logarithmic transformation of town

population is applied to the original data. This model explains 41 percent of the variance in

attendance. Still, were we to use our chart to actually predict what a town's attendance would be

based on its size, the confidence in the accuracy of our predictions would decline as town size

increased.

A more important observation is this: not only does attendance fail to keep up with increases

in town size, none of the town meetings have rates that approximate universal participation.

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[30]These are all linear estimates. For the small town the power curve (1/N) reduces the variance in attendance by 51 percent. For middle-sized towns the linear fit is as good as any. For larger towns a quadratic model increases the R^2

Consider a typical town with a population of 1200. Plot 3 in Figure IV-C shows that the best estimate of the number of people at a town meeting held there is 138; the constant (78), plus four more attenders for every 100 people in town. Surely a town of 1200 people must have at least 600 people older than eighteen. In such a town attendance would equal far less than half the eligible voters. Obviously the next step is to discover the relationship between potential attendance and actual attendance, that is, to define attendance as a percent of its potential. Treating either registered voters or eligible voters as the denominator in a division in which the number of actual citizens who attend town meeting is the numerator will do the trick. The time has come to clothe these raw numbers in percentages – to end their nakedness.

Attendance and Town Size: A First Look

Figured as the percentage of eligible voters, attendance will be a bit lower than attendance measured as the percentage of registered voters, since not all those who are eligible are registered. Fortunately there is such a strong relationship between the percent of the total population eligible to vote and the percent of the total population registered to vote, it makes no difference from an analytical point of view which statistic is used.[31] There is no party registration in Vermont and the gap between eligible voters and registered voters is quite small. Moreover, the registered voter count may be more reliable since it is taken and published every two years while the number of eligible voters is estimated from the Census. The measure of choice is therefore the percentage of registered voters who turn up at town meeting.

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from two percent to four percent.

[31]The Pearson's "r" between town population and eligible voters is .99. Between population and registered voters it is .97. Between eligible voters and registered voters it is .98.

Recasting real democracy as percentages of registered voters in attendance at town meeting has the effect of controlling for population size. Now it is possible to make comparative judgments. How does town meeting attendance compare, for instance, to levels of voter participation in municipal elections, in state elections, in elections for president, in elections in other countries? The histograms in Figure IV-D arrange the 1434 town meetings in clusters according to percentages of registered voters who attended. Plot 1 is based on the highest attendance count taken during the meeting and groups the meetings in cohorts of five percentage points. Plot 2 has average attendance and Plot 3 is formed from the lowest counts of attendance taken.

[FIGURE IV-D ABOUT HERE]

For the highest attendance recorded the cohort with the largest number of cases had 291 meetings averaging 16 percent of the town's registered voters in attendance.[32] When the measure is shifted to the average percent of registered voters in attendance, the largest cluster had town meetings which turned out an average of 13 percent of registered voters. This cohort also contained 291 cases. The lowest count of attenders taken in each of the 1434 meetings placed the largest number of its meetings (293) in the nine percent cohort. These histograms demonstrate that attendance at town meeting is distributed in a normal fashion, that is, it approximates a bell-shaped

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[32] While the comparison is severely strained for many reasons the best match up I can make between real democracy in a town meeting and real democracy elsewhere is with the Israeli Kibbutz, even though systematic data on attendance levels are not available. Thanks to the work of Menachem Rosner, however, we know that, at least well into the 1980s, attendance at the assemblies was about 35 percent (and they met an average of three times a month!) Menachem Rosner, *Participatory Political and Organizational Democracy and the Experience of the Israeli Kibbutz* (Haifa: The University of Haifa, 1981): 12. In the mid 1980s attendance was also reported to be about 35 percent in an average Kibbutzim with a population of about 500. Joseph Blasi, *The Communal Experience of the Kibbutz* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1988): 99, 109. This comes quite close to our predictions for an *annual* Vermont town meeting for a town of equal size. See also Menachem Rosner, *Democracy, Equality and Change: The Kibbutz and Social Theory* (Darby, Pennsylvania: Norwood Editions, 1982) and for more recent developments Auraham Pavin, "The Governmental System of the Kibbutz" in Uriel Leviatan, Hugh Oliver and Jack Quarter (eds.), *Crisis in the Israeli Kibbutz* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1998): 97-109.

fig 4 D

curve. The left "tail" of the distribution, however, is chopped off at the lower end and stretches a bit

thin at the upper end. This simply reflects the reality that the distribution has more room to expand

at the upper end (the percent attending could go much higher than the mean) than at the lower end

where zero percent attending cuts off downward expansion. The distribution looks very much like

the reverse of the results of student grades in one of my classes: the mean is about 80 percent, there

are very few "A's" and the lower end of the grade distribution tails off in a long and thankfully thin

line of failure. Yet if we were to "grade" these meetings on their attendance where 100 percent

attendance was an A+ and anything below 60 percent was failure, only four of the meetings would

pass. Only two would even squeak out a "C".

On March 5, 1974 at 11:30 a.m., 94 people were counted at the town meeting in Newark,[33]

whose 1992 town meeting we described earlier. Since there were 130 voters on the "check list" (that

is to say, they were registered to vote) the turnout at town meeting reached 72.3 percent. For 30

years students have taken thousands of counts of the citizens present at town meetings. This is as

good as it got.   The average attendance that day for Newark was 60 percent. The lowest was 48.

Vermont's smallest town, Victory, came in second on the list of highest attendance. In 1997, 71

percent of the registered voters were there. In 1994 in North Hero, a town on an island in Lake

Champlain, 65 percent of the registered voters were present for one of the counts. The average

count for Victory in 1997 was 59 percent. In North Hero in 1994 it was 49 percent. Of the top ten

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[33] Peter Moore, Jon Levesque, Janet Leman and Diane Lynch, "The 1974 Comparative Town Meeting Study: Town of Newark," (Burlington, Vermont: University of Vermont, the Real Democracy Data Base, March 1974).

meetings in the 1434 meeting sample, two happened in Newark, two in Athens, and three in

Victory.[34]

WITNESS

The town of Victory has a total population of approximately 70. These people are scattered over 43 of the toughest square miles in New England's great northern hardwood forest. In the 1992 presidential election the town cast 12 votes for President Bush, 13 votes for Bill Clinton and 19 for Ross Perot. In 1994 they split their votes between the Republican candidate for Congress and the socialist candidate and winner, Bernard Sanders. In 1996 there were seven names on the ballot for Vermont's lone seat in the House of Representatives. Bernie Sanders got 55 percent of the vote in Victory. The yearly Town Report for Victory is over 50 pages long. The 1995 report (published in time for the 1996 town meeting) contained the following two entries: the first on the inside of the front cover, the second on the inside of the back cover. Neither was signed.

THE 1995 VICTORY TOWN REPORT IS GRATEFULLY DEDICATED
TO
GERALD AND LEAH (ALRIDCH) MASTEN

Gerald and Leah, married on November 4, 1931, have spent over 64 years atop Victory Hill. During this time they have seen many changes come to Victory and have played an active roll when called upon. During those years the first tractor came to the hill. Generators provided electricity early on until finally "power on the pole" arrived in 1963.[35] The sugar bush behind the house was visited "more than 40 times" resulting in untold gallons of fancy grade syrup and many gifts of maple candies. The family continued to farm until Gerald decided to "retire" in the early 1970's. They have continued to actively care about the town and to offer their hospitality to all who stop at the farm atop Victory Hill.

Gerald has served the Town of Victory as State Representative, Selectman, Constable, and Tax Collector, Auditor, Grand Juror, Library trustee and Town Agent during 40 years of active service. Leah also served as State Representative from Victory, as well as Auditor, School Director, and Library Trustee during the years 1944 through 1972. We are grateful for all that you both have contributed to the Town of Victory.

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[34]Victory's meeting in 1996 shows how the attendance counts may be conservative, especially in small towns where a handful of attenders affect the percentage turnout dramatically. Often potential voters are around outside the hall smoking or talking. In 1996 the student who went into the very deepest part of the Northeast Kingdom to get the data for Victory counted 36 in attendance on the first count and 39 in attendance for the second count (taken at 8:00 p.m.). But from 7:50 p.m. to 8:05 p.m. he also recorded three different votes in a three-way contest for town lister. The first vote for the three candidates (it takes a majority to win) was 11, 14, 18. The second was 9, 13, 20. The candidate with the 9 votes, Judy Blondin, then dropped out and Ilene Kanoff defeated Tim Hart 24 to 19. Note on the first and third votes 43 ballots were cast. This means that 73 percent of the registered voters were at the meeting at least long enough to participate in this election.

[35]After, please note, men had circled the planet in space ships.

A LOOK BACK

The year started with a mild winter, followed by a not so muddy spring. Summer was in a hurry and rushed in the first part of June. It was a dry summer; lawns were turning brown and a little moisture was badly needed. We welcomed the rain on August 5th—at first. Before it was over, we experienced "the flood."

Two homes received damage, the folks on Victory Hill were stranded until John MacDonald could get out there and rebuild a path for them to get through. Judy and Keith went from house to house checking on folks and keeping us informed. Lots of people did lots of work. But on the whole, Victory did not fare too badly.

We were saddened by the loss of two gentlemen who affected our lives in one way or another. Conrad Gingue had done road work for the town and those who worked with him will miss him.

Ross Baxter was our computer expert and those of us who were instructed by him and had the benefit of his sunny disposition feel the loss.

Neighbors, friends, and family moved on to another environment. We said good-bye to the Watsons, who went to another state; the Staats, who went up the road to Granby; and to Sandy Stocker, who went to St. Johnsbury to care for Betty Locke. Although he hasn't moved, Matthew Bush is off to college.

But we have new neighbors. Ilene Kanoff, a teacher in Whitefield, and Peggy Morris now live in the former Stocker homestead.

Janet Bouchard and 'Uscar' Lynaugh have purchased the Alice Beaver place, Janet and Roland Copp are in their place on Victory Hill, and Jim and Helen Nichols are in the process of building their little hide-away on the hill as is Richard Prue. We also extend a welcome to Steve Bobrowsky, Jessica Hudson, and Hern Locmis.

Our year ended with a snowy December, which gives Victory its charm—to some of us anyway.

Have a healthy, happy 1996.[36]

The very lowest turnout, measured as a percent of the registered voters in attendance, occurred in the Burlington satellite town of Jericho, only one of two of Vermont's 246 cities and towns to be given biblical names (the other was Corinth). At the meeting of 1998 attendance was

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[36]Town of Victory, *Town Report*, (Year ending December 1995).

counted four times (at 9:30 and 11 a.m. and at 12:30 and 1:45 p.m.).[37] It averaged 31, less than one

percent of the registered voters. The second lowest turnout over the 29 years occurred in Swanton,

one of the larger towns in the sample. Swanton was built on a great bend in the historic Missisquoi

River just before it enters Lake Champlain below the Canadian border in the northwestern part of the

state. In 1997 only 54 of the 3622 registered voters were at the meeting in the Swanton Village

Municipal Complex at 8:10 p.m. when the highest count of the evening was recorded.[38] Two other

low counts took place in the southwest. In Rutland Town (again in 1997) 60 of 2845 voters were

present at the highest count and in nearby Fair Haven in 1981, 45 of 1672 were there. Up lake 50

miles or so in between Swanton and Fair Haven, Shelburne and Middlebury (also in the valley of

Lake Champlain) also had meetings with very low turnout, about three percent of registered voters

for Middlebury in 1980 and Shelburne in 1987.

The average town had 20.54 percent of its registered voters at town meeting when the

attendance count that proved to be the highest was taken. When this highest count was averaged

with all the counts taken at each meeting, producing an average attendance for each meeting, the

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[37]Kimberly Henry and Christopher Morris, "The 1998 Comparative Town Meeting Study: Town of Jericho," (Burlington, Vermont: University of Vermont, the Real Democracy Data Base, March 1998). The low attendance in Jericho is probably the result of an experiment with Saturday meetings. Jericho went to Saturday meetings in 1995. In the previous four meetings in the sample (1987, 1989, 1990 and 1991), the average number of attenders was 190. Beginning in 1995 the turnout was 119, 116, 85 and 31—an average of 88. In 1998 Jericho had had enough. Article VI of the 1998 meeting read "Shall Jericho's Town Meeting Day be changed to the first Tuesday in March?" Nine people participated in a 15-minute debate and then voted by voice vote to move the meeting back to Tuesday. Dee Dee Jameson seemed to sum up the argument for the move: The school winter break included the weekend prior to town meetings, many families were away on vacation. (Author note: Jericho is an upscale town.) She also argued that a Tuesday meeting "would encourage that childcare be provided by a local group as a fundraiser, and that Town Meeting be combined with School Meeting—all in one day." *Ibid*; and Town of Jericho, Cynthia Humphrey, Town Clerk, "Minutes of Annual Town Meeting February 28, 1998," *Town Report,* (Year ending December 1998).

[38]Jeremy Chevalier, Brad Messier, and Derek McDonald, "The 1997 Comparative Town Meeting Study: Town of Swanton," (Burlington, Vermont: University of Vermont, the Real Democracy Data Base, March 1997). The average attendance was 49. The meeting began at 7 p.m. and ended at 9:06.

mean of the average for the entire sample was 17.43. All five of the poorest attended meetings were large towns in the Champlain Valley and all five of the best attended meetings were very small northern towns in the Kingdom. Meetings with more normal attendance were geographically scattered. They tended to be held in towns that were larger than those with the best meetings and substantially smaller than those with the worst. Data for the average situation are charted in Figure IV-E, Plots 1 and 2. The average meeting in the sample was held in a town that had a population of about 1550 when we studied that particular meeting. About 1000 of these townspeople were eligible to vote and about 900 of them were registered. Turnout at the polls in the towns that held these meetings was about 600 (60 percent) in the elections surrounding the year we visited their meeting. Turnout at the town meetings themselves averaged 137 (18 percent). Forty-four (only 7 percent) of a town's eligible voters spoke at the meeting.

Of all the meetings in the data set, the ones held in Concord in 1982 and Cornwall in 1988 most approximated the normal situation. In both towns 18 percent of the eligible voters came to town meeting. In both places this was 138 people. The town populations were very similar: 1119 in Concord and 1079 in Cornwall. The number of eligible voters was equally close: 777 in Concord and 769 in Cornwall. Seventy-three meetings in the sample of 1434 nailed the attendance percentage right on the nose – 18 percent of eligible at the highest count (rounding up from 17.5 and down from 18.5). No two were closer on percent attendance, absolute attendance, town size and eligible voters than Cornwall and Concord.

That, however, is where the similarity ends. Cornwall is an upscale, rural bedroom town adjacent to Middlebury and its expensive, elite, small college. Concord is a Kingdom town high on

the Connecticut River above the fall line.[39] In 1990, 38 percent of Cornwall's population over 25 years old had college degrees. In Concord only eight percent did. Cornwall's median family income was $41,484. Concord's was about half of that, $23,587. Fifty-seven percent of Cornwall's voters said yes on a vote to supply the Vermont Constitution with an equal rights amendment for women in 1986. This was substantially above the statewide average. Only 28 percent of Concord's voters supported the ERA. It was one of the very lowest in the state.

To get a feel for the variations in the kinds of communities that held a meeting that fell precisely on the arithmetic mean of real democracy take a look at Plot 3 of Figure IV-E. Bear in mind that each meeting in the scatterplot had 18 percent of the town's eligible voters in attendance. They are arrayed by the number of eligible voters at town meeting and a liberalism factor score developed as a summary measure to identify communities that voted for liberal issues and candidates over the years. No two towns with equal numbers at town meeting (and consequently, of course, equal numbers of eligible voters in town) are so estranged on their politics as Concord and Cornwall. Concord was the very most conservative of the 210 towns in the sample with a factor score of –2.37. Cornwall was in the top 20 percent of the towns (it ranked 39th out of the 210 towns) on liberalism with a score of +.71. It also ranked 30th out of 210 towns on a factor score called UPSCALE, (loading very high on traditional SES measures) while Concord ranked 189th.

[FIGURE IV-E ABOUT HERE]

The scatterplot also demonstrates how varied these model attendance towns are in general. There atop the liberal index is the upscale town of Norwich, with its Dartmouth College analog to

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[39]One summer while in my twenties I spent many a Saturday night in Concord watching dirt track stock car racing after a 12-hour day working for Charlie Cole down river in South Newbury at Isabel Whitney's Sleepers Meadows Farm.

fig 4 E

Cornwall's Middlebury College. The upland pasture town of Strafford is directly behind Norwich in the foothills along the Connecticut River. Plainfield, Marshfield and Calais with their lunch pail leftish politics (associated in one way or another with the nearby Goddard College tradition) are the next most liberal towns.   There (in the lower right quadrant) is the conservative, Republican "company" town of Proctor named after the most successful political family in the state's history and the marble they quarried. But right next to Proctor is Hardwick, the rough and tumble, blue-collar small town at the gateway to the Kingdom. It is as estranged from the ambiance of Proctor (and Norwich and Strafford, for that matter) as is imaginable. There in the lower left corner are the quintessential Vermont hill towns in the eastern range of the Green Mountains of Orange County—Groton, Ryegate, and Topsham, where the land is mostly rock and the farmers had all but given up by mid-century. But they cluster on liberalism and the total number of people at town meeting with prime farming towns on the clay bottom flatlands of Addison and Franklin Counties line Franklin, Orwell, and Leicester. In these places men and women still go to the barn to milk before breakfast. Liberal or conservative, upscale or down, farming or not, all these towns had one thing in common. As a percentage of registered voters they produced town meetings with identical attendance. They landed squarely on the bull's eye of the attendance average for the entire sample of 1435 meetings conducted in 210 different towns over more than a quarter century. This does not bode well for our upcoming attempt to decipher the reasons for variations in attendance at town meeting from the context of the communities in which they are held.

Except for one thing.

SIZE AND DEMOCRACY

The most overlooked variable in political science, I believe, is scale. The gap between its importance and the attention it receives is unmatched.[40] A remarkable book, published in 1973, reinforced my early hunch on the significance of scale because it demonstrated that political scientists far more important than I could ever be were thinking about it. The book was Robert A. Dahl and Edward R. Tufte's *Size and Democracy*.[41] In one incandescent paragraph in the Epilogue I found intellectual support for what was then becoming my life's work:

> It seems evident to us that among the units most needed in the world as it has been evolving lie several at the extremes: we need some very small units and some very large units. . . .Very large units that transcend the parochialism and inadequate system capacity of the nation-state are evolving, but too slowly–quite possibly too slowly for human survival. If the giant units are needed for handling transnational matters of extraordinary moment, *very small units seem to us necessary to provide a place where ordinary people can acquire the sense and the reality of moral responsibility and political effectiveness* (emphasis my own) in a universe where remote galaxies of leaders spin on in courses mysterious and unfathomable to the ordinary citizen. At the same time that the transnational units will increase the capacity of the system to handle critical problems, and thus the collective effectiveness of a body of citizens, transnational units will also increase the ineffectuality and powerlessness of the individual citizen. *As a consequence, the very small unit will become more, not less, important to the sense of effectiveness of the ordinary citizen* (emphasis my own).[42]

Unfortunately, political scientists did not take up the issue of size and democracy as Dahl and Tufte urged, and the implications such a discussion would have for issues of federalism, world

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[40] "Yet so far the size of social systems has scarcely become one of the central concerns of institution builders and social system designers." Alberto Guerreiro Ramos, *The New Science of organization,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981): 138-139.

[41] Robert A. Dahl and Edward R. Tufte, *Size and Democracy* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1973).

[42] Dahl and Tufte, *Size and Democracy*, 142.

government, and (I believe) real democracy were denied.[43] Instead the profession became entranced

with the question of individual behavior in the very units down played by Dahl and Tufte (like the

national government of the United States of America) and scale was pretty much ignored.[44] This has

had devastating implications for this enterprise because nearly all the literature available to direct the

investigation concerns voting and other participatory habits of individuals as they elect executives *of*

and representatives *to* distant and remote governments. As we are about to discover, the variables

associated with these studies do little to identify communities where real democracy lives. This is

because from participation to policy, size (the *scale* of things) is critical to any discussion of the

potential for a sustainable democracy. How could we ignore it so? In the heart of conundrums like

these lies the fascination of our craft.

The Master Thesis

        Reconsider the towns of Newark, Athens, Hinesburg, and Shelburne.   The cost of

participation is much higher in the Kingdom towns than it is in the towns near the lake. First of all it

is physically much easier to get to town meeting in Hinesburg and Shelburne.   The cost of

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[43] There are exceptions. See, for instance: Jacques Thomassen, "Political Representation in Dutch Communities," (Paper prepared for delivery at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association Washington D.C. August 28-31, 1986.) Although Thomassen is interested in the effect of community size on indirect democracy, his work is unique in that community size explicitly anchors his theoretical framework.

[44] Important exceptions are found in the work of scholars like Jane Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary Democracy*, (New York: Basic Books, 1980); and Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy*, (Berkeley, California: The University of California Press, 1984). Kirkpatrick Sale, *Human Scale*, (New York: Coward, McCanon and Geoghegan, 1980) is a leading scholar on scale outside political science. There is also an important popular literature that grew from the efforts of such people as Wendell Berry, Murray Bookchin, Leopold Kohr, and E. F. Schumacher. See Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America*, (New York: Avon Books, 1977); Murray Bookchin, *The Limits of the City*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1974); Leopold Kohr, "Critical Size" in Michael North (ed.), *Time Running Out? Best of* Resurgence, (Dorchester:, Dorset: Prisism Press, 1976); Leopold Kohr, *The Breakdown of Nations*, (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1978); and E. F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1973).

participation is made still lower in these two Champlain Valley towns by holding the meeting at

night not during the day. Newark and Athens not only meet on a workday, their populations are

more apt to be employed in jobs where taking a day off is difficult.[45]

Most importantly, however, Hinesburg and Shelburne also score higher on variables that

seem to prompt people to participate more in politics. Sidney Verba and Norman Nie's watershed

volume puts the matter succinctly: "Citizens of higher social and economic status participate more

in politics. This generalization has been confirmed many times in many nations."[46] They go on to

demonstrate the truth of this finding using their own data.[47]   Moreover, socio-economic status

variables are especially strong predictors of the one particular kind of participator who most closely

anticipates a willingness to attend town meeting, what they label "communalists," people who "are

defined by their high level of communal activity and low level of campaign activity."[48]   The

relationship between socio-economic status and participation holds for several status-based

measures: education, income and occupation. The thesis was not new.[49] But Verba and Nie nailed it

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[45] On the other hand upscale professionals, while *able* to take the day off suffer higher *real* costs in terms of services deferred. At any rate, the costs of attending any town meeting are remarkably higher than the costs of voting. This has always been the case even before recent reforms have made the voting act easier still. See: Richard G. Niemi, "Costs of Voting and Nonvoting," *Public Choice* 27 (1976): 115-119.

[46]Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie, *Participation in America,* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1972): 125. Verba and Nie are so convinced of the importance of the SES variable that early on in their volume they establish it as a baseline measure so that throughout the remainder of their study when they ask a question such as "At what levels do particular kinds of people participate in politics?" they automatically are holding constant the question of these individuals' socioeconomic status. The analogue to Verba and Nie for Great Britain is: Geraint Parry, George Moyser and Neil Day, *Political Participation and Democracy in Britain*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Their findings on socioeconomic class and participation are similar.

[47] Studies on the relationship between status and participation began to appear (as one political scientist put it in 1987) "with monotonous regularity." Jack H. Nagel, *Participation*, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1987): 57.

[48]Verba and Nie, *Participation in America*, 98.

[49] One of the best early studies which has the unique characteristic of taking place in a town that is close in population

down and appropriately became the catalyst of record for the voluminous (indeed discipline

dominant) body of empirical scholarship on democratic participation in the last quarter of the 20th

Century.[50]

I will deal with variants of the research as the need arises throughout the book.[51] For now it

needs only be emphasized (as an evidential precursor to the discussion ahead) that *on the face of it*

(albeit on the "big" side–3,000 inhabitants) to the towns in this project is: Robert E. Agger and Vincent Ostrom, "The Political Structure of a Small Community," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 20 (Spring 1956): 81-88. Their data show a powerful link between a range of participant activities and socioeconomic status. As we begin the next century I find their classification of participant "types" in the small town they investigated remarkably familiar.

[50] Two strongly supportive works appeared in the early 1980's. Raymond Wolfinger and Steven J. Rosenstone, *Who Votes*, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1980): 13-36; and Paul Abramson, John H. Aldrich and David W. Rhode, *Change and Continuity in the 1980 Elections,* (rev. ed.), (Washington, D.C.: The Congressional Quarterly Press, 1963): 83-86: "Our most impressive finding is the strong relationship between formal education and turnout…Better educated Americans are more likely to develop attitudes that contribute to participation especially feelings that citizens have a duty to vote and can be politically effective." *Ibid,* 84. These studies have stood the test of time with qualifications appearing but here and there. Stephen J. Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen, *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*, (New York: The Macmillan Publishing Company, 1993), Jonathan Nagler, "The Effect of Registration Laws and Education on U.S. Voter Turnout," *American Political Science Review* 85 (December 1991): 1393-1405. Moreover the relationship does not appear to have changed over the years. Jan E. Leighley and Jonathan Nagler, "Socioeconomic Class Bias in Turnout, 1964-1988: The Voters Remain the Same," *The American Political Science Review* 86(September, 1992): 725-738. In 1997 Shields and Goidel reported that the declining rates of turnout occurred in all levels of society and were not over-represented in the disadvantaged classes. Todd G. Shields and Robert K. Goidel, "Participation Rates, Socioeconomic Class Biases, and Congressional Elections: A Crossvalidation," *American Journal of Political Science* 41 (April, 1997): 683-691. In their important refinement of participatory definitions and practices Sidney Verba and his colleagues, for instance, demonstrate that socioeconomic causation matters most for activities such as working in campaigns, giving money and political protest. It matters least with political contacting and voting. Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Volunteerism and American Politics*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995): 682-682. The best study on the relationship between SES and political participation in the context of direct face-to-face neighborhood politics found that community participants were "disproportionately from upper SES backgrounds." This was as true for respondents with active avenues of strong democracy available to them as for respondents from cities where such opportunities were lacking. Interestingly the authors found that for low and middle-class residents the stronger the neighborhood organization, the more the participation. But strength of organization did not change the participatory behavior of higher SES citizens. Jeffrey Berry, Kent E. Portney and Ken Thompson, *The Rebirth of Urban Democracy*, (Washington, D.C. 1993) The Brookings Institution Press, 83-84, 95.

[51] Even the bibliographical essays on political participation have grown so numerous they will soon need their own. For the more recent period one of the best, however, is Arend Lijphart's presidential address to the American Political Science Association: "Unequal Participation: Democracy's Unsolved Dilemma," *The American Political Science Review* (March, 1997): 1-14. Earlier essays are: M. Margaret Conway, *Political Participation in the United States*, (Washington, D.C.: The Congressional Quarterly Press, 1985) and Lester W. Milbrath and M. L. Goel, *Political Participation*, (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1977). The first edition was authored by Milbrath alone and appeared in 1965 from the same

this most prestigious of paradigms wilts in the face of real democracy. The towns of Athens and

Newark, which score dramatically low on SES variables, had the very highest town meeting

attendance of the 70 towns we studied in 1992, while the towns of Shelburne and Hinesburg, which

rank remarkably higher on SES indicators, had the very lowest. Not only does political participation

in Newark and Athens survive what so many political scientists claim is a most hostile environment

it actually seems to flourish there. In Shelburne only three percent of the registered voters went to

town meeting. Hinesburg doubled that. Six percent attended. Up in the Northeast Kingdom town

of Newark 49 percent made it to town meeting and in Athens the figure was 58 percent.

The census of 1990 reported that the percent of citizens over 25 years of age with college

degrees averaged 19.1 in the two Kingdom towns and 41.0 in Hinesburg and Shelburne. What about

income and occupation? To expand and simplify the analysis I created a composite index of socio-

economic variables (a factor score) and called it "upscale." Each town that had at least one town

meeting in the 1251 meetings we studied after 1976 when accurate SES data were available received

an upscale score.[52] The mean score of the index is 0. It has a high of 3.14 (for Norwich) and a low of

–1.88. Newark and Athens averaged -.03 and Hinesburg and Shelburne averaged 1.41. The 15

meetings in Table IV-A support this pattern. In the five best meetings of the 1251, the median

percentage of college graduates was 19.4. In the five worst meetings it was 25.1.[53] There seems to

be an inclination for towns whose citizens in the aggregate have more formal education to have

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publisher. The literature is also well developed (at least through the 1980's) in the selections contained in: William B. Crotty (ed.), *Political Participation and American Democracy*, (New York: The Greenwood Press, 1991). For the decade of the 1980's see the articles in the July-August (1991) issue of *Society*. A succinct representation of some of the more important studies is Henry E. Brady, Sidney Verba, and Kay Lehman Schlozman, "Beyond SES: A Resource Model of Political Participators," *American Political Science Review* 89 (June 1995): 271-294.

[52] For a more detailed explanation of the factor score, see below page ___.

lower, not higher attendance. But there are exceptions. Swanton and Fair Haven had low levels of

college graduates and low attendance. The master thesis would have predicted this. North Hero was

above average on college graduates and had very high attendance. This too fits the socio-economic

status model. Even so it is clear that real democracy seems distinctly uncomfortable in high-status

environments.

The central causative feature of this analysis is also introduced in Table IV-A. Community

size. In the towns holding the meetings with the very lowest turnout the median number of

registered voters was 3622. In towns with average attendance it was 621. The towns with the very

highest percent of registered voters in attendance had a median of 259 registered voters.[54] Moreover,

small town people participate more than large town people even though their communities score low

on socioeconomic status variables.[55]

[TABLE IV-A ABOUT HERE]

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[53] The five best town meetings averaged -.37 on the upscale factor. The five worst averaged .83.

[54] Years ago the discipline was convinced that electoral participation would be lower in small, rural places because they were on the "periphery" of society. Said Lester Milbrath in 1965, "One of the most thoroughly substantiated proposition in all of social science is that persons near the center of society are more likely to participate in politics than people near the periphery." Lester Milbrath, *Political Participation,* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1965): 230. Unfortunately little attention was given to exploring the match between *level* of participation and the level of society. Since SES levels were higher in cities, there was more social heterogeneity in them (which sparked conflict and therefore turnout) and people were more "cosmopolitan"–more apt to see their importance in the larger scheme of things–the conclusion seemed inescapable. The smaller the location, the lower the political involvement. It wasn't long, however, before a wide range of evidence began to turn the hypothesis completely around. In 1969 one study said, "the size of the community in which a citizen lives adds nothing to our understanding of his general level of political participation." Norman H. Nie, G. Bingham Powell, Jr. and Kenneth Prewitt, "Social Structure and Political Participation: Developmental Relationships, II," *American Political Science Review* 63 (September 1969): 818-819. Another concluded: "Our most striking finding is precisely that . . . the larger and more cosmopolitan the city, the less the frequency of active citizenship in the common-man stratum of society." Alex Inkels, "Participant Citizenship in Six Developing Countries," *The American Political Science Review* 63 (December 1969): 1140. Then in 1972 Verba and Nie announced the end of the small is bad for participation thesis: "The small, peripheral community is not the place where participation is most inhibited. Rather, citizens participate more than their social characteristics would predict." Verba and Nie, *Participation in America*, 236.

[55] Robert Dahl, through the words of his "Athenian democrat" says: "A democracy must also be of modest size, not only so that all citizens can meet together in the assembly and thus as rulers of the city, but also in order that all citizens may

table 4 A

What to do when the dominant guidepost that sets the direction of inquiry fails? Good searches begin with good theory. This is as true for social science as it is for trout fishing. Without it we are casting frustrating loops of trial and error. The problem here is that nearly all of the literature on political participation proceeds from theoretical premises and/or methodological techniques that do not apply.

They do not apply because they seek to explain participation defined as voting percentages reported for clusters of citizens (like studies of participation across political units such as states or cities) or as a participatory "score" based on what individual citizens tell researchers about their individual behavior. The advantage of using voting percentages is clear. Yet because they are so clean, handy, and accessible, they color too much of the scholarship on participation. I do not mean to be critical. We work with what we have. But the voting act is profoundly different from other forms of participation such as attending a town meeting. One therefore hesitates to transfer reasoning geared to explain it to real democracy.

When researchers select individual citizens at random and interview them concerning their participatory habits (including whether or not they vote), the conceptual texture of the participatory variable is infinitely richer than the voting act alone. It is also concerns much broader theoretical frameworks. Yet the use of these studies as guides in the search for the causes of real democracy triggers problems as well. One is that the analytical case here is the community not the individual. To confuse the two is to engage in what is called the "ecological" or "aggregate" fallacy: that is, applying generalizations about groups to individuals within the groups. Certainly there are ways

around this, the most often practiced of which is to do precisely what I intend to do here: pay lip

service to it and then be very careful about my interpretations.[56]

Another limitation of studies based on depth interviews of individual citizens is that they are

very expensive.   Consequently most use national level data.   Those that are published,

understandably, focus on the theoretical landscapes that dominate the literature. Thus indexes of

participation and participation scores are heavily weighted to reflect political activity in the context

of representative democracy, not direct democracy. Although some of the questions asked could be

matched loosely with attending a town meeting, it often stretches their operational utility to the limit.

At the sub-national level it is nearly impossible to find any research (with a large enough sample) in

even *one* small town to say nothing of a *series* of small towns.[57] But the most serious difficulty with

the literature of political participation has direct implications for theory construction. It marks a

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[56]I have explored the several solutions for the ecological fallacy provided since the 1950s. The most recent, Gary King's *A Solution to the Ecological Inference Problem*, (Princeton, New Jersey: The Princeton University Press, 1997) tied me up for a couple of months one summer. While a friend and I had some success using it to reinforce a strong aggregate relationship in Vermont towns between education levels and support for Vermont's ERA referendum in 1986, I have not applied it to my findings here because in truth I am interested in the aggregate or contextual variables that house real democracy for their own value. Besides I am involved in describing communities and using models from individual level studies primarily to whet the appetite and enliven the process. Frank Bryan and Bill Smith, "Education, Turnout and Equal Rights for Women: King's Solution to the Ecological Inference Problem," (Unpublished Manuscript, Summer 1998).

[57] An important and useful exception which contains micro-level research from local, *face-to-face* decision-making government institutions is Berry, Portney and Thompson, *The Rebirth of Urban Democracy*. The authors' ambitious effort compares political participation in 15 American cities, five of which have functioning forms of neighborhood government which use face-to-face meetings as part of the political process, and ten control cities which do not. Unfortunately, several critical features of their work make the match with my work hazy at best. First, the cities that feature neighborhood participatory structures vary in the *power* these organizations possess. Second, with limited exceptions, they lack *authority*. They are not general purpose governments.   Third, because the data base consists of telephone interviews (about 1100 per city–with a smaller sample of follow ups) we have no hard counts of how many citizens in each are present at the meetings, how long the meetings last, how many people speak out at the meetings and so on. Finally the size of the neighborhood does not enter the analysis. This variable it will be seen is of utmost importance to this study. Understand. These are not criticisms. They are simply components of the design needed to accomplish the authors' goals. It is the single best empirical study of urban neighborhood democracy I have found.

critical branch in the decision tree of scholarship. Scale. To understand its implications we must

return to a point in time when the empirical revolution in social science was a virtual frontier.[58]

The Size Variable

It was 1957 when Anthony Downs' classic, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*[59] appeared

and established a baseline in the literature on political participation, or to be more precise, the

rationality of the voting act in mass democracies. The intellectual ecology of the field was then

heavily influenced by two related propositions. One was that political participation in America was

woefully low and the other was that what there was of it was limited to the voting act. In the most

important of the early studies of political participation *The American Voter* Angus Campbell and his

associates put it quite bluntly in 1960: "For most Americans voting is the sole act of participation in

politics."[60] Down's contribution was to begin the process of explaining voting (or rather the lack of

it) in purely rational terms: In its simplest form his model reads: voting is unreasonable because the

cost of voting far outweighs its benefits. As B. F. Skinner put it (speaking through Dr. Frazier) the

probability of making a difference in an election is "less than the chance [of being] killed on the way

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[58] One of the more insightful attempts to integrate the SES model with size holds that highly educated citizens tend to free themselves from "the boundaries of tightly construed social groups" and expose themselves to a "larger climate of public opinion." But this "larger climate" is apt to be "anchored" in the neighborhood. Robert Huckfeldt, Paul Allen Beck, Russell J. Dalton and Jeffrey Levine, "Political Environments, Cohesive Social Groups and the Communication of Public Opinion," *American Journal of Political Science* 39 (November 1995): 1025-1054. Something like this occurs in small towns in Vermont. To believe this one must understand that small towns are no longer synchronated with "hard line social groups and strata."

[59] Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1957).

[60] Angus Campbell, Philip Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes, *The American Voter*, (New York: Wiley, 1964): 50.

to the polls."[61] Thus Downs left us with what has been called the "voters' paradox": the cost of

voting always outweighs its benefits yet the majority of the people vote anyway.[62] The dilemma is

extended by the belief that the more citizens know about the system (the more educated they are) the

more rational (about the possibility of enhancing their own self interest at the polls) they will be and,

consequently, the less likely they will be to vote. Yet the empirical evidence is clear: people with

more education vote more, not less.[63]

The voters' paradox has been explained in several ways.[64] One is to extend the definition of

"benefits" in the cost/benefits equation to include psychic rewards such as satisfying inclinations to

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[61] B. F. Skinner, *Walden II*, (New York: Macmillian, 1948): 265, quoted in R. E. Goodin and K. W. S. Roberts, "The Ethical Voter," *The American Political Review* 69 (September, 1975): 926 – 938.

[62] This strain in the literature of political participation is complex. The following are (roughly chronological) guideposts: V.O. Key noted early on that turnout in southern primaries was higher than in the general election because primaries were more competitive and outcomes critical making it more reasonable to pay the cost of voting. V. O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, (New York: Alford A. Knopf, 1949). See the reference in: J. Kim, J. R. Petrocik and S. N. Enokson, "Voter Turnout Among the American States: Systematic and Individual Components," *American Political Science Review* 69 (March 1975): 107-123. Key also makes a general case for voter rationality in: *The Responsible Electorate: Rationality in Presidential Voting*, (Cambridge: The Harvard University Press, 1966); Gordon Tullock, *Toward a Mathematics of Politics*, (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1967); Michael J. Shapiro, "Rational Political Man: A Synthesis of Economic and Socio-Psychological Perspectives," *American Political Science* Review 63 (December 1969): 1106-1119; G. P. Stigler, "Economic Competition and Political Competition," *Public Choice* 13 (1972): 91-106; Yoram Barzel and Eugene Silberberg, "Is the Act of Voting Rational," *Public Choice* 16 (1973): 51-58; James Enelow and Melvin J. Hinich, *"*A New Approach to Voter Uncertainty in the Downsian Spatial Model," *American Journal of Political Science* 25 (August, 1981): 483-493. (See also Benjamin Page's earlier piece on political ambiguity: Benjamin I. Page, "The Theory of Political Ambiguity," *The American Political Science Review* 70 (September, 1976): 742-752; Morris P. Fiorina, *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections*, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1981). This is a good example of the rational choice perspective on party identification as a stimulant to voting. John P. Katosh and Michael W. Traugott, "Costs and Values in the Calculus of Voting," *The American Journal of Political Science* 26 (May, 1982): 361-376; Carroll B. Foster, "The Performance of Rational Voter Models in Recent Presidential Elections," *The American Political Science Review* 78 (September, 1984): 679-690; Guillermo Owen and Bernard Grofman, "To Vote or Not to Vote: The Paradox of Nonvoting," *Public Choice* 42 (1984): 311-325; and John Aldrich, "Rational Choice and Turnout," *American Journal of Political Science* 37 (February, 1993): 246-278.

[63] There is always the possibility, of course, that education and rationality are not positively associated. This hypothesis is often articulated in somewhat earthy ways by the farmers, loggers, and people of the outback I grew up with and still live with here in Vermont. Often, I, myself, have been identified by these people as clear evidence that the hypothesis holds.

[64] Sidney Verba warns us not to get so intellectually bent out of shape by the voter's paradox that we forget the more interesting questions: "…given that the people participate (whether they ought to or not) are why some do so and others

civic duty and social responsibility (like the feeling you get after going to church even though you

may not be perfectly certain you've benefited yourself by so doing).[65] Another is the "mini-max

regret" model in which you eliminate the potential for maximum regret if you don't vote (the

election is decided by one ballot) with the minimal expenditure of energy it takes to vote.[66] A more

modern version might be an inclination to waste money on a lottery ticket to avoid the horror of

"your" number being picked the one week you get rational and decide never to play again.

A third approach has been to argue that voting is only one act in a hierarchy of acts that are

performed by people who are political activists anyway. They have become activists because they

have found a way to *reduce the size* of the arena in which they participate and thereby increase the

probability that their actions will tip the cost/benefit balance in their favor. This is accomplished by

participating at other levels and in different ways. Consider what Verba and Nie call "particularized

contacting" of public officials on behalf of issue-specific goals. Casting a vote for President in 2000

carries a probability of affecting the outcome of the election of almost zero even though the electoral

college has reduced the size of the pool to turnout at the state level. A call to the mayor's office on

do not, why the differences in activity, and above all, what are the consequences for American democracy of the kind of participation we have from the kind of people who participate." Sidney Verba, "The 1993 James Madison Award Lecture: The Voice of the People," *P. S. Political Science and Politics* (December, 1993): 677-686.

[65] The earliest formulation of this thesis is: William H. Riker and Peter C. Ordeshook, "A Theory of the Calculus of Voting," *The American Political Science Review* 62 (March, 1968): 25-42. See also: B. Barry, *Sociologists, Economists, and Democracy*, (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1970) and D. P. Green and I. Shapiro, *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory: A Critique of Applications in Political Science*, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1994).

[66]J. A. Ferejohn and M. P. Fiorina, "The Paradox of Not Voting: A Decision Theoretic Analysis," *The American Political Science Review* 68 (1974): 525-536. See also: Orley Ashenfelter and Stanley Kelley, Jr., "Determinants of Participation in Presidential Elections," *Journal of Law and Economics* 18 (December, 1975): 695-733; L. S. Mayer and I. J. Good, "Is Minimax Regret Applicable to Voting Decisions?" *The American Political Science Review* 69 (September 1975): 916-917; N. Beck, "The Paradox of Minimax Regret," *The American Political Science Review* 69 (1975); P. J. Kenny and T. W. Rice, "An Empirical Examination of the Minimax Hypothesis," *The American Politics Quarterly* 17 (1989): 153-162 and André Blais, Robert Young, Christopher Fleury, and Miriam Lapp, "Do People Vote on the Basis of Minimax Regret?" *Political Research Quarterly* Vol. 48, No. 4 (December 1995): 827-836.

the issue of the stop sign on Elm Street reduces the size of the pool to the number of people who called the Mayor on that issue.

Verba and Nie put it this way: "Our data on the content of citizen-initiated contacts show a citizenry involved with government in ways that are highly salient to them, on issues that they define, and through channels that seem appropriate. What we are suggesting is that on matters of the politics of everyday life, citizens know what they want."[67] Thus the paradox of voting is explained in terms of an electorate that has learned the benefits of political participation at a more human scale and this *habit* of participation then beclouds their rationality (defined in terms of self interest) and carries them into the polling both. This model has the added value of explaining the link between socio-economic status and voting, since it is logical to assume that professional and white-collar classes in the higher education and income cohorts will be more apt to be involved in particularized contacting. The key for us here, however, is not the linkage between particularized contacting and voting. It is the notion of size and its impact on particularized contacting.

The fourth way out of the voter paradox also involves the notion of a smaller political arena. Here, however, size is shrunk not by reduced numbers, but by the width of the perceived gap between the candidates in the race. If, for instance the voter is told that a race is very close and may be decided by a handful of votes, then the probability of a single vote making a difference increases dramatically.[68] It might be the case for instance that one could anticipate more potential "benefits"

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[67]Verba and Nie, *Participation in America,* 113.

[68] There is growing evidence that efforts to mobilize for political action are often defined in terms of the probability of group successes. Mark I. Lickbach, *The Rebel's Dilemma*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995). After a review of this work and other studies dealing with both the rational action model and the free rider problem in the collective action model Finkel and Muller conclude: "Put simply, what matters for protest behavior are not private incentives but, rather, collective goals, collective chances for success and the individual's estimate of his or her own

by voting in a close race for Congressperson than in a local race in which one candidate is seen as a

sure winner. One of the most clearly marked trails through the literature on political participation is

defined in terms of this "closeness" hypothesis.[69] Striking out on this trail from its base station (the

Barzel and Silberberg model of 1973) and following it to the present day, however, is a journey

through very dense thickets of mixed results.[70]

Where does this leave us? First, a stronger card can trump reason. We are told that people

will vote more, even in the face of gigantic odds of it making a difference because "making a

difference" doesn't matter as much as being a good citizen. Duty trumps reason. Or we are told that

the size variable does matter because it makes participation on any number of smaller fronts

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importance for the collective outcome."   See: Steven E. Finkel and Edward N. Muller, "Rational Choice and the dynamics of Collective Political Action: Evaluating Alternative Models with Panel Data," *American Political Science Review* 92 (March 1998): 46.

[69]For an excellent review of the early "closeness" literature see: Foster, "The Performance of Rational Voter Models in Recent Presidential Elections," 678-690.

[70]Barzel and Silbererg, "Is the Act of Voting Rational?" 51-58. This genre of the literature is also indebted to J. F. Banzhaf for his early work in establishing voter "power indexes" which are directly related to the size of a district and, consequently, to the probability that any single citizen can cast a tie-breaking vote. See: J. F. Banzhaf, "One Man, 3312 Votes: A Mathematical Analysis of the Electoral College,"*Villanova Law Review* 13 (1968): 304-335. Much of the work on "closeness" is subsumed in the works already cited on the rational voter thesis in general and, more specifically, the "mini-max regret" explanation. Others are: John A. Ferejohn and Morris P. Fiorina, "Closeness Counts Only in Horseshoes and Dancing," *American Political Science Review* 69 (September, 1975): 920-925; Using county level data for Mississippi and Montana and town level data for Vermont I found little relationship between competition and turnout in either the general or primary elections between 1950 and 1972. Frank M. Bryan, *Politics in the Rural States*, (Boulder, Colorado: The Westview Press, 1981): 93-95; F. Thompson, "Closeness Counts in Horseshoes …and Elections," *Public Choice* 38 (1982): 305-316; Gregory A. Caldeira and Samuel C. Patterson, "Contextual Influences on Participation in U.S. State Legislative Elections," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 7 (August 1982): 359-381; Patrick J. Kenny, "Explaining Turnout in Gubernatorial Primaries," *American Politics Quarterly* 11 (July 1983): 315-326; Malcolm E. Jewell, "Northern State Gubernatorial Elections: Explaining Voting Turnout," *American Politics Quarterly* 12 (January 1984): 101-116; Harvey J. Tucker, "Contextual Models of Participation in U.S. State Legislative Elections," *Western Political Quarterly* (March 1986): 67-78; Patrick J. Kenny and Tom W. Rice, "The Effect of Contextual Forces on Turnout in Congressional Primaries," *Social Science Quarterly* 67 (June 1986): 329-336; Gary W. Cox and Michael C. Munger, "Closeness, Expenditures, and Turnout in the 1982 U.S. House Elections," *The American Political Science Review* 83 (March, 1989): 217-231; George Chressanthis, "Third Party Voting and the Rational Voter Model: Empirical Evidence from Recent Presidential Elections," *Public Choice* 65 (1990): 189-193; George A. Chressanthis and Stephen D. Shaffer, "Major Party Failure and Third Party Voting in Presidential Elections," *Social Science Quarterly* 74 (June, 1993): 263-274.

meaningful enough to promote participation in mass elections. Habit trumps reason. Second, what

may seem irrational really is not. A surrogate for small scale is created when mass elections are

reduced in the minds of the voters by the perception that the outcome of the race is in serious doubt.

Or it is argued that what may seem irrational (voting against all odds of making a difference)

becomes rational indeed when the regret associated with not voting when it would have made a

difference is considered.[71]

It is time to back up and start over. The dead end we find in the literature suggests it.[72] Our

data base of small town democratic systems allows it. Our preliminary findings command it.

Needed is a look at high cost political participation in governments small enough to make variations

in the potential to make a difference salient and where the significance of the outcome is high.[73] The

data in Table IV-A slap us alongside the head. In matters of real democracy the premiere causal

variable in the literature of political participation, socio-economic status, does not suffice. In fact it

may be dysfunctional. The gap between this first peek at the data and a definitive conclusion is, of

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[71] A considerable amount of literature from community psychology indicates that some sense of personal power is a prerequisite to participation. An example is: "David M. Chavis and Abraham Wandersman, "Sense of Community in the Urban Environment: A Catalyst for Participation and Community Development," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 18 (No. 1, 1990): 55-81. But the relationship between sense of power and group size has not been featured in these studies.

[72] Arend Lijphart, in his thorough review of the literature on political participation, makes, for instance, this claim: "From the perspective of rational choice, it is to be expected that the careful reasoning voter will vote less in most second order than in first order elections." Why would this be so if it is the case that the size of the electorate is much smaller in second order elections? Is it that significance of the outcome trumps potential to make a difference? Or is it that in second order constituencies the curvilinear pattern in the "making a difference" potential means the single voter still (even in a small city, for instance) cannot in any practical sense "make a difference"? Or could it be that American political socialization is biased in favor of "national citizenship over local citizenship and it is this, not the significance of the issues," that draws people to the polls in first order elections? See: Lijphart, "Unequal Participation," 1-14.

[73] Most political scientists, I wager, would disagree with my "significance" claim. This question is in my view a key ingredient in the mystery soup of political participation and rational behavior. Which *is* (not "ought to be") more significant to a typical citizen, a school bus route, a zoning ordinance, or one's property taxes (on the one hand) or (on the other hand) who becomes President of the United States?

course, massive. But it certainly grabs the attention. One thing is for sure: in the battle to build a

working hypothesis with which to begin an analysis of real democracy community size must lead us

into the fray.[74]

EXPLORING SIZE

For the first time since Aristotle posed many of these same questions data from town

meeting allow us to place the continuum of community size under a microscope powerful enough to

expose politics so small that variations in size make an immediate and potent difference. Precluded

is the necessity to artificially shrink the political arena through the dubious methodological

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[74] The effect of size alone as an independent variable in political participation research has been hopelessly entwined with urbanism and other variables associated with it. Early on, cross-polity studies dueled extensively on the question of turnout as it related to the urban-rural continuum. Studies that found a positive relationship between cities and turnout were Philip Cutwright, "National Political Development: Its Measurement and Social Correlates," in Nelson W. Polsby *et al, Politics and Social Life*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1963): 569-581; Karl W. Deutsch, "Social Mobilization and Political Development," *American Political Science Review* 55 (September 1961): 493-514; Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968). As time passed scholars began to have their doubts. See: Wayne A. Cornelius, Jr., "Urbanization as an Agent in Latin American Political Instability: The Case of Mexico," *American Political Science Review* 63 (September 1969): 833-857; Jae-On Kim and B. C. Koh, "Electoral Behavior and Social Development in South Korea: An Aggregate Data Analysis of Presidential Elections," *Journal of Politics* 34 (August 1972): 825-859; Nie, Powell, and Prewitt, "Social Structure and Political Participation: Developmental Relationships, II," 808-832; Bradley M. Richardson, "Urbanization and Political Participation: The Case of Japan," *American Political Science Review* 67 (June 1973): 433-452; Sidney Tarrow, "The Urban-Rural Cleavage in Political Involvement: The Case of France," *American Political Science Review* 65 (June 1971): 341-357. By the 1970's studies on American participation were in near agreement that "city vs. country" comparisons by themselves were not very useful. Gerald W. Johnson attributed his finding that smaller rural counties demonstrated higher turnout to the organization effects of unions in the coal mining areas. Both of the major books on the subject tied size-based participation in smaller places to other things. For Milbrath it was "center-periphery" attitudinal constructs and for Verba and Nie it was notions of "community boundriness." Gerald W. Johnson, "Research Note on Political Correlates of Voter Participation: A Deviant Case Analysis," *American Political Science Review* 65 (September, 1971): 768-775. Milbrath and Goel, *Political Participation*; and Verba and Nie, *Participation in America.* By 1980 it was clear that size was so clearly associated with other factors the task for scholars was to focus on the disentanglement. Parker W. Frisbie, "Urban Sociology in the U.S.," *American Behavioral Scientist* 24 (1980): 177-214. In the 1980's the original association between higher turnout and the cities was discredited (it fell to concommitment status variables) and the newer findings that smaller places had more political involvement fell to communitarian explanations. For an excellent review of the dynamics of this process see: David Lowery, Ruth Hoogland DeHoog and William Lyons, "Citizenship and the Empowered Locality," *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 28 (September, 1992): 69-103. That the rational voter thesis has never played a role in the urban-rural debate on political participation is attributable to the fact that the *population ranges* of the cases did not extend downward enough to pick up size differentials that would make clear to citizens differences in what chance they had to effect electoral outcomes.

assumption that the voter's perception of closeness can be trusted. We can abandon the make-do

conceptual laboratories that mass society data require. We can work instead in a laboratory where,

on the lower end of the spectrum, communities are small enough to make perfectly clear the

rationality of participation and where communities increase in size dramatically enough to make the

transition from "rational" to "irrational" participation visible to the naked eye.[75]

The Linear Relationship

The operating assumption is that voters will *understand* that participating in a meeting of,

say, 100 voters gives one a *real* chance of changing the outcome (or to demonstrate one's

commitment to the polity) and that this chance is far less potent in a meeting of 300 voters. Further,

there is a point at which the size advantage is so clear cut it ought to assume priority in any

hypothesized chain of causal variables said to impact on the decision to participate or not to

participate. In short it is time to put the horse before the cart again. The horse is the size variable

and the cart is a load of other factors such as socio-economic status, governmental structure and

other situational variables.

First, a very simple hypothesis: the bigger the community, the lower the turnout at town

meeting. Recall the meetings in Newark and Athens. These towns had by most measures the least

raw material for political participation.   But they had the highest turnout. Hinesburg and Shelburne

ought to have had the highest but they in fact had the lowest. Now consider their size. The town of

Athens had a total population of 313 in 1992. The town of Newark had 354. The towns of

Hinesburg and Shelburne, however, had populations of 3780 and 5871 respectively. We saw the

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[75] For the life of me I can't figure out why some enterprising young graduate student has not done this before using

same phenomenon in different towns in Table IV-A. If this pattern obtains for the entire range of

data the conclusion would seem inescapable, size matters and it matters a lot.

To draw a more refined bead on the question the 1435 meetings were clustered in groups

representing increasing increments of 150 voters in the towns in which the meetings were held[76] (see

Figure IV-F). The smallest towns (those that had less than 150 registered voters) averaged 40

percent attendance at town meeting. The very largest (they had more than 3600 voters) averaged

only 6 percent attendance. More remarkable, however, is the consistency of the association between

attendance at town meeting and town size. As towns in the clusters get bigger, attendance falls like

a slinky on a stair case, snapping downward one predictable step at a time. Only at the upper end of

the registered voter scale, where fewer meetings in each cohort cause more volatility in the data, do

variations appear.

[FIGURE IV-F ABOUT HERE]

The process of grouping the meetings into clusters is a handy way to simplify the analysis.

The cost is precision. It is far better to look at each individual meeting to see how its attendance

matches up with the size of the town in which it was held. This increases the observations from 20

(the number that resulted when we broke up the towns into groups) to 1435, the total number of

meetings in the study. The result of this matching of 1435 "attendances" with 1435, "town sizes" is

best summarized by means of what for decades has been the hand shovel of analysis in the social

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ballot-box participation in some very small places. Village elections in New York state a possibility.

[76]Towns with between 2400 and 3000 registered voters were grouped in two clusters representing increments of 300 voters to increase the number of towns in each group. For the same reason the final two groups represent towns with from 3001 to 3600 voters and from 3601 voters to [n] of voters respectively.

sciences, the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient. The simplest utility of Pearson's "r" as it's called is its ability to roughly summarize the correlation between two variables. The coefficient of correlation ranges between -1.0 and +1.0. In this case the coefficient of correlation representing the relationship between town size and the percent of the registered voters who attended town meeting was -.65.

The product moment coefficient has another useful property. When squared it tells us the percent of the variance in the dependent variable "explained" by the independent variable. The "r" of .65, therefore, tells us that about 42 percent of the variance in attendance at town meeting disappears when we take town size into account. This is a more intuitively satisfying measure since it gives us meaningful reference points: the best relationship is one in which all (100 percent) of the variance is explained and the worst is one in which none is explained. Forty-two percent of the variance explained, of course, means we are still in the dark about 58 percent of whatever it is that makes attendance go up and down from meeting to meeting.

It also means that the relationship between size and democracy is very strong, indeed.[77] A comparison with the findings of Verba and Nie will put this in perspective. After a thorough analysis of the importance of socio-economic status in explaining their overall political participation score for a large sample of American citizens, they find that the correlation coefficient ("r") between socio-economic status and participation is .37. This explains only 14 percent of the variance in

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[77] The only other clear example of a negative relationship between size and involvement based on direct, face-to-face political participation approximates the town meeting is found in: Menachem Rosner, *Participatory, Political and Organizational Democracy and the Experience of the Israeli Kibbutz*, (Haifa: University of Haifa, 1986): 44. In comparing attendance at community and work place assemblies in Israel Rosner found it twice as high in the work place and he attributes this to size: "The community is much larger than the plants." Rosner, *Participatory Political and Organizational Democracy*, 1981, 12, 44.

Figure 4F

Table 4B

participation. When the authors match SES against the type of participation we are most interested

in here, communal activity, the percent of variance explained drops still more to 11 percent. Yet the

authors are willing to claim (as I too would have been) that "the standard socio-economic model

works very well for our overall measure of activity and for campaign and communal activity."[78]

This makes the size variable, which explains 44 percent of the variance, seem quite impressive.

How reliable is this coefficient? The meetings, after all, are selected on a yearly basis and

pooled over a 29-year period. The most obvious first test of the coefficient is to determine if it holds

up for each year during which the data were gathered. It could be, for instance, that a relationship,

which appears to be so strong overall, is actually a product of its great strength in particular years.

Or it might be that the coefficient was much stronger in the early 1970's when this study began than

it is today. By putting all the town meetings in one pool, these kinds of linkages might be obscured.

It adds significantly to the credibility of the size variable to be able to report that this fear is

unfounded. The relationship remains remarkably consistent over time.

[TABLE IV-B ABOUT HERE]

Table IV-B shows the r's and R^2's for 13 two-year clusters of towns that were studied

between 1970 and 1997.[79]   When the number of registered voters in each town are correlated with

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[78]Verba and Nie, *Participation in America,* 133-135. What is a "strong" relationship between two variables (assuming the variables have statistical and paradigmatic legitimacy) is, of course, pretty much a judgment call. In his book *Mathematics & Politics,* Hayward R. Aiker, Jr., who was writing from Yale University quotes Karl Deutsch on this matter as follows: "Anyone who suggests a variable explaining an additional 10 percent of the variance has made a contribution to political theory." See: Hayward R. Aiker, Jr., *Mathematics & Politics*, (New York: The Macmillian Company, 1965): 89.

[79]We have attendance data for only one town in 1976, my home town of Newbury.

that town's average attendance at town meeting for all the towns in each group, the weakest R^2 is .34

and the strongest is .56. The median is .46 and the mean is .43. When the average attendance

figure is replaced by the highest attendance figure, the lowest R^2 is .27 and the highest is .59. The

median is .42 and the median is .41. All of these relationships are, of course, negative.

A hard squint reveals a couple of very hazy patterns in the data. The coefficients are a bit

weaker both in the early years and the later years of the study and the range of their variation is

greater when the highest attendance recorded at town meeting is used instead of the average of the

several attendance counts that were taken. But the remarkable thing about these coefficients is their

consistency. A wide array of variables can affect attendance at town meeting; a snowstorm, a

controversial issue, the structure of the town meeting itself, the nature, socioeconomic, and political

character of the community in which it is held. The fact that the size of community variable remains

so powerful and so consistent over time is remarkable. Simply stated, if we drop randomly into the

data set at any point over the 27-year period, we would come away with the same conclusion we

drew from the pooled data: size matters and it matters plenty. [80]

The Bend in the Data

To end the discussion about the connection between size and democracy at this point,

however, would be to ignore a predictable and intriguing pattern apparent in Figure IV-F. As the

relationship between town size and *increasing numbers* of people at town meeting was not a straight

line or linear relationship, neither is the connection between size and *decreasing percentages* of

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[80]The coefficients for the yearly studies produce similar conclusions. Variations in the coefficients are small and randomly distributed. The strong similarity in the coefficients of the two dependent variables (average attendance and highest attendance) verify a point made earlier that for analytical purposes it does not matter greatly which variable is used. The "r" between the variables is .96.

people at town meeting. As the towns in the cohorts increase in size from the first cohort to the

eighth cohort the decline in attendance at town meeting is sharp. But after that point it begins to

level off, that is, increases in the number of registered voters does not reduce the percent of those

registered voters who went to town meeting with anywhere near the same intensity. Put another way

there is a point of diminishing returns after which enlargement of electorates does not produce as

much decline in participation.

Imagine a straight line drawn as closely as possible through the points representing the

average attendance levels for the cohorts beginning with the first cohort in Figure IV-F through the

eighth cohort. Compare it to a flatter straight line that might be drawn as close as possible through

the points representing the attendance levels for the meetings in the rest of the cohorts. By

comparing both lines to the vertical axis of the chart one could approximate just how much

attendance would be "lost" as town size increased, first for the set of smaller towns and then for the

larger towns.

Since the cohorts represent increases of 150 registered voters in the towns where the

meetings were held, a naked eye estimate might conclude every increase of 150 registered voters in

towns of under 1200 lowers the percent of registered voters in attendance at town meeting by almost

three percentage points. The same kind of estimate can be made for the shallower line, the line

predicting loss in attendance associated with increasing size for towns with more than 1200 voters.

This second line might read: for every increase in 150 registered voters in town a decline of only

three quarters of one percent of registered voters attending town meeting should be expected.

Using a linear regression model to predict the attendance at town meeting based on the size

of the town in which it is held works well enough for individual parts of the distribution (of town

size) but it is rather clumsy when applied to the entire array of towns. It is more than clumsy. It is

downright embarrassing. If one imagines a line drawn as straight as possible through all the points

in Figure IV-F (when statisticians do this mathematically they call it the "line of best fit" since it

would minimize to the greatest extent possible the total distance produced if the distances from each

point to the line were added together) one can imagine such a line predicting that towns with more

than 5000 registered voters would have -15 percent of the voters at town meeting.

The correlation coefficients in Table IV-B were figured from just such a straight line

equation or linear regression model. Pearson's "r" and R^2 are in fact byproducts of linear regression

and as such are often misleading summaries of the relationships they are intended to explain. A

quick sojourn into this methodology will help in a couple of ways. It will make clear the analytical

techniques that I will use throughout this book—techniques that are far simpler (and a lot more fun)

than statisticians make them out to be. More importantly it will also show us in more detail how the

relationship between size and democracy works itself out.

To begin a random sample of 200 meetings (about 15 percent of the total meetings) was

selected from the data base. When too many meetings are crammed into a single scatterplot

individual cases become invisible to the naked eye and the analytical utility of the scatterplot is

compromised. Next attendance at these meetings was predicted from an indicator that would fail

and in that failure demonstrate how much total variance there is in the data for town meeting

attendance. This nonsensical variable was the alphabetical ordering of the towns in which the

meeting was held.

Plot 1 in Figure IV-G shows the impossibility of predicting attendance at town meeting from

the place in the alphabet occupied by the first letter of the name of the town in which the meeting

was held. Those towns at the beginning of the alphabet had a whisper less attendance than those at

the end but clearly not enough to question the assumption that this is purely a random occurrence. In

short Plot 1 does its duty. It provides a handy way to picture how attendance at town meeting varies

from meeting to meeting. It also helps to revisit the communities and actually see how they are

positioned in a comparative field of inquiry. My hometown of Newbury appears twice, once above

and once below the line of average attendance. So does Greensboro on beautiful Caspian Lake in the

high meadow country north of Hardwick. Both times it had better than average attendance.

Hinesburg, Newark, and Shelburne, three of the four towns discussed at the opening of this chapter,

also made the sample at least once.

[FIGURE IV-G ABOUT HERE]

The next step was to see if attendance at town meeting could be forecasted from the size of

the town in which it was held. Plot 2 in Figure IV-G makes the attempt. Consider it as a much more

refined display of the data in Figure IV-F that shows in precise terms how the variance in the data

can be reduced by 45 percent by matching it with town size rather than alphabetical ordering. Only a

few scant paragraphs ago this relationship was heralded with near orgasmic enthusiasm. But Plot 2

reveals a problem that suggests this excitement may have been premature.

Note that if we were to use the line of best fit produced by the linear regression equation to

predict the attendance at any particular town meeting our success would depend on the size of the

town. Worse, the direction of the errors we made would also be clustered on certain points on the

line. Roughly speaking the line underestimates the attendance for both the very smallest and the

very largest towns.   It tends to overestimate the attendance for those in the middle. Towns like

fig 4 G

Ripton, Waitsfield and Craftsbury are estimated to have far lower attendance than they actually had if it is assumed that the positive impact decreasing town size has on attendance remains constant across the range of town size.

Ripton, the rugged little hill town where Robert Frost once lived is as good a place as any to see how this works. The slope of the line in Plot 2 estimates, for instance, that Ripton's attendance would be 29.4 percent of the registered voters (the constant) minus .01 of a percent of attendance for every voter in town. Since Ripton had 174 voters it was necessary to subtract 1.74 percentage points (174 x (-.01)) from its entitlement of 29.4 percent turnout. Thus the prediction Ripton was 27.6. In fact, however, Ripton almost doubled that with exactly 50 percent attendance. It had in effect 22.4 percentage point *more* attendance than was predicted by the "line of best fit" extended through the data. By the same formula,[81] Proctor, with almost seven times the registered voters of Ripton, is predicted to have 17.0 percent attendance, but in fact falls 11.4 percentage points short of that since only six percent of its registered voters came to town meeting. Stowe turned out 16.4 percent. Since its larger size predicted it to have only 2.8 percent attendance, it overachieved by 13.6 percentage points.

While using town size to produce a *straight-line* predictor of town meeting attendance is useful the bend in the data renders predictions that are *systematically* off base. One way to deal with this problem is to develop two straight-line predictions, one for towns with less than 1200 registered voters and one for towns with 1200 or more registered voters. Twelve hundred registered voters seemed to be a hinge point at which the steep early decline in turnout at town meeting leveled out.

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[81]$YC = A + BX$ or (here: $YC = 29.4 + (-.01*174)$). This, of course, is the infamous linear regression equation that professors in statistics departments use to scare the hell out of undergraduates in political science departments. I have

Plot 3 in Figure IV-G displays the relationship between town size and meeting attendance for these two sections of the data. For the meetings held in towns with less than 1200 registered voters the new linear regression line clearly improves the estimate of meeting attendance based on town size. First and most importantly the meetings are more apt to surround the line rather than hover above it or below it in groups. The systematic error is pretty much erased.   Secondly, the slope of the line becomes steeper. It begins higher on the Y axis at the 35.6 percent turnout level rather than at the 29.4 level and drops off more steeply at the rate of -0.02 rather than -.01. This reflects the fact (as the first, single line did not) that increasing town size *matters more* at this range of town size.

Finally, the bias in favor of small towns produced by the original line is pretty much eliminated. Ripton's 174 voters, for instance, predicted 27.6 percent turnout under the original, single-line model. This meant its actual attendance (50 percent) was 22.4 percentage points over prediction. With the two line model, however, Ripton was expected to have 31.9 percent attendance (a more realistic assessment) and it exceeded that prediction by only 18.1 percentage points. Thus high achieving meetings (held in very smallest towns) didn't look as good under the second line of best fit. Similarly, underachieving meetings held in the very smallest towns looked even worse. The first line (in Plot 2) predicted Panton's 1980 meeting would have 26.9 percent attendance and it in fact had only 19.7 percent, a negative gap (statisticians call it a negative *residual*) of –7.2. But when the line was adjusted upward (making Ripton's attendance less impressive) it left Panton still further below the line with a negative residual of –10.9.

In fact, of course, predictions improved for all the towns that were on the smaller end of the 0-1200 registered voters range and originally above the line. This improvement in the prediction

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always been amazed at the capacity of statisticians to make something that is so much fun seem so horrible.

diminished our view of their attendance, however, as it made it seem nearer what it *ought* to be

given the size of the town in which it was held. Predictions were not as accurate for meetings in the

very small towns that were originally below the line. But they were more *realistic* and as such made

the attendance at these meetings worse as well. Conversely all the meetings held in towns on the

bigger end of the 0-1200 range *and originally below* the line improved their positions while those

above the line suffered larger errors. Note for instance that Underhill comes out closer to the line in

Plot 3 than it did in Plot 2 and Huntington strays away. Thus our assessment of both of these towns

as attendance achievers improves with the two-line model. Huntington's positive residual expands

and Underhill's negative residual retracts. This is all for good since once we have fully digested the

profound impact size has on attendance at town meeting we will use these gaps, these residuals, to

control for size and search for the other reasons why attendance varies from meeting to meeting and

from town to town.

Predictions are even better for the smaller number of meetings that took place in towns with

populations of more than 1200 registered voters. By flattening out the line of best fit meetings no

longer cluster systematically above or below it. In the single line model meetings in towns on the

lower end of the 1200 to 4000 registered voter continuum were apt to fall below the line and towns

on the upper end fell far above it. Also we are spared the embarrassing estimate that any town with

more than 2850 registered voters would have less than zero percent of these voters present at town

meeting. Not all the predictions are improved, of course. The meetings in Hartland in 1998 and

Williamstown in 1984 are good examples of this. The line for the full sample estimates that

Hartland's meeting in 1998 should have 8.8 percent of its registered voters at town meeting. It had

6.3, which was 2.5 percentage points lower than expected. The line for towns of over 1200

registered voters, however, predicts Hartland's size entitles it to 10.7 percent turnout. The "error" in

prediction increases about two percentage points from –2.5 to –4.4. Predictions for Swanton,

Rockingham and Shelburne, however, improve dramatically using the split-line linear regression

technique. Table IV-C contains data for 10 meetings that can be found in Plot 3 of Figure IV-G that

exhibits how different lines generate different predictions. It is important to remember that the goal

is to find the line that best *predicts* what a town's turnout should be, given its size. Once such an

estimate is established (that is, town size has been controlled as accurately as possible)[82] the larger

the gaps between predicted turnout and actual turnout the greater the probability of learning more

about real democracy. If there were no gaps at all we would simply chalk up the nature of real

democracy to size alone and go home.

[TABLE IV-C AND TABLE IV-D ABOUT HERE]

Using two straight line or linear regression equations dramatically improves our capacity to

use town size to meaningfully estimate town meeting attendance.   But it is awkward to use. Far

more elegant would be an equation that drew a smooth but curved line through the data so as to

minimize the sum of all the distances between each case and the line itself.   Once this is done we

would have a more nimble size calibrated base from which to measure the impact of other variables

associated with increases and decreases in real democracy.   More importantly, by abandoning two

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[82]Our large sample size in this study means that it takes miniscule relationships to violate levels of statistical reliability. Even with a sub-sample of only 229 cases, all these relationship far exceed threshold levels.

combo tables 4 c and 4 d

linear estimates joined artificially at the waist, we are forced to think more theoretically about the

relationship between size and real democracy.[83]

A SIZE CALIBRATED MEASURE OF REAL DEMOCRACY

Scientific investigation we are told (and I think wisely) should proceed inductively only

when theoretical guidelines are lacking. In this case they are not. What is needed is a reason to

believe that the slope representing the relationship between increasing size and declining attendance

will behave in a certain way. This insight might then form the foundation for an equation that will

estimate attendance levels at town meeting. A pair of theories is available. First there is the

perfectly reasonable observation that when the size of the voting group increases one's power in that

group decreases in a direct, if curvilinear, way. That is to say, one's power is based on the ratio of

the individual to the total number of people present. The second claims that the voter is a bit more

sophisticated and understands that real power for an individual increases with the closeness of the

outcome and is maximized when it is tied.

Two's Company, Three's a Crowd

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[83] No matter how you cut it, of course, it is obvious that the best test of the size, rationality and participation relationship is at the very smallest end of the community size continuum. To do this in a way that would shed light on another important question I will deal with shortly (what is the linkage between real and representative democracy?) what is needed is a data base on elections (say for local officials) in *very small* systems. My suggestion is the over 550 villages in the state of New York. They elect local officers in March and there are enough of them to duplicate the range of population size I have used here. Would turnout drop off at a rate matching what town meeting attendance shows? The same models could easily be applied to a much *lower cost* and *representative* systems. To begin one might want to consult the work of Gerald Benjamin who has studied New York villages from the Rockefeller Institute in Albany. See: Alan Ehrenhalt, "The Mystique of Government 'Close to the People,'" *Governing* (August 1995): 6-7.

I call the measure that holds that an individual's power in a group decreases as the inverse of the group's population the Voter Power Index. In a group of one the voter has 100 percent of the power because she controls 100 percent of the vote. Let someone else join, however, and the voter's power is cut to 50 percent or half, a third person in the group means the voter now has only one third the power and when a fourth comes in it is reduced to 25 percent. But note that the larger the group becomes the smaller the loss if another person joins. This creates a situation of diminishing returns on loss of power as the group increases in size.

Put it this way. If the goal is group influence, a fifth person joining a group of four is much more disheartening than a forty-first person joining a group of forty. In the first case you are reduced from 25 percent of the membership to 20 percent of the membership, a loss of twenty percent; in the second from 2.5 percent of the membership to 2.4 percent of the membership, a loss of only four percent. The "what's one more going to matter?" hypothesis predicts that if (when considering their personal influence) people are willing to attend a meeting with 300 potential attenders an increase in ten more potential attenders at the meeting should make little difference to them. But if they are in a situation where the total number of potential attenders may increase from 30 to 40 (still an increase of only ten voters), this increase may mean a lot indeed.

This simple inverse relationship (a citizen's power is equal to one over the size of the constituency in which they vote) is the heart of our notion of what representative democracy means. It serves as a foundation for America's most important declaration on the matter. In a series of cases beginning with *Baker vs. Carr* in 1962 the Supreme Court reminded Americans that "The conception of political equality from the Declaration of Independence, to Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, to the Fifteenth, Seventeenth and Nineteenth Amendments can mean only on thing—one

person, one vote."[84] The Court saw to it that this principle was subsequently enforced in both houses

of every state legislature in America. If a district with 10,000 citizens is allotted a single

representative in the state Senate, for instance, then a district of 100,000 must receive ten. Every

person's vote is "worth" .0001 power units in this body—one divided by 10,000.

A second way to look at the relationship between group size and the power of a single

individual within the group is to ask what is the probability that the group will be evenly split on an

issue and a single voter could cast the decisive ballot? In its simplest form the claim is that the

individual voter's real power in a group of voters is related, not to the relationship between the

individual and the numerical size of the group as such, but between the individual and half the size

of the group. In its more general form the question is what is the potential that the other members of

the group will produce a tie which any single voter may then break.

Using the example of an election for state legislator, the first scholar to give this notion

mathematical expression, John Banzhaf explains. "The voter's ability to affect the election of his

legislator decreases as the inverse of the *square root* of the population of the district rather than the

simple inverse of the population."[85] The effect of this equation, which is called here the Voter

Decisiveness Index (in comparison to the Voter Power Index), is to reduce the sharpness of the

decline in voter power as constituency size increases.[86]

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[84]The quote is from *Gray v. Sanders*, 372 U.S. 368, 381 (1962).

[85]John F. Banzhaf, III, "Multi-member Electoral Districts--Do They Violate the "One Man One Vote Principle?" *The Yale Law Journal* 75 (July 1966): 1323. See also: Banzhaf, "One Man, 3312 Votes": 304-332.

[86] Banzhaf has been refined by Steven J. Brams, *Game Theory and Politics,* (New York: The Free Press, 1975): 260-261. See also: G Chamberlain and M. Rothschild, "A Note on the Probability of Casting a Deciding Vote," 25 (1981): 152-162 and H. Margolis, "Probability of a Tie Election," *Public Choice* 31 (1977): 135-138.

Another popular technique for dealing with curvilinear patterns is to define the independent variable (in this case the number of registered voters in town) as its base 10 logarithm. Using the log of the variable has a successful history in the social sciences for precisely the kind of situation in which we find ourselves. This measure provides a still flatter curve against which to match attendance data at town meeting; that is, the drop off in turnout isn't as dramatic early on in the relationship as it is for either the Voter Power Index or the Voter Decisiveness Index. But the Log Index lacks theoretical grounding. It is at least conceivable that when citizens decide the question of whether or not to attend town meeting they take into account the actual size of the group expected to be there. Likewise they may imagine the size of the group in terms of a tie occurring that they might break. It is highly unlikely, however, that they muse over a logarithm as they eat breakfast and ponder the question of whether to go snowmobiling or practice direct democracy.

Yet the best "predictor" of town meeting attendance turns out to be the Log (10) of the registered voters in the town in which the meeting is held. It explains 58 percent of the variance. The number of registered voters alone (the earlier linear model) explains 42 percent. The Voter Power Index explains 43 percent and Voter Decisiveness 52 percent. The sub-sample of 200 meetings are arrayed in Figure IV-H along with plots of these three models that seek to map the curvilinear expression of the relationship between town size and real democracy.[87] The 10 towns on which this analysis has focused are labeled. Summary data are provided in Table IV-D for each model.[88]

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[87] The subsample R^2 coefficients match those of the full sample; linear model = 45 percent, log (10) = 56 percent, Voter Power Index = 45 percent, Voter Decisiveness Index = 54 percent.

[88] Table IV-D on page ___.

A ranking of the towns on how well their meetings performed changes depending on the

model employed. If either the logged or decisive models are used, Panton has the lowest relative

turnout of the ten meetings, either 12 or 10 percentage points below what its size would predict.

Belvidere is next lowest. Both Banzhaf (voter decisiveness) and the logged expression rank Ripton

highest and Craftsbury second. But the voter power index has Craftsbury the best of the ten, 21.7

percentage points of attendance over prediction. The logged prediction puts Shelburne right on the

money for attendance and the voter decisiveness model raises it well above predictions mainly

because it holds the town is so big it would make no sense for *anyone* to show up. The predicted

percent of registered voters in attendance by the voter decisiveness model was – 4.5. On the other

hand the voter power prediction says Shelburne should have 13.3 percent attendance and since it

produced only three percent, it fell far below its size generated expectation.

[FIGURE IV-H ABOUT HERE]

Inspection of these data and the scatterplot shows that for most of the meetings, Banzhaf is

very close to the logged model. This leaves the power index and the logged technique under

consideration since the linear model is cleverly inoperable. The Log(10) transformation was

theoretically the least satisfying, however. It, therefore, seemed appropriate to further examine voter

power and voter decisiveness (Banzhaf) to see if they could be improved either individually or in

combination. After several alternative approaches were explored, one was adopted that conformed

both to the statistical mandates of regression analysis and the theoretical assumptions of the

curvilinear models.[89]   This was a combination of two equations. The first used Voter

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[89]For those interested in the detail of these statistical properties and theoretical assumptions see Methodological Appendix
B, page____.

figure 4 H

Decisiveness modified by Voter Power to predict attendance for towns with more than 345 registered voters. The second relied on Voter Decisiveness alone to predict attendance for towns with 345 registered voters or less. When these equations are combined they [like the log(10) term] account for 58 percent of the variance in attendance.

To see how this final size prediction works out let us return to the meetings studied in 1992 which contain the four cases used to start up this chapter those in Newark, Athens, Hinesburg, and Shelburne. Figure IV-I arrays each of these and 66 others by the number of registered voters in the town in which it was held and the percent of registered voters present. Superimposed on this array is the line indicating what percent of the town's registered voters would be predicted to be in attendance if these people behaved according to the combined equation. The result shows we are closing in on what we have been after all along—a powerful predictive technique with which to produce a fair attendance rating for town meetings that accounts for town size.

[FIGURE IV-I ABOUT HERE]

This rating is called "size handicapped attendance." Of the several theory-based techniques, it is the best predictor of how much attendance at town meeting a town "ought" to have given its size. Earlier we balked at crediting the two meetings in the small towns of Newark and Athens with as much attendance (in comparison to the larger towns of Hinesburg and Shelburne) as the facts required precisely because the meetings in Hinesburg and Shelburne seemed to be handicapped by the size of the towns in which they were held. This worry was given theoretical legitimacy by the rational voter model; of course smaller towns will have higher attendance since

fig 4 I

the people who live in these places know they are more powerful decision makers than people in larger towns. The size handicap variable simply gives mathematical expression to this thesis.

To get a better handle on this concept, it is instructive to compare meetings in the three other towns to the "best" meeting of the 70 studied in 1992, the meeting held in Athens where 51 percent of the registered voters were present. For instance, because the town of Newark has 60 more registered voters than Athens its 96 people at town meeting produced only 39 percent attendance while Athens' 94 produced 51 percent. Thus Athens exceeded its expectation by 18 percentage points while Newark exceeds its by only six. But since Newark's larger size lowers the attendance expectation to 31 percent while Athens is established at 43 percent, both towns score about equally on their amount of attendance *above* their expectations, close to eight percentage points for each. In fact Newark's attendance effort was a fraction better than Athens.' Had there been one less person at town meeting in Newark, the two meetings would have been exactly equal. See the data in Table IV-E.

[TABLE IV-E ABOUT HERE]

Under the unadjusted measure both Hinesburg and Shelburne have woefully low attendance. To equal the "attendance effort" of Athens, Hinesburg would need to improve its count by 1198 voters (45.5 percentage points) and Shelburne would need to improve its by 2068 people or 47.8 percent of the registered voters. Nor were Hinesburg or Shelburne even able to match their size handicap. Hinesburg needed a turnout of only 8.3 percent and achieved 5.5 percent. Shelburne needed 6.8 percent and achieved 3.2 percent. But because their size reduces their expectations dramatically, it takes much less attendance effort to close the gap with Athens when these new

table 4 E

goals are considered. An increase of 10.8 percentage points of attendance (not 45.5 as was the case

under the absolute measure) gives Hinesburg enough attendance to exceed its handicap by 8 points

(as Athens and Newark did) and an increase of 11.1 points (not 47.8) would bring Shelburne up to

par with Athens. Put another way 284 more attenders in Hinesburg and 480 more attenders in

Shelburne would have propelled these towns to equal attendance with Athens and Newark. If their

size *were not* taken into account, Hinesburg would have had to produce 1198 attenders and

Shelburne 2070 to match Athens. Given their size Hinesburg and Shelburne look a lot better in

relation to Athens than they did under the original, pure attendance count.

A Final Adjustment

Even a casual look at Figure IV-I reveals a troublesome observation. The distance between

each town meeting and the line of best fit (the line that predicts attendance for each meeting) is apt to

be much greater for small towns than for larger towns. It seems the availability of *space* in which

attendance may vary decreases as town size increases. To make this clearer inspect the data in

Figure IV-J Plot 1. Here the residuals (which are simply the plus or minus variations from the

prediction line) are plotted to show how many percentage points above or below the line each

meeting strayed.   First of all, it is interesting to see that five towns had better attendance than

Newark and Athens under size-controlled conditions. The town of Lincoln, for instance, had 13

percentage points of attendance above expectations. Also, Shelburne and Hinesburg did much better than many other towns like Addison, St. George, Panton, or Granville.[90]

Note that meetings held in towns with less than 1000 registered voters often have attendance which is more than ten percentage points above or eight points below what would be expected *given their size*. But meetings in towns with more than 1500 voters almost never have such dramatic variations from expected attendance. In other words what is of concern is not that town size predicts how high or low a meeting's attendance is (this has already been controlled with the equation that produced these variations), but that size predicts how much variation exists from the size adjusted mean the equation generated.

This is bad for a couple of reasons. First of all if left standing predictable variation of this sort would jeopardize the use of the size handicap variable in subsequent regression equations. Since the principal reason for creating the variable in the first place was to have in hand a measure for future use, this is a most serious problem. But secondly this kind of decline in variation as town size increases compromises the capacity of the technique to measure the quality of attendance. Larger towns would never have the chance to be as good or as bad as the very good or the very bad smaller towns.

If a town is predicted on the basis of its size to have 10 percent of its registered voters at town meeting and it turns out 20 percent it has doubled its expectation; that is, exceeded its size allotment by 100 percent. If an adjacent town was predicted to have 20 percent in attendance and turns out 30 percent, it has exceeded its allotment by only 50 percent. But the size handicap measure

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[90]My hometown of Newbury where I grew up and hung out until I was 25 and Starksboro where I have lived for the last quarter century, both had negative residuals in 1992.

would list the two towns as equal on attendance—both with 10 percentage points of attendance above expectation. Calculating the *ratio* of the departure percentage (the percentage point difference between the expected percent attendance and the actual percent attendance—also called the residual) to the size handicap percentage itself sets the measure to reflect turnout as a *relative* deviation from size expectation. This measure will be called forthwith, therefore, the attendance effort ratio.

Assume, for instance, that a 100-pound person expected to lift 50 pounds lifted 60 pounds instead and that a 200-pound person who was expected to lift 100 pounds actually lifted 110 pounds. The departure from the expectation was 10 pounds in both cases but one would want to credit the lighter person more because she exceeded her expectation by 20 percent while the heavier person exceeded her expectation by only 10 percent. By applying this logic to town meeting attendance, we have a more meaningful gauge of attendance *effort*. This reformulation also solves the problem of the non random distribution of the residuals seen in Figure IV-J, Plot 1. When the ratio of the residual to the expected value is plotted (see Plot 2 in Figure IV-J), the variance appears much more random with respect to town size and is normally distributed.[91] There are large and small towns with actual attendance close to that predicted by size, and also with adjustments as much as the full amount or more of the size handicap in either direction.

The combination of the two regression equations (which together produced the size handicap) with the attendance effort ratio is accomplished with the following algorithm:[92]

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[91]The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality results in a p-value of 0.003.

[92]Standard Error of the regression coefficient estimates are shown below the equation. R-Squared values for the transformed dependent variable were .012 and .60 respectively. For all observations the combined R-Squared for the dependent variable in original units of measurement was .58. Since both independent and dependent variables had to be transformed for regression analysis, the results are expressed in terms of those units (for instance R-Squared measured "variance explained" for the square root of percent attendance). To calculate the true degree of explanation due to the regression equation, the fundamental relationship defining R-Squared (the ratio of the sum of squares from the regression

<u>If town has ≤ 345 Registered Voters</u>

$$PCTATT = (2.061 + (4.419 * 1 / \sqrt{RV}))^4$$

(0.041) (0.609)

<u>If town has > 345 Registered Voters</u>

$$PCTATT = (0.985 + (41.126 * 1 / \sqrt{RV}) - (310.696 * 1 / RV))^4$$
(0.041)   (3.038)   (41.807)

The meetings in Newark and Athens are now even more subsumed in the overall distribution displayed in Plot 2 of Figure IV-J than they were in Plot 1, still with strong turnout but no longer at or near the top. Charlotte, a much larger, upscale town near Burlington bordering both Hinesburg and Shelburne, scored (by far) the highest on attendance effort. Whereas Athens ranked first and Newark third of the 70 towns studied in 1992, when their size handicap was taken into account they dropped to sixth and seventh. When their attendance effort was calculated Newark fell to 17th and Athens to 23rd. Richmond, another much larger, more suburban town near Burlington, ranks fourth, substantially higher than either Newark or Athens.

When free of the constraints of size the cluster of four suburban, more upscale Chittenden County towns–Hinesburg, Shelburne, Charlotte and Richmond all enhance their relative positions. Shelburne, which was remarkably low, is now (barely) second from the bottom and much closer to several other smaller towns. Hinesburg, which was originally second from the bottom is now 10th from the bottom. Richmond improved ranks from 53rd to fourth and Charlotte jumped from 23rd to

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- SSR - to the sum of squares total - SST) was used. The predicted value of the dependent variable for each observation was squared to get the predicted percent attendance, then subtracted from the observed percent attendance. The sum of the squares of these terms gives the "sum of squares of the error term (SSE)." Statistical theory says that SSR = SST-SSE, and R-Squared = SSR/SST.

first. While Hinesburg and Shelburne had 66 and 49 percent respectively of what towns with their size ought to have in attendance at town meeting, Richmond and Charlotte had 156 and 216 percent of their size allotments. (The frequency distribution for the total sample of 1435 meetings is displayed in Plot 3 of Figure IV-J.)

[FIGURE IV-J ABOUT HERE]

A final look at Hinesburg and Shelburne compared to Athens and Newark demonstrates the impact of attendance measured by the adjusted size handicap technique, now called the Attendance Effort Ratio (see Table IV-E).   Based on their size, Athens was predicted to have about 43 percent attendance and Newark 31 percent since Athens exceeded this expectation by 15 percentage points and Newark by 21, Newark's size handicap elevates it above Athens on attendance.   Because Newark's expectation was *lower* than Athens' its *effort* (the ratio of the difference between expected and actual attendance and the expected attendance) was even more separated on the high side from Athens. Newark had 127 percent of its size handicapped attendance at town meeting and Athens had 119. Hinesburg and Shelburne both failed to match their expectations. But in this failure they seem quite similar; Hinesburg 2.8 percentage points too low and Shelburne 3.1 percentage points too low. Because Hinesburg's handicap is set higher by the regression equation (its break even point was 8.3 percent attendance while Shelburne's was only 6.3 percent) its ratio of loss to expectation is somewhat lower than Shelburne's, -.34 as compared to -.49. To put the differences among these three measurements in perspective it is useful to define them in their simplest terms.   Again it helps to ask the question, for each measure how many additional voters

fig 4 J

would it take at the meetings in each of the towns of Newark, Hinesburg and Shelburne to produce a

level of attendance effort equal to that of the best of the four towns, Athens. The application of a

little arithmetic shows the following:

	Newark	*Hinesburg*	*Shelburne*
Absolute (real) Attendance	28	1198	2070
Size Handicapped Attendance	-1	284	480
Attendance Effort Ratio	-7	115	186

If 28 more voters had come to the Newark town meeting the percent of the registered voters present

would have increased from 39 to 51, Athens' percentage. I pointer out earlier, however, that since

Newark's size handicapped expectation was significantly lower than Athens' (because it had one

third more registered voters), it actually could have lost one attender and still have equaled Athens'

handicapped attendance. In fact a loss of seven citizens at town meeting would still have left

Newark with enough attendance to equal the attendance effort of Athens. Without their size

handicaps Hinesburg would need to increase its attendance by 1198 and Shelburne by 2070 to

achieve equality with Athens' percent attendance figure. But to equal Athens' positive percentage

point deviation from its size handicap (8.2 percentage points) Hinesburg would only need 284

additional voters and Shelburne would only need 480. Finally, to match Athens' attendance effort

ratio (which is figured by answering the question by what percent did Athens exceed its handicap?)

Hinesburg would need only 115 additional attenders and Shelburne 186.

We are now equipped with a measure of real democracy that accounts for the effects of size

in a way that rewards towns (to stretch the example used above a bit more) for not only lifting more

weight (having greater percentages of their citizens at town meeting) but for lifting it against greater

forces of gravity (increasing town size) and for lifting a greater percentage of their body weight,

where body weight is considered to be the amount of attendance they are expected to have because

of their size. With this handy baseline measure, it is possible to consider other factors that may

cause turnout to go up or down. It is especially nice that thanks to the wizardry of statistics, we can

go about our work as if each of the 1435 meetings in the sample was held in a town of equal size.

For every subsequent variable tested, the question automatically becomes *given town size*, how

much does this variable matter? Quantification can seem soulless and it is often misleading. But in

the world of complexity it makes thinking about important things a whale of a lot easier.[93]

VISITING THE TOWNS

This enterprise is about democracy practiced in open assemblies. The *analytical* focus,

however, is the meeting and not the town in which it is held. The task is to show what democracy

looks like, describe the places where it lives and see if there are connections between the two. Using

each meeting as a discrete unit of analysis has the critical advantage (once town data has been

attached) of dramatically expanding the number of cases at which to look. This in turn allows the

decisions to be fine tuned, lifting it above the fog that is often brought on by limited observations. A

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[93] Published attendance figures for town meetings in general are hopelessly unreliable. This is especially true for town meetings in other states. That is why I am always on the look out for data that seem reliable on which I can levy my formula for predicting attendance. One such case was spotted in the *New York Times* in 1987. In an excellent article on town meeting in Litchfield, New Hampshire, in 1987 the author reports that 148 registered voters from a list of 2300 turned out on March 27. This is only 6.4 percent. Our size-based model predicts that a town that size (handicapped by a size of 2300 voters) should have 8.4 percent in attendance. Thus Litchfield's attendance was 2.0 percentage points below prediction. Their attendance effort ratio was therefore .76. They had a bit more than three quarters of what they should have had given the Vermont-based model. Matthew L. Wald, "Tradition Attended by Sense of Loss," *New York Times* (March 29, 1987): 20; In a 1998 article in *USA Today*, the town of Peterborough was reported to have 196 in attendance. With 4200 registered voters my model predicted 5.6 percent attendance and Peterborough had 4.7 percent. Fred Bayles,

substantial number of towns (56), however, had enough meetings in the sample to allow the construction of averages for the towns themselves. This provides a data base analogous in number to the American states with enough empirical snapshots (better than one out of every three meetings) held in these towns over time to make general descriptive assessments and judge how the towns themselves perform democracy.

A much smaller number of cases, however, makes the data more unruly. The frequency distributions for percent attendance and the attendance effort ratio for the 56 towns bump up and down along their bell shaped curves like my 1969 Chevy C-80 on Big Hollow Road. The same distributions for the 1435-case sample of meetings cruised smoothly along the blacktop like a new Volvo on I-89. (See Figure IV-K, Plots 1 and 2.)   Still, the town-based result is statistically manageable and matches the contours of the meetings remarkably well. Attendance for the towns averaged 20.2 percent of the registered voters. For the meetings it was 20.5 percent. This means of course that town size must also have been close and it was, differing by less than 100 registered voters. The attendance effort index, which is disassociated from town size, matched up as well. It was 1.04 for the meetings and 1.08 for the towns. These similarities are not surprising given the fact that 756 (53 percent) of the meetings we studied were held in the 56 towns of the town-based sample.

[FIGURE IV-K ABOUT HERE]

"Venerable Town Meeting is Slowly Losing Its Voice," *USA Today* (April 14, 1998): 3A.

fig 4 K

Most importantly the towns follow the same path as the meetings along the way to an understanding of the relationship between size and democracy. The curve they generate in Plot 3 of Figure IV-K is a mirror-like reflection of the curve produced by the meetings. There is the familiar initial sharp decline in attendance followed by a leveling out as the towns (often quite literally) come down from the hills and into the valley. On this curve we can see Newark and Athens once more, tiny places with high percentages. Now they represent clusters of meetings (10 for Newark and 7 for Athens) rather than their single meetings of 1992. In that year Athens had outdone Newark on attendance by 12 percentage points (See Figure IV-I). Now it is apparent that over the 28-year period of the study, it is Newark (even with size left unadjusted) with the best attendance by a couple of percentage points. Also in Figure IV-K the bigger valley towns of Hinesburg and Shelburne reappear with their attendance record aggregated across the years. In 1992 Hinesburg had 5.5 percent attendance. Its 14 meeting average was substantially higher, 9.7 percent. The same was true for Shelburne. In 1992 Shelburne had 3.2 percent. In ten meetings between 1970 and 1998 it averaged 6.1 percent.[94]

The heart of the data resides within the boundaries of towns like these. I will return to certain of them from time to time throughout the book. For now it is time to look at several that occupy early statistical vantage points. To begin, come back home with me to Newbury where I grew up. I made sure our town meeting was studied every year. Subsequently it has the most cases in the data base. Newbury is the only town with a complete set of meetings for the length of the study. There on the edge of the village green is the town hall. There in 1959 I and the six other members of that

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[94] Remember every town in the sample grew substantially over the period and as they grew their attendance percentages automatically declined. But there were other reasons for the decline that will be explored in coming chapters.

year's graduating class of Newbury High School stood before our families (and a goodly number of

the townspeople) and received our diplomas. There I went to my first town meeting when I was

thirteen. There every year in early March Newbury practices its democracy.

     Think about Newbury as the quintessential, isolated, up country, New England small town

where the foothills to the mountains now bump against and then retreat from the banks of a deep

flowing river (the Connecticut) and the fertile valley it has created. Think village green and church

steeples above maple. Think like Neal Pierce who wrote in his book on the New England States:

"Vermont is perhaps the only place in America a stranger can feel homesick for – before he has even

left it."[95] The reader will get to know Newbury better in subsequent chapters. For now the question

is: Does its democracy match its beauty?[96] The answer is: Not quite.

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[95] Neal R. Pierce, *The New England States: People, Politics, and Power in the Six New England States*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976): 233.

[96] For the reader who suspects my heart has beclouded my mind here I offer the following: (1) Look at the most popular postcard of northern New England in the last half century. It features the Placey Farm (and the White Mountains of New Hampshire in the background) on the banks of the Connecticut in Newbury. (2) Read the many descriptions of the Upper Connecticut Valley beginning with that of the Duke de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, in 1799. In a passage which a leading American geographer, Ralph E. Brown, once called one of the "minor classics in early land use interpretation," Rochefoucauld-Liancourt tells of a valley of 'plains and perpendicular rises one behind the other, which ascend with the regularity of terraces in a garden, to the summits of the hills.'" Ralph E. Brown, *Historical Geography of the United States*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1948): 55-56. Four years later on Friday October 3, 1803 Yale's Timothy Dwight passed through Newbury and wrote in his famous diary: "As we cast our eyes up an down the river; itself an object extremely beautiful, and with its romantic meanders extensively in view; a chain of intervals, sometimes on one and sometimes on both sides, reaching from north to south not less than ten or twelve miles, spread before us like a new Eden, covered with the richest verdure, and displaying a thousand proofs of exuberant fertility. This spot was bounded on both sides by rising grounds; now sloping, now abrupt; always interesting; and overspread alternatively with forests, farms and villages…The birds around us sported, and sung, with the highest glee. A vast multitude of neat cattle, horses, and sheep, were cheerfully cropping the verdure of the rich fields beneath us, wandering around them in frolic, or quietly ruminating in the shade. The farmers were gaily pursuing the various business of the field; and the children, more gaily still, were occupied at their play." I have worked these same fields for many a season and can tell you Dwight is guilty of robust romantic delusions. Still if one *has* to work the fields there is no more beautiful place to do so. Raking hay there in the summers of the 1960's (especially the second cutting – rowen) we windrowed first away from the river toward the Green Mountains and then toward the river and the White Mountains of New Hampshire. Hour after hour on a blue August afternoon watching the butterflies dance in the breeze. There is little a man can do about the beauty of it but weep. See: Timothy Dwight, *Travels in New England and New York*, Vol. II, (New-Haven: Timothy Dwight, 1821): 316-317.

In Table IV-F are data that compare Newbury with the 1435 meeting sample, the cluster of 56 towns, a town representing the average town on the Attendance Effort Ratio, and the individual towns that scored highest and lowest on the same measure. On town meeting day between 1970 and 1998 an average of 163 people was in the town hall. This represented 15.4 percent of the 1094 registered voters Newbury averaged over the period, a number predicting 14.3 percent attendance. Thus attendance effort was slightly above the 1435 meeting average and slightly below the 56-town average.

[TABLE IV-F ABOUT HERE]

Precisely matching the mean on attendance effort is Elmore, a little town by a lake and next to a mountain both of the same name in north central Vermont. Elmore combines many of the characteristics that define Vermont. The lake bequeaths a "summer trade" and draws (like so many small lake-side villages in Vermont) intellectuals and artists. Some even stay year round. But it is also rugged and shares the character of the hardscrabble hills and the natives who live among them. It is on a hinge between the Kingdom and the Montpelier area, a place where gentrification is fast eclipsing the culture of the upland Yankee. A half hour drive south from the Elmore General Store on a decent blacktop road (route 12) takes you to the State House. Turn north from the store for twenty minutes or so and Corley Road (gravel but in pretty good shape) puts you up and over into the Kingdom town of Wolcott (population 1378) home of Buck's Furniture, an establishment about as gentrified as a bug zapper.[97] Elmore also corners Stowe (see below) where opulence runs amuck. It is even closer to Morristown, a typical Vermont "big town" (population 4733 in 1990) business

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[97] Wolcott also has a remarkable general store named Charles E. Haske's Store, a nice little library named the Glee Merritt Kelly Community Library and the Wolcott Children's Ballet.

table 4 F

center which has a movie theater. [98]

We counted attendance 12 different years at Elmore's town meeting. On average there were 307 registered voters in town the year the meeting was held. On average 92 of them went. On average this represented 31 percent of the total voters. On average Elmore was expected to have 29 percent in attendance given its size. Thus Elmore's size adjusted effort to practice democracy was exactly the same as the average effort of the 56 towns, about eight percent higher than size alone would predict.

The town that scored lowest on attendance effort was St. George, a little place with a short commute to Vermont's largest city, Burlington. St. George's defining characteristic over the three decades in which 16 of its meetings were studied, the first in 1971 and the last in 1998, is population increase. None of the other 55 towns grew faster. For each year a meeting was visited population increase over the previous 20 years in the town in which it was held was recorded. In St. George it averaged 175 percent. Otherwise the town is known for the Rocky Ridge Golf Course and a mobile home park which houses a hefty percent of the town's 793 residents. St. George's 169 K-12 school-age children attended 18 different schools in 1977-1998, every one of them in a different town.[99] *The Vermont Yearbook* lists only a single commercial or business enterprise other than the golf

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[98] Melissa and I were up in Elmore last winter looking for a used 1987 Chevette. We stopped at the general store on the lake to eat a hot dog and drink coffee at a stand set up beside the road. It was there for weekend snowmobilers who roared over the land and lake and through the village in well planned caravans. These are the working class analogue to the troops of more upscale bikers that snake along Vermont roadways in the summer. There was something refreshing about the day, the engines, the pink cheeked often overweight 'sledders' (as they call themselves), the aroma of gasoline, the culture of family that was so clear. A couple of weeks ago we were driving through Elmore up to Buck's to look for a bed for Rachel's room and we passed a line of bikers. Their joy in the experience was not visible to the naked eye. Bikes and sleds in Elmore--a metaphor for the new Vermont.

[99] Town of St. George, *Town Report*, (Year ending June 1998): 11.

course, the B&L Janitorial Service.[100] Over the years there has been an average of 64 people at the St. George town meeting. This was 18.7 percent of the registered in town and far from the 27 percent expected for such a small community. It landed St. George at the bottom of the list on attendance effort.

The very best town on attendance effort is as different from St. George as can be. It is the internationally recognized ski town of Stowe. There play the rich and the famous; at the Trapp Family Lodge (cross country), the Stowe Mountain Resort (downhill) and other places during the day and at night clubs like the Matterhorn and The Rusty Nail after dark. In 1998 there were less than 4,000 men, women and children residing in Stowe. There were also six art galleries, eight beauty salons, 18 gift shops, 19 sporting goods stores, 20 lawyers, 65 lodging establishments, 22 real estate dealers, 58 restaurants, three alarm systems stores and one blacksmith, Richard Spreada. In 1998 *The Vermont Yearbook* listed 198 different merchants in Stowe.[101] It listed none in St. George. Not even a mom and pop store or gas station.

My students recorded data at a Stowe town meeting for the first time in 1971 and ten other times ending in 1998. For those 11 meetings Stowe averaged far more attendance than its size predicted. Of the 56 towns for which we have averaged figures for ten meetings or more between 1970 and 1998 no town made a better effort to practice real democracy. One of the biggest towns in the sample (6th largest) it averaged 156 percent of its size based allotment. The number in attendance averaged 297, 14 percent of the registered voters. By comparison St. George averaged about 30 fewer people at its town meeting than expected given its size while Stowe averaged over 100 more.

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[100] National Survey, Inc., *The Vermont Yearbook 1998-99*, (Chester, Vermont: National Survey Inc., 1998): 395.

[101] National Survey, Inc., *The Vermont Yearbook 1998*-99, 427- 431.

Put in theoretical terms the question becomes why did these 100 additional people come to the Stowe town meeting year after year when there was no mathematically strategic reason for them to do so? Why did 30 people on average stay away from St. George's meetings? No one who has paid attention to the scholarship on political participation over the last half century in America and, indeed, much of the world where such things are considered important, would be surprised at St. George's performance. Surprised, in fact astounded, would be precisely the reaction for Stowe.[102]

It is, therefore, time to begin the process of discovering what other factors beyond size may influence the practice of real democracy. Size explains 58 percent of the variance in attendance. But this leaves 42 percent left unexplained. Do night meetings have higher attendance than day meetings? Do towns with upscale populations do better than working class towns? Do towns that have higher turnout at the polls have higher attendance at town meeting? Do towns that consistently vote Democrat have higher attendance than towns that consistently vote Republican? Does the political culture of the town matter at all? What about something as simple as the weather conditions? What is going on in Stowe and St. George? Without knowing these things we know very little about the community context of real democracy. There are over a thousand published studies on representative democracy that deal with similar questions. For real democracy there are none.

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[102] If I have a clear sense of my colleagues' socio/cultural perspectives, "appalled" might be an equally accurate description.