Town Meetings Encyclopedia Article

Town Meetings

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Typically held once a year, town meetings bring citizens together to vote on decisions about local affairs, including ordinances, taxes, town officers, and local improvements. Most historians associate town meetings with the region and culture of New England, especially Massachusetts and Vermont. Town meetings symbolize a strong belief in political equality and direct democracy (versus the representative democracy of America's constitution), which explains why town meetings continue today. Some historians and political scientists argue that town meetings are not truly democratic because citizens simply defer to an unspoken leadership when attending them. The meetings were re-popularized by Bill Clinton's presidential campaign in 1992.

Further Reading:

Bryan, Frank, and John McClaughry. *The Vermont Papers: Recreating Democracy on a Human Scale.* Chelsea, Vermont, Chelsea Green, 1989.

Lockridge, Kenneth. *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years: Dedham, Massachusetts, 1636-1736.* New York, Norton, 1985.

Mansbridge, Jane. *Beyond Adversary Democracy.* New York, Basic Books, 1980.