

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Libertarian Community Performances, an Inherently Broken Fourth Wall

By

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Abstract:

The following thesis analyzes the interactions of the Free Town Project (FTP), an offshoot libertarian utopic endeavor inside the larger Free State Project (FSP), with locals in the town of Grafton, N.H. The group sought to take over the town politically and remake it in the image of orthodox libertarianism. Initially, the founding of the FTP online is analyzed to gain an idea of members' expectations, ideologies, and practiced interaction styles. The Web Archives or WayBackMachine is utilized to analyze websites, forums, and announcements of the FTP and FSP in the 2000s and early 2010s. Utilizing ATLAS.ti, 238 pages of Deliberative Session (Town Meeting) minutes are read, coded, and analyzed from 2000 - 2021. 98 codes (c) are established, 397 are applied (a), and 17 code groups (g) are established around themes. Other data utilized includes warrant articles, voting results, tax records, voter estimates, personal websites, and local news reports. The work uncovers boundary demarcation processes through observing deliberative session interactions and warrant article introductions by the FTP. The work shows that the relative success of the FTP in Grafton was considered a social strain by local deliberative session participants or civil sphere/(society) actors. It is found that locals were highly embedded and reliant on the democratic process in Grafton and saw FTP success as an existential and alienating threat to their meaningful democratic labors and practices. Initially, the group was unsuccessful at passing its agenda and so alienation was only possible. In 2013 the FTP organized successfully under new leadership and gamified the deliberative session. The FTP began practicing its ideology much more overtly, in an increasingly similar way to what it had outlined online. The FTP successfully passed a 10% budget reduction in the process that was ultimately voted down during the town wide election. Importantly, it is found that their actions threw off the sacred deliberative session interaction ritual, alienating locals from their democratic labors and practices. Losing control of this ritual and the losses' subsequent effects was real alienation from democratic labor for locals. This caused an intense backlash from locals opposed to the FTP. This could be seen most vividly in skyrocketing deliberative session participation, warrant articles mocking the FTP, increased taxation, and charged interactions defending local public servants. The social conflict had the effect of hardening boundaries. Moreover, it ensured the FTP would never reach its goal of instantiating its ideology into the governance of Grafton. The thesis shows that online libertarian ideology can indeed be offloaded and practiced similarly in an interactional setting such as a deliberative session. However, the work indicates that its practice is mediated by organization, leadership, and perceived success. In other words, FTP members began to act increasingly like their orthodox online libertarian personas as they transformed the interactional style of the deliberative session. The thesis also illustrates the potent effect of perceived alienation from democratic labor in contexts practicing localized participatory democracy. It can galvanize people, harden boundaries, and cause intense social conflict. Civil Sphere Theory notes that the perception and subsequent profanation of anti-democratic strains can have this effect, causing Societalization or the repair of an anti-democratic strain by the civil sphere (Alexander, 2006; Alexander, 2018). This thesis strengthens and challenges that work by showing such processes can occur in rural communities around highly localized strains. It also moves away from abstracted cultural binaries and instead shows the process in relation to democratic labor practices, while empirically demonstrating its performance. This creates a much more bottom up and grassroots approach through the utilization of deliberative session minutes and YouTube videos of direct interactions. By including democratic labor as a sacred object for those practicing it, the thesis also shows the very wide set of people who can be galvanized by the threat of alienation from it.

For my Dad

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Introduction

This thesis sets out to understand the collapse of the Free Town Project (FTP) and the social conflict surrounding it, via attention to its online origins and later deliberative session interactions. The FTP was an offshoot faction of the Free State Project (FSP), a group that desired/s to move 20,000 libertarians to N.H., gain control politically and eventually secede from the U.S. The FTP set out to be a glowing microcosm and test case for this larger project by setting up a libertarian intentional community (utopia) in the town of Grafton. Libertarian individualism and intentional community collectivism seem to be oxymoronic, indicating contradictions and tensions built into the foundations of the project. To comprehend these contradictions, the work is centered around understanding belief systems, ideology, commonsense social knowledge, and boundary demarcation processes over time. Presently, it is thought that the FTP has collapsed, due primarily to the launch of the larger FSP. However, the launch did not really cause the collapse, for if the FTP was successful, it would have been an asset to keep as an exemplar and hub within the larger project.

In the recently published book, “A Libertarian Walks Into a Bear,” it is claimed that the project collapse was partially due to the indirect consequences of anti-government beliefs (in general) but specifically around trash collection, causing an uptick in bears less fearful of humans (Hongoltz-Hetling, 2021). This is eye-catching; however, a bear rehabilitation center is also located very close to Grafton. The book also notes that the group was incohesive, disorganized and inept at integrating with the ecology of locally established people and rural climate (Hongoltz-Hetling, 2021). This seems like a more fruitful path towards understanding.

What is less clear is the role that migrating from an almost entirely online community to an offline community (with a hybrid element) had on the success of the project. This work thus seeks to understand the styles and types of social knowledge informing the intentional actions of FTP members online and then offline. Both parts focus on democratic deliberative processes as this is where actors have a chance to express and push for their goals. Offline, “real world” deliberative sessions are analyzed (2000-2021), composed of both Free Towners (primarily newcomers) and non-Free Towners (established locals). My online analysis focuses on FTP and FSP internet archival pages related to voting, forums, and letters/announcements. Comparisons are then drawn between the two realms, paying special attention to ideologies and styles of action.

The commonsense knowledge and language of libertarianism online has been studied a bit (Jordan, 2001; Sotirakopoulos, 2018), however, the FTP and FSP online have not been studied at all, indicating a knowledge vacuum. Moreover, the FTP appears to have been one of the first utopia projects forged online, opening interesting possibilities for understanding the habitualization processes involved in launching a migratory settler colonial movement in the digital age. Migratory movements also take time, and it seems that the effects of the FTP and broader FSP launch of 2016 are just beginning to be seen in N.H. This is most vividly noticed in the libertarian parties increasing power within state politics. Understanding the commonsense knowledge informing the ideology of the FTP online and offline could prove useful for understanding the broader FSP. It could also shed light on how movements forged online interact with group members and non-group members.

Basic Story

In the early 2000s, libertarians coalesced online due to their mutual disdain for government and taxes. One of their members devised a plan to take over a state and secede. This was considered a great idea. More libertarians joined and the group began to ideologically coalesce. Some of the most devoted members decided to take over a town and instantiate the tenets of libertarianism there. They found a town that seemed to be full of like-minded libertarians. They thought the townspeople would hate the government and its oppressive taxes and welcome them as liberators. But they were wrong. In many ways the town was already highly libertarian, just not libertarian enough. The town practiced a highly participatory and direct style of democracy. They had moved to a place where the people really were the government. They no longer had an abstract “government” to hate and instead had to attack real people if they wished to destroy the government. They thus began trying to become the government, the thing they hated, to pass increasingly orthodox libertarian proposals. This meant destroying many local civil servant’s livelihoods and defunding public goods. Moreover, it meant gamifying the participatory deliberative session and attacking the localized norms undergirding the democratic process. In other words, it meant alienating the locals from their democratic labor and practices, something antithetical to libertarian ideology. Initially the locals did not take the FTP very seriously as it was not very competent at gaining political or social wins. However, after many years the FTP gained leadership, organization, and increased numbers and was successful at accomplishing some of its goals. This caused a major backlash

from the locals and hardened social boundaries. The locals did not want to be alienated from their democratic labor. The opposite of what the libertarians wanted happened. Tax revenues rose and support for civil servants became a common talking point. The local government expanded instead of contracting. The larger statewide project launched and what they thought would be a glowing libertarian utopia was instead an early example of libertarian ineptness.

Argument

This work argues that real FTP success threatened to alienate Graftonites from their meaningful democratic labor, causing a pronounced backlash in the form of galvanization and increased participation in local politics. It is shown that initially this threat of democratic labor alienation was considered possible but not real and thus Grafton remained in a steady societal state. However, when commonsense social knowledge pertaining to democratic labor alienation switched from considering it possible to real, there was a shift to the unsteady societal state and thus intense social conflict. Deliberative sessions between 2013-2015 featured skyrocketing attendance, aggressive encounters, increased media coverage, and an increasingly gamified process. The work finds the FTP indirectly strengthened Grafton's democracy, creating a revival and appreciation for the storied New England participatory style of democracy called Town Meeting.

The things demarcating boundaries are considered overtime to get a better understanding of the social process and groups involved (Abbott, 1995). These things are uncovered via treating interactions as sacred rituals (Goffman, [1967] 2005; Collins, 2004). Moreover, deliberative sessions are thought of as sacred and ritualized democratic act sequences (Townsend, 2009; Townsend, 2022) which when profaned have the effect of alienating people from their democratic labors.

The analysis initially delves into understanding the FTP in an estranged online echo chamber or what is deemed an online intentional community. An understanding of the town is also gained beforehand. The analysis then observes interactions with locals in the political sphere. From these juxtapositions and interactions one can gain a better understanding of the ways in which boundary things are navigated and contested in a rural setting. Moreover, one can get insight into how ideologies are offloaded and the kinds of integration occurring.

The work also serves to illuminate notions around societal states. Settled/steady and unsettled/unsteady societal states are often theorized in sociology (Swidler, 1986; Alexander,

2018). However, their mapping over time is often neglected or done over smaller event level stints. This work helps elucidate these societal states through mapping boundary processes occurring over a meso-durée period, bolstering them with event level examples.

In Civil Sphere Theory (CST) it is often posited that agents of the civil sphere (civil society) profane the personal as anti-democratic, while the impersonal is sacralized as democratic (Alexander, 2006). In this work this was also found to be the case as personal attacks were condemned by public servants. However, under the surface, it should be noted that the democratic process is highly personal, it is just not explicitly uttered. In this sense, understandings of the implicitly personal are indeed sacralized, while explicit denotations of the personal are profaned. This work demonstrates this by showing the highly socially mediated side of Grafton's democratic process.

The classic participatory democratic and social movement problem concerning the creation of political change without reproducing the structures opposed is also tackled (Polletta, 2002, 6). This is done by comparing FTP online ideology with offline democratic participation. The FTP did participate and reproduce the system its members opposed, however, they did so with a combative and anti-agreement attitude, causing increased animosity with the established Graftonites. Due to this it is found that they reproduced their online ideology style offline. It seems that if they had not reproduced their online style, they may have had more success as locals seemed less opposed before the FTP began aggressively attempting to achieve its goals.

Paper Structure

The work begins by providing background context on the FTP and the deliberative session. This is followed by a data and methods section covering data, the qualitative coding process, and interactional discourse analysis.

The literature review begins by analyzing libertarian ideology and its tensions with intentional community formation. The processual approach to things constituting boundaries and the eventual perception of groups is then covered. This is followed by the way in which ideology is considered. The concepts of democratic labor alienation, civil sphere theory and Societalization are then covered. The treatment of town meetings as democratic interaction rituals is then described.

The work then sets out to gain a deeper understanding of how the FTP began. Concurrently, an understanding of group members' ideology online is undertaken. The chapter

attempts to showcase how FTP members interacted online. Not just an ideology but a language ideology is uncovered. The chapter also focuses on showcasing the FTP's stated expectations for their intentional community in Grafton. It is found that the group was indeed a kind of online intentional community, estranged from nonmembers and habitualizing its ideology. The notion of "libertarianitis" is uncovered. It is a language ideology that glorifies antagonistically and critically attacking norms, commonplace expectations and speech, and the government. Moreover, it promotes optimism toward the market and intense individualism. This style of interacting is considered orthodox libertarianism.

An overview of the qualitative codes derived from the deliberative session minutes is then covered. Code frequency, code groups and constituent codes are covered. The way in which codes are treated as themes is then explained. The analysis then proceeds in a temporally linear fashion.

The work then moves to deliberative session minutes and warrant article analysis in the early migratory period of the FTP. This chapter shows the strain around the possibility of democratic labor alienation. Moreover, it shows the early stages of boundary demarcation. The chapter leans on coding groups showcasing FTP anti-government and anti-taxation actions. One section covers the FTP actions aimed at privatizing and defunding Grafton's government. This helps illustrate the threat posed to Grafton's democratic laborers. The following section showcases the desire of Graftonites for town workers to "live among" them. This shows the desire of democratic participants to employ locals that could be socially and politically regulated. It also contrasts the desires of the libertarians who wished to privatize public jobs, opening them up to more competition and "outsiders." This chapter establishes the steady state where locals were fearful of the possibility of becoming alienated from their democratic labor due to FTP privatization efforts. It also showcases the social and personal side of the democratic process that the FTP threatened. Finally, the chapter helps illustrate the demarcation of boundaries.

The next chapter covers two prominent and contrasting libertarian figures. John Babiarz and Jeremy Olson. The former is shown to have been a perfect candidate to lead the FTP but seems to have disavowed them. It is argued that his local status in Grafton, cross cutting ties, and public service made him become a stalwart of Grafton institutionalism instead of an FTP member focused on dismantling Grafton's government. Jeremy Olson, an experienced libertarian activist and organizer is then presented as injecting the charismatic authority the FTP needed. It

is shown that he helped get the FTP organized and capable of passing warrant articles furthering its ideology.

The next chapter shows the shift in 2013 from the steady to unsteady societal state in Grafton. It is centered around showing the semiotic code switch defining the FTP for locals. This code switched from signifying a possible to real threat to Graftonites democratic labor, moving Grafton into the unsteady state. It is shown that the FTP's organization, policy gains, and disruption of the deliberative session interaction ritual at the 2013 deliberative session helped initiate this semiotic code switch. The response from prominent Graftonites is then showcased while simultaneously echoing the previous chapter, indicating the importance of individuals within small rural politics. Moreover, the call to "respect [the] labor" of Grafton public servants within the 2013 deliberative session is shown. This illustrates that Graftonites were feeling real alienation due to a lack of respect for their democratic labors and practices. Most notably, the FTPs profaning of the locals' sacred deliberative session ritual, achieved through challenging and gamifying social logics around the act, caused locals to see the FTP as a real threat capable of causing democratic labor alienation. Coding frequency is also shown to have skyrocketed during this time frame, along with deliberative session attendance.

The following chapter delves into a metapragmatic analysis of an interactional sequence to gain a feeling of a typical interaction at a deliberative session during the unsteady state. This allows for one to understand how boundaries were signified and created in real time. It also gives a clearer understanding of ideology practiced by the FTP offline. The section focuses on an FTP member questioning the deliberative session rules around personal attacks. This helps show the lack of social interactional regulation within the unsteady state. It also helps to illustrate the gamification of deliberative sessions and move from comedic to tragic frames. Moreover, it illustrates the galvanization of locals to protect their democratic labor and avoid alienation after the semiotic code switch.

It is proposed that this galvanization, driven by alienation from democratic labor, was what caused the backlash and subsequent fall of the FTP. The work then proceeds to show warrant article introductions aimed at making fun of the FTP. Finally, the work illustrates the move back to a new steady societal state. Deliberative sessions became focused on improving public goods like the library. There was also a push to revamp Grafton's historical records. After this the work moves to concluding remarks.

Who are the Free Towners?

The FTP, within the broader FSP, was an ideologically libertarian intentional community project, initially born online. The FSP began like many intentional communities, under charismatic authority (Weber, [1922] 1947; Zablocki, 1971), specifically the charismatic authority of a young PhD student at Yale. He published a manifesto in 2001 calling for a libertarian mobilization to take over a state politically and eventually secede from the U.S (Sorens, 2001). The manifesto was very well received by online libertarian circles and what had begun as a polemical rant, morphed into a migratory movement. As the movement gained momentum, New Hampshire (N.H.) was voted to be the “Free State” imagined in the manifesto (fsp.org). The state was chosen due to its motto “Live Free or Die” along with libertarian socio-cultural and political elements, seen most vividly in the lack of state income and sales taxes. Would-be Free Staters communicated and gained online solidarity while preparing to move. A sense of homogeneity in values, beliefs, norms and ultimately ideology seemed to exist, as is often the case with online groups and movements. But was there truly homogeneity in the group, or was this a false sense of homogeneity or sameness that would dissipate offline?

Grafton N.H. was singled out as the “Freest town in the Free State” and thus was a common destination for libertarian migrants/colonists (see Appendix 24 for more on Grafton).¹ It was picked mainly due to its lack of zoning laws, prominent libertarian residents, apparent socio-political acceptance of libertarian ideas and the availability of land (Appendix 5). The “Free Town Project” offshoot was thus born. A small but devoted and willing group packed up and moved to Grafton. Tent communities sprang up and with the libertarians came anarchists and other freedom-centric folks. Initially, tensions were not extremely high as the group did not possess the capabilities to pass its political agenda and thus was not a major threat. However, once it did, things devolved. The integration processes, both internally to the fledgling intentional community and externally within the broader receiving environment or town, were

¹ “[The Town of Grafton](#) is far more suitable for our Free Town. Come on down! (or up)” (Free Town Project Website, 2004). “The presence of John and Rosalie Babiarz, respected long-time residents who are already activists for individual liberty, had much to do with it. But the general feelings of Grafton residents—unsupportive of bureaucracy, desirous of being left alone, live-and-let-live attitudes, hostile toward zoning, increased taxes, and other schemes—also had much to do with it” (Condon, 2004).

The Free Town Project members made clear that their goals were “identical” to those of the Free State Project. This was seen on their website: “[IDENTICAL GOALS - FSP & FTP: FSP Home Page - August 2001](#)” (Free Town Project, 2006).

raft with disagreements, controversies, fragmentations, and the apparent demise of this offshoot settler project (Hongoltz-Hetling, 2021).

What is a Deliberative Session or Town Meeting?

A deliberative session can be thought of as a highly localized and participatory form of democracy practiced in New England. “Known as “town meeting,” the event is an annual meeting or set of meeting sessions in which everyday citizens deliberate and vote (Townsend, 2009)” (Townsend, 2020, 2). It is a formal gathering in which citizens discuss, amend, accept, or deny warrant articles that are eventually voted on during elections. It is a voluntary session and so relatively active citizens often participate. As it is voluntary, attendance levels fluctuate. Only registered voters can actively participate. Unregistered voters can attend.

Warrant articles constitute proposed changes to the formal governance of the town. Warrant articles are typically introduced by elected officials in the town, such as selectboard and budget committee members. However, they can also be proposed by individual voters via a signature process which reads on the warrant as “via petition”. Warrant articles are typically relatively technical and revolve around divvying up tax revenue to fund the needs of various town departments. Oftentimes, the question of legality arises, as warrant articles must be compliant with overarching state and federal laws. This creates situations of disagreement as folks will often have differing opinions on what the law is.

The moderator in a deliberative session plays a highly important role as they oversee handling disputes and promoting order. The moderator is also typically in charge of enforcing deliberative session rules around points of order, voting, seating, time, and anything procedural or functional.

Selectboard and budget committee members often play a vital role in deliberative sessions. They typically answer questions about the intent and content of proposed articles as they often write most of them. Due to this acquaintance with drafting warrant articles, governance members present are often also turned to for their expertise concerning technical and legal problems with warrant articles. Though not always lawyers, they typically reiterate what they have been told by legal counsel.

Public servants such as the fire and police chiefs, road agent, town clerk, librarian and supervisor of the checklist also play important roles in the functioning of deliberative sessions. In small towns such as Grafton, each public servant often advocates for their department and

proposes warrant articles in conjunction with the selectboard and budget committee. Oftentimes, they are the entirety of their department. They will often field questions about funding, projects, and issues as they attempt to advocate for the needs of their specific departments.

On warrant articles in Grafton, one can sometimes find the phrase recommended or not by the selectboard and recommended or not by the budget committee. This serves to indicate the level of support for an article by the two most powerful governing bodies. Other committees can also voice their support for various warrant articles, though they typically do not have a spot directly below the warrant article and thus on the ballot, which diminishes their relative power to influence voters. They can still exercise their power in deliberative sessions by making points for or against articles. Articles not introduced by town officials state “by petition” at the end. Time also plays an important role in a deliberative session. There is typically not a uniform number of people present throughout the entirety of a session. The number of voters present vary, meaning that the number of voters constituting a majority can change. Typically, one can expect the number of voters present to diminish as a session progresses. This is particularly true for exceedingly long sessions. The ways in which the meeting proceeds, the sheer volume of articles, points of order, questions and the number of proposed amendments can serve to slow down the pace of the meeting drastically. One can thus gamify a session through various formal and informal strategies or tactics.²

Data and Methods

Data

Four types of publicly available data were collected. These types were web pages and books related to the FSP and FTP, internet archival data relating to the Free Towners, physical town of Grafton records, and YouTube videos of Grafton’s deliberative sessions.

Web pages containing news coverage gave a preliminary outline of the project. Other web pages directly related to the movement gave a more contemporary idea of present circumstances.

Books such as “A libertarian Walked into a Bear” (Hongholz-Hetling, 2021) provided a general overview and timeline of the movement.

²This description was derived from Buckley (2022) and Leslie (2018) along with my own knowledge ascertained while reading through deliberative session minutes.

The internet archival data was mainly acquired via utilization of the “internet archives” or what is commonly known as the “WayBackMachine.” Many of the sites that were utilized during the formation and heyday of the FTP no longer exist. It was therefore necessary to utilize the internet archives to find forum pages, websites, blogs, statements, manifestos, reports, discussions, and referendums.

The town records utilized were found within the Grafton Annual Reports at the Grafton Town Clerk Office. Relevant data such as Deliberative Session Minutes, Warrant Article Summaries, Selectboard(men) Reports, Vital Statistics and Annual Tax Rates were scanned and organized. Data was gathered between the years 2000-2021 (3 GDSMs missing) to have data preceding and following the FTPs very active period in Grafton. Deliberative session minute total years (Y) = 18 were utilized. Within these 18 years, 238 pages (P) were read, analyzed, and coded: P=238.

Years (y)	Pages (p)	Codes (c)	Code Groups (g)	Codes Applied (a)
18	238	98	16	397

Videos were gathered on YouTube from the page “Knowaymr.” 2 years of videos, 2014 and 2015 were viewed. Within these years, a small clip: 2:54-3:56 from 2014, was analyzed.

It should be noted that all the data had biases attached to it in some way, which was considered throughout analysis. The news articles were trying to cover a story and gain readers. Similarly, Hongholz-Hetling is also a local reporter and wanting to write a captivating book. The FTP and FSP pages were attempting to foster a political movement. The Annual Reports and data therein were created by town officials who, as the research shows, were antagonistic toward the FTP. The transcriber of town meeting minutes transcribed an accusation of bias directed toward them during a town meeting. The FTP then began recording video. Thus, it follows that the videos recorded and uploaded to YouTube by a member of the FTP also had clear political motives.

Coding Methods

The coding of data was conducted via ATLAS.ti. 19 years of deliberative session minute documents were read, spanning the years 2000-2021 (2 early years were not found in the town archives). An iterative process was employed to construct a “gradually changing, abstract representation of the social world in a form which can be rearranged to let new aspects of its properties become evident” (Turner, 1981).

During the initial reading, coding was conducted via a purposeful and emergently grounded approach. This approach allowed for the codes applied to evolve and grow as the process unfolded (Patton, 2002, p. 240). Being purposeful with the coding allowed for “information-rich cases” to emerge, cases that could “offer insights into issues of central importance” (Patton, 2002, p. 46) while simultaneously “get[ing] at meaning, not at truth” (Charmaz, 2000). The grounded method employed helped with “objective orientation, emphasizing disciplined procedural ways of getting the researchers' biases out of the way” (Patton, 2002). In this way, the coding process focused on letting the social text emerge from the data, while purposefully striving to home in on the aims of the research. Moments of social conflict were thus coded. Keywords of note and references to the FTP were also coded. The codes were graphed according to frequency across years, to find the years of highest coding frequency (see appendix 11 or chapter on code summary).

This process was then continued iteratively with emergent codes applied to areas where they may not have existed during previous readings. 98 codes were created: C=98. This initial coding scheme was utilized to narrow down temporal sequences of most importance. Refinement and abstraction then became paramount via bracketing, grouping, and manipulation aimed at fostering deeper analysis and thick description. Coding groups (G) were established to help narrow the codes significantly while establishing broader themes over time. G=16. The process then shifted toward intensity sampling of the codes established, aimed at finding ‘excellent or rich examples of the phenomenon of interest, but not highly unusual cases’” (Patton, 2002, p. 234). The use of intensity sampling, on top of thorough purposeful and emergent coding, ensured that relevant actions and interactions were analyzed, while pinpointing the most salient periods, events, and moments for thick descriptive analysis (Geertz, 1973). To enhance intensity sampling, the following ATLAS.ti functions were utilized: code manager, code group manager, code co-occurrence explorer, concepts, word list/cloud, named entity recognition, sentiment analysis and generate reports. These tools were highly useful for identifying trends, visualizing, narrowing the sample of relevant codes, identifying key actors, and finding key debates, finding warrant article introductions, and pinpointing disputes.

Discourse Analysis Methodology

Analysis focuses on social conflict producing noticeable fluctuations in the sequence of sacred interaction rituals (Goffman, [1967] 2005; Collins, 2001). Chains are thought of as

previous interaction styles one can draw upon in each interaction and that the co-emergence of similar chains creates emotional entrainment and a successful interaction (Collins, 2004). The work thus seeks to find incompatible chain emergence sequences.

When problems occur against the normal flow of commonsense everyday expectations, there is often an attempt to restore the flow and integrate whatever is problematic into the social stock of knowledge (Berger and Luckman, 1966, 24). Goffman ([1967] 2005) characterized a problem like this as being *in wrong face*. When this occurs, “expressive events are being contributed to the encounter which cannot be readily woven into the expressive fabric of the occasion (8).³ This profanes an interaction ritual.

Goffman’s notion of maintaining face is considered in conjunction with the interaction ritual as “[o]ne’s face is a sacred thing, and the expressive order required to sustain it is therefore a ritual one” (19). Particularly, interchanges of aggressive uses of facework are looked for. These are thought of as “the sequence of acts set in motion by an acknowledged threat to face and terminating in the re-establishment of ritual equilibrium” (19).⁴ The three types of threat, innocent, malicious/spiteful and incidental are also considered.

It is thought that “the most robust and effective metapragmatic function is implicit, not denotationally explicit” (Silverstein, 2003).⁵ Thus, attention to the implicit over the literal is paid. The implicit is derived via attention to the broader context in conjunction with unfolding interactional sequences. This helps one gain a clearer understanding of the underlying message and ideology being espoused. Linguistic devices from conversation analysis and ethnomethodology are also utilized to formally construct interactional sequences. In conjunction with contextualization and contingent ongoing social processes, the analysis strives to holistically treat and understand the unfolding events. The micro level discursive interactional sequences were thus utilized as heuristics of typical interaction. These interactions were then analyzed over time to show the shifts in the social fabric.

³ Goffman further notes that one must sustain “an order that regulates the flow of events, large or small, so that anything that appears to be expressed by them will be consistent with his face” (9).

⁴ “In aggressive interchanges the winner not only succeeds in introducing information favorable to [oneself] and unfavorable to the others, but also demonstrates that as interactant [one] can handle [oneself] better than [one’s] adversaries” (24).

⁵The implicit “resides in cotextual organization itself, that is, in token co-occurrence patterns of emergent entextualization itself, that transcend, encompass, and supersede any denotationally literal metapragmatic discourse that may happen to manifest simultaneously in the plane of denotational function” (Silverstein, 2003).

Literature Review

Tensions at the Heart of a Libertarian Intentional Community

The FTP set out to create an intentional community grounded in the tenets of libertarianism. Libertarian ideology is typically thought of as rooted in positive beliefs toward capitalism, the market, anarchism, freedom, anti-authoritarianism, anti-statism, individualism, and voluntaryism (Nozick, 1974; Doherty, 2007). Unsurprisingly, its members felt that the American government was way too big, oppressive, and bleeding Americans dry with forced excessive taxes. They aimed to set up a place antagonistic to and outside this imagined reality. A free-market paradise run by libertarians. The intentional community faced one big obstacle, the town it was attempting to take over politically and build in its image was already inhabited. Social tension and strains emerged. They were centered around ideological differences concerning the ways in which the town should be run. Social and symbolic boundaries became increasingly hardened over time; this work pays special attention to the “things” around which boundaries were constructed.

Libertarians in the American context are often thought of as anarcho-capitalists or what Doherty (2007) calls radicals for capitalism. Libertarians ascribe to *freedom from* government intervention and cherish negative rights (Nozick, 1974; Doherty, 2007).⁶ This cherishing of negative rights often leads to absolutism on things like freedom of speech, which they feel should not be encumbered in any way. Moreover, libertarians in the American context often believe that the government has too much power and is a threat to individual liberties. Decreased government implies a vacuous societal state, libertarians believe the market would and should fill this vacuum (Narveson, 2002; Doherty, 2007). Positive rights like education, roads, fire and police departments, electricity and phone lines are all considered by libertarians to be excessive government overreach that should be conducted in what they believe to be the more efficient marketplace (Nozick, 1974; Doherty, 2007).

Increased societal complexity and differentiation in the division of labor are often thought to lead to increasingly heterogeneous cross cutting social ties and interdependence fostering trust, or people relying on others to fulfill certain life functions for them (Abascal and Baldassari, 2015). The market itself has been one of the main forces driving this increased societal complexity and interdependence

⁶A useful binary for understanding libertarian ideology toward government is *freedom to/freedom from* (de Tocqueville, 1839) or similarly positive and negative rights (Self, 2012), respectively. *Freedom to* implies government interventions (action) aimed at creating equity or equal access to rights across socio-economic stratification. *Freedom from* implies rights guaranteed by the government without any interventions (in-action) aimed at realizing said rights. Negative rights are considered inalienable legally yet are not guaranteed via government fiscal and economic intervention (Self, 2012).

(2015). Folks who join intentional communities often cite a nostalgia, wanting to escape their modern transactional lifestyles to gain a stronger sense of community via living in a more homogeneously constituted setting (Zablocki, 1971; Kanter, 1972; Blackshaw, 2010). In this sense, actors constituting intentional communities are often attempting to escape the imagined and/or real negative effects of the marketplace to form an idealized community grounded in homogenous values, beliefs, and norms.

There are thus major tensions within the concept of a libertarian intentional community. The FTP sought to constitute an intentional community rooted in a religious-like faith in the market, implying a community rooted in heterogenous cross cutting ties. Moreover, this homogeneity in beliefs and values would seem to run counter to the libertarian notion of fierce individualism. Successful intentional communities typically establish hierarchical kinship-based relationships characteristic of homogeneous and localized forms of solidarity. The hierarchical social structural relationship is most vividly seen in intentional communities' common leadership style, charismatic authority, or the leadership of a strong and vocal actor capable of gaining, organizing, sustaining, and leading a following over time (Weber, [1922] 1947; Zablocki, 1971). This too seems to be in tension with the libertarian tenet of anti-authoritarianism and anti-statism.

Intentional communities involve a group of humans constructing boundaries with the outside world while attempting to build a “community” inside those boundaries, based on shared values, norms, behaviors, and attitudes, or what is often called homogeneous or mechanical solidarity (Durkheim, [1893] 1984). It is also thought that intentional communities need time to habitualize underlying subconscious normative elements (Zablocki, 1971; Schmalenbach, 1977). This homogenized and hierarchical solidarity is often formed via “commitment mechanisms” (Kanter, 1973) and “economies of control” (Hechter, 1990), which help foster sameness and uniformity.

Intentional communities often require sustained estrangement or spatio-temporal and socio-cultural separation with non-members to become habitualized into homogenous values and beliefs (Sargisson, 2007). Without estrangement, tensions are more likely to arise, eroding cohesion and fostering community formation stagnation (Sargisson, 2007). When an intentional community feels threatened, it can lead to more pronounced group introversion and intensified boundary maintenance. This can cause a shift into being an “oppositional community,” focused on curating and performing differentiation from outsiders over fostering community (Sargisson, 2007). The FTP was certainly an oppositional community during its most politically active years, 2013-2015.

A free market “paradise” grounded in heterogeneous solidarity and interdependent transactional relationships would seem to hinder estrangement and the formation of homogenized solidarities. The FTP was forged online where more homogenized forms of solidarity could be fostered due to digital estrangement from heterogeneous values, beliefs, and ultimately ideology. This is thought of as the echo chamber effect or “aggregation in homophilic clusters of users dominates online dynamics” (Cinelli et al., 2020, 5). This online dynamic seems to confirm the notion that utopias are like a mirror, you see yourself in them, but you are never actually there (Foucault, 1984 [1967]). The FTP could see and feel itself digitally forging a homogenized collectivity around libertarian ideology yet aimed to physically constitute this offline and really be “there.” This required leaving the estrangement of the online echo chamber.

Moving this online homogeneity offline required fostering the more normative and holistic subconscious practices required for successful “real” world intentional communities. The FTP aimed to move into an inhabited town, take over politically, and eliminate the government. Estrangement could not be practically achieved due to these goals, the participatory democracy with which they wanted to control, and the heterogeneous solidarities rooted in transactional cross cutting interdependencies. This speaks to the oxymoronic footing the FTP found itself on.

Thinking about Boundaries and Socially Demarcated Groups

Group interaction processes between local and newcomer groups typically have some sort of social conflict (Simmel, 1955 [1922]; Park, 2019 [1921]; Elias & Scotson, 1965; Jimenez, 2017). When one adds that the newcomer group plans to take over politically and then dismantle the government (settler colonial style), it becomes apparent that the social conflict will be very tense.

One way to understand social conflict is by looking at interactional boundary signification over time. Social entities or groups ought to be thought of as secondary to social boundaries, which are constantly being contested and processually refined (Abbott, 1995; Abbott, 2016). In this sense, what is important for consideration is not the group itself, but instead the historical process wherein actors begin to recognize and assign differences, thus differentiating from each other. In this sense, by the time a group is recognized, the boundaries themselves are and have been long established (Abbott, 1995).⁷ Thus, it is important to observe

⁷ What Abbott describes is called for here: “a more elaborate phenomenology of group classification, i.e., of how individuals think of themselves as equivalent and like, or compatible with, others (Lamont 2001b,

interactional processes concerning competition, as actors will often dispel the things they believe, stand for, identify with, practice, and are to demarcate their group from another.

One way to understand boundary things is through observing meta-theorization, or what groups tell themselves about themselves and each other over time. One can think of ideology “as actors' theorization of their own position, and available strategies, in a political field (Levi Martin, 2015, 1). Thus, understanding actors' meta-theorization or ideology can help elucidate the things constituting boundaries. By observing FTP deliberation online and offline in conjunction with deliberative session interactions over time, one should gain a clearer understanding of ideological changes and by extension boundaries. In other words, this will help elucidate when, how, and what boundaries emerged in the social process.

Groups and their constituent actors do not like to be categorized, especially by those considered outside the group (Brubaker, 2004). Out-groups are often considered homogenous by in-groups which consider themselves more heterogeneous (Brewer, 1993). Social conflict and boundary demarcation between those most similar or homogenous is thought to occur due to disagreements over ideological orthodoxy (Simmel, 1955 [1922]). This process of ideological fracturing can be thought of as fractionation (Abbott, 2001). It seems that social conflict intensifies when actors categorize other actors, who think they are different, as the same.

Democratic Labor Alienation

Utilizing a processual approach, the work assumes that human nature varies across spatial-temporal contexts due to socio-cultural processes constantly in flux (Abbott, 2016). Human nature thus varies based on context. Context is therefore paramount to understanding something like alienation. Alienation is thought to separate people from their human nature or “species essence” through estrangement from meaningful understanding of the products of one's labor (Marx, [1859] 1978). Thus, what constitutes alienation can vary dramatically across contexts and individuals. In a place like Grafton, many types of labor are embedded in the localized and participatory political process. This labor is considered highly meaningful as one's efforts have a direct impact on one's town and community. It can therefore be thought of as the antithesis of alienated labor. Such meaningful labor types are election winners or office holders, appointed officials, volunteers, deliberative session participants, voters, and members of the

Lamont et al. 2001); and of how they “perform” their differences and similarities (Jackson 2001)” (As seen in Lamont and Molnar 2001, 188).

media. Therefore, major changes impacting governance and participatory democracy are thought to cause alienation. Thus, the intent, expectations, and judgements of various actors became highly important to understand.

As has been noted, particular attention is paid to democratic labor alienation in Grafton. Using Civil Sphere Theory, those conducting democratic labor can be thought of as agents inhabiting the civil sphere; highly focused on identifying through signification what they view as anti-democratic or profane (Alexander, 2006; Alexander, 2019). The theory proposes that democratic culture revolves around the binaries of sacred/profane, civil/uncivil, and inclusive/exclusive. This signifying of the profane anti-democratic can be thought of as the indexing of political ideology. This signification can thus help elucidate explicitly stated boundaries.

Periods of intensified socio-cultural and political change are often called unsettled or unsteady societal states (Swidler, 1986; Alexander, 2018; Alexander, 2019).⁸ During these phases, it is thought that entrenched collective meanings assigned to various phenomena are challenged. This allows ideology to play a powerful role as norms and values commonly inhabited via socialization processes temporarily become less hegemonic. The process of Societalization posits that when something is being profaned as anti-democratic, it is considered a societal strain in need of civil repair (Alexander, 2018; Alexander, 2019a). This can occur via judgements from media sources, government officials, opposition parties and active citizens over time in what is considered the steady societal state. However, when a semiotic code has been flipped around the strain being profaned, a move into the unsteady societal state occurs. Battles over the strain, its civil repair, and ultimately its anti-democratic-ness then ensued. The work thinks of the possibility of democratic labor alienation in this way (see Appendix 19 for a graphic representation).

Oftentimes, media sources are utilized as a means of understanding what is being profaned as anti-democratic by the civil sphere (Alexander, 2018). As a small town, Grafton does not have a newspaper and is not covered regularly by an outside news source. It is covered by the “Valley News” sometimes, but only when something of note is occurring. That Grafton

⁸ While the social world is always in a state of flux and processual change (Elias, 1939; Abbott, 2016), sociologists tend to agree that certain periods and events lead to expedited socio-cultural and political change.

was indeed covered during some of these time frames helps to indicate that the process of Societalization was occurring. However, deliberative sessions serve as the main means of understanding the process. Moreover, they are much more useful as this is where participatory democracy was being practiced.

Town Meeting as a Democratic Interaction Ritual

Much of the following analysis focuses on interactions occurring during democratic deliberative sessions or “town meeting” in Grafton. It is thus useful to understand the way democracy is treated by those who practice it. Democracy becomes more resilient as it is practiced longer, with its actors coming to inhabit a common-sense democratic spirit that is second nature and intuitive (Tocqueville [1805-1859] 2002). The political form of democracy is highly reliant on socio-cultural historical processes shaping the beliefs and thus morals of the constituting actors. Today, democracy is considered by those who practice it to be a sacred moral good, like a religion, in need of constant perfecting and refining (Bellah, 2005 [1967], Alexander, 2006; Polletta, 2016).⁹ Thus, political discourse within democratic societies focuses heavily on signifying anti-democratic practices to be profaned as immoral. Formal occasions of its practice are thus considered highly sacred rituals (Bellah 2005 [1967]; Alexander, 2006).

As a ritual, “democracy is a performance and a locally situated, culturally embedded, interactional accomplishment” (Townsend, 2009, 69).¹⁰ The object of analysis, town meeting interactions, are thus centered around salient events useful for grasping the local knowledge informing interactions occurring between the FTP (newcomers/outsideers), Graftonites (locals/insiders) and those in between (Elias & Scotson, 1965). Events and their historically situated socio-cultural contexts are what must be studied to get at the meanings and interpretations assigned to situationally dependent social interactions (Weber, 1978 [1949]; Schutz, 1967; Berger and Luckman, 1966; Geertz, 1973). Town Meeting is a place where actors from the two perceived conflicting groups met, debated, compromised, performed, and practiced

⁹Durkheim described how groups operate religiously via the utilization of the sacred/profane binary to categorize things morally ([1912] 2001). Bellah, quoting De Tocqueville noted, "In the United States even the religion of most of the citizens is republican, since it submits the truths of the other world to private judgment, as in politics the care of their temporal interests is abandoned to the good sense of the people. Thus, every man is allowed freely to take that road which he thinks will lead him to heaven, just as the law permits every citizen to have the right of choosing his own government" (p. 436).

¹⁰Performances and the self-one presents vary depending on the relationally constituted situation or event (Goffman, 1956).

varying political repertoires. They are also events located in the public sphere (Habermas, 1999 [1962]), “a space that designates its own ‘norms of membership’ by virtue of its circulation and uptake by otherwise unrelated people” (Warner, 2010: 78, as seen in Soh, 2020, 1121).

On top of being public events, deliberative sessions are also highly formalized rituals of local democracy carried out by actors inhabiting New England towns (McComas et al., 2010). With a beginning, middle, and ending resolution, the deliberative session sequence is structured as a narrative (Townsend, 2009). In this sense, its participants collectively perform, co-create and enact democracy as a sequential social text, “that is to a large degree enabled and constrained by the nature of the legislative process as a speech event” (Townsend, 2009, p. 68).¹¹ Through their performance, participants reaffirm their civil allegiance to the state, explicitly via the collective recitation of the pledge of allegiance, and more importantly via the reproduction and performance of the state's form of governance, representative democracy. The sessions have highly structured interaction rules, norms, codes, and values far outside the norms of everyday life, along with specialized interactant roles that come with varying degrees of authority, prestige and ultimately power (Townsend, 2009). In this sense, participants take on differing roles and personas outside of their usual everyday knowledge, while performing, reaffirming, and questioning various aspects of town life. With ritual comes a certain phenomenological element rooted in subconscious feeling that often involves a dialectical negation process to occur, collectively working to make sense of hypocrisy (Alexander and Smith 2003; Werbner, 2001).¹² Rituals typically require a supermajority or more of ‘insiders’ to function properly. Without this, the performance may not resonate or sync properly with the collectivity as a whole, causing a failed ritual.

New England Town meetings are highly dependent on the practice of deliberative play, where comic frames take precedence over tragic frames to maintain the democratic act sequence (Townsend, 2022) and the formalized interaction ritual (Goffman, 2005 [1967]). In this sense, officials, such as moderators are more likely to frame norm violations by speakers as “mistakes”

¹¹As with most speech events, the basic structure revolves around turn taking clusters of adjacency pairs, serving to create relational interactions and expectations building off each other. Violations of this basic unit of conversation lead to a need for repair (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973; Sacks, et al., 1974).

¹² Werbner (2001) discusses cultural hybridity and particularly rituals as a way of purifying and changing a given meaning via a socially sanctioned event. Discusses cultural hybridity performances and the effect this has on boundary formations between interacting groups such as colonized and colonizing peoples. Discusses how blurring the boundaries of acceptable norms for given actors performs hypocrisy in such a way as to purify socio-culturally.

than as nefarious calculated political moves, comic and tragic respectively.¹³ This allows actors to become highly contingent in their acts, pluralistically shifting based on a given issue. This is thought to forge cross cutting ties and varying group memberships in real time during town meetings (Townsend, 2022), thus strengthening democracy (Calhoun, 1993; Alexander, 2006; Parsons & Sciortino, 2007; Sciortino, 2021).¹⁴ Though there of course will be coalitions and special interests, authority figures or moderators' actions tend to focus on preserving a comic frame. This helps people transcend division across identities, toward a collective achievement of we.

Analysis of Free Town Project Ideology While Online

The Free Town Project Online

The Free Towners converged initially as part of the Free State Project online. They were the group that was willing to begin moving before the larger group hit the 20,000 signatures needed to spark the FSP migration.¹⁵ The group met on forums related to the project. The Free Towners coordinated their move and met each other primarily on a Yahoo groups page devoted to the project, the Free State Project Website, and the Free State Project Forum. As they were the ones who packed up their lives and left the quickest, it follows that many were highly motivated members. In this sense, Grafton not only was the first main destination for libertarians entering New Hampshire, it was also the home of some of the most zealous libertarians in the group.

The FTP at this point can be considered an online intentional community, estranged from the greater world, and providing a space for members to practice and become habitualized with libertarian ideology. Libertarians were/are early adopters of ICT or information and

¹³ This speaks to ritual adherents' desire to preserve the interaction and its parts, sacred ritual participants, via saving face, glossing, and attempting to maintain emotional entrainment (Goffman 2005 [1967]; Garfinkel and Sacks, 1986; Collins, 2004). In democratic settings actors often characterize civility as democratic and sacred and perceive its opposite as anti-democratic and profane (Alexander, 2006). Bourgois (2003) notes a common desire to be respected, which is often stymied via exclusion taking precedence over inclusion due to a lack of knowledge on how to maintain interactions in an unfamiliar context. This can lead to misunderstanding, alienation, and social conflict, particularly for the actors attempting to be included.

¹⁴ Public sphere requires not only rational critical discourse but also consideration of different identities to communicate across basic lines of difference more clearly. "Participation in a democratic public sphere obligates us to develop a good account of the identity of our political communities that faces up to necessary problems of inclusion and exclusion" (Calhoun, 1993 p. 279).

"[Parsons] theory places at the center differentiation, within a generalized definition of common membership, of a pluralist set of social relationships, both segmented and functional. It also highlights how the relationships between these clusters are regulated not only by domination and exchange but also by crosscutting ties of solidarity and persuasion" (Sciortino, 2021, p. 174).

¹⁵ This is outlined in the manifesto authored by Sorens (2001) calling for the movement.

communication technologies (Jordan, 2001; Sotirakopoulos, 2018). Viewing “A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace” (Barlow, 1996) one can get a taste of the libertarian ideology infused into the imagined possibilities for the internet around this time. The FSP exemplified this as well as they were highly adept in the early 2000s at building an online movement (see FreeStateProject.com). One of the Free Town Project’s leaders and founders also seemed to take this as common knowledge about libertarians stating: “many Porcupines own their own businesses in the computer or Internet industries.”¹⁶ Moreover, two prominent libertarians in Grafton, John Babiarz and Jeremy Olson, ran ICT businesses (Hongholz-Hetling, 2021; jeremyjolson.com).

By observing Free Towners while they were beginning to coagulate as an online group, one can begin to grasp what was taken as commonsense knowledge within their political ideology. As might be expected, anti-government rhetoric, individualism, moral self-assuredness, mistrust of authority, critical questioning, and a desire to undermine social norms seem to be prevalent. Self-assuredness seems to originate from the belief that libertarian ideological logic is morally correct thus sacred. Most ideologically orthodox belief systems seem to function similarly, while simultaneously experiencing fractionation and sectarian splits.

Choosing the Free Town

Grafton was chosen to be the Free Town in the Free State by a group of libertarians who traveled around N.H. attempting to find the most suitable location (Condon, 2004; Hongholz-Hetling, 2021). Grafton was decided upon due to several factors, one of which being that they expected a small number of libertarians to shift the political tide in their direction (Condon, 2004). This was due partially to the fact that one of the most prominent libertarians in NH told them this during their tour.¹⁷ They thus thought that they could be welcomed as “liberators”

¹⁶The quilled porcupine is a common symbol used by the Free Towner/Stater libertarians. It symbolizes their desire to be left alone (individualism), along with a defensive attitude that insists on voluntarism (action based on one’s free will) over obligations. A libertarian festival in NH called “PorcFest” exemplifies the symbolic importance of the porcupine for the movement.

¹⁷The quotes are from a post on the FTP and FSP pages, discussing the Grafton decision. Condon was a leader in the FTP and was also part of the group looking for a place to found the FTP. The Babiarz’s were two prominent libertarians in Grafton, but also in N.H., with John Babiarz running the most successful Gubernatorial libertarian campaign in American history, but still losing. Condon’s letter also stated: “What about the town selectmen who politically run the 40 square miles of the “town” of Grafton? Said John and Rosalie, one is somewhat with us, another is not with us at all, and still another is very friendly to our ideas. I asked what they could do with 200 to 400 activist Porcupines moving into the town over the next year or two. “Give me just 25 and we could win some elections,” John predicted.

freeing the town from the “Authoritarians and Statists” (Appendix 1). This created a great deal of optimism, and several websites/forums were launched, focused on “liberating” Grafton. While describing the decision Condon (2004) also noted that:

“the general feelings of Grafton residents—unsupportive of bureaucracy, desirous of being left alone, live-and-let-live attitudes, hostile toward zoning, increased taxes, and other schemes—also had much to do with it. When we asked if it might be possible to de-fund the local government school system in favor of free market alternatives, John and Rosalie told us there had already been talk about the possibilities”

While the Free Towners chose Grafton partly due to its extremely limited government, they also stated their intention to do away with most public services there, characterizing them as oppressive (Appendix 1). They had thus found a place as close to their libertarian vision as possible, yet also felt that Grafton was not libertarian enough. The ideational fringe group mechanism of fractionation (Abbott, 2001) thus seemed to be at work as there was a belief that Grafton was libertarian in some ways, enough for it to win out as the Free Town in the Free State, but not libertarian enough. In this sense, the Free Towner’s were preparing to liberate Graftonites via politically imposing their beliefs. The Free Towners were thus very self-assured that their way of governing was correct and would be welcomed. Yet, they also believed strongly in people not imposing themselves on others.

Understanding the Free Town Project Ideology, Expectations, and Interaction Style Online

This section seeks to understand the interaction styles utilized by the FTP. The FTP members prided themselves on conducting lively debate while attacking norms and commonplace expectations found within the broader society. This is rather common amongst digital countercultural groups, but also countercultural groups in general (Lingel, 2017).

One way that the Free Towners exemplified this was with sarcastic humor in the form of an early meme. On their website was the post “I just naturally assumed it was some of my business – Marge Simpson” (see appendix 1). The use of the word “natural” implies second nature action or habitualized modes of being. While “my” serves to create possession for Marge over business. What “my business” is, is not stated in the quote, allowing the reader to jump to

How could that be, you ask? It turns out that John has a base of support of about 125 in the town. With 400 typically voting, it takes about 200 to win an election. If 25 Porcupines were politically active residents, they could be expected to positively influence at least two or three potential voters each...in which case John (or presumably another Porcupine) would be over 200 votes...just about enough to win” (Condon, 2004).

their own thoughts about unnecessary interference. A quick glance at the rest of the page however and one can gain an understanding of the implication. One can see that Marge is a stand-in for the “Government” writ large, but particularly Grafton’s government and “my business” is all the ways the Free Towner’s felt the government was naturally oppressing and interfering. The quote coupled with the rest of the page thus serves as a warning that one must be vigilant of government overreach, otherwise the government will continuously assume it naturally should expand, which is linked with “that’s how ALL oppression starts” and “(taken from the residents as Taxes, AT THE POINT OF A GUN).” This implicit joke serves to prime the viewer for the very explicit text throughout the rest of the page inundated with anti-government messaging and the stoking of fear with words in bold like “threaten,” “protect,” “Evil,” and “Danger!”.

A later FTP website was also full of very explicit language calling for Grafton’s liberation from the “statist oppressors.” Quotes describing George Orwell’s (Eric Blair’s) 1984 could be found stating, “In 1984 George Orwell wrote a book that warned of a world in which the government-controlled thought by controlling speech” (see Appendix 3). First off, “1984” was not written in 1984, but 1949. Second, the usage of a common archetype symbolizing the oppressive state serves to prime the viewer with fear, mistrust, and ultimately a rebellious spirit. Depending on one’s political views it is also often used as an archetype for communism or capitalism, with the FTP ascribing the latter meaning to it. The FTP is very clearly stating its disdain for control of speech by government and ultimately thought. Fear is invoked by referencing government control of thought via control of speech. Indicating a belief that speech is thought. A belief in endless disagreement with norms as a means of fighting government control is thus a cornerstone of the FTP interaction style. This theme was a common talking point in deliberative sessions as well.

The FTPers and broader FSPers also pride themselves on being highly critical second guessers, immune to manipulation. This goes along with their anti-government mindset and individualism. As noted above they link the political state with the social interactional styles of people. When Condon (2004) announced that the Free Town was to be Grafton, while describing the reception he notes that:

“complaining, moaning, second-guessing, and arguing began. “Why Grafton!?!” was the refrain. “You musta had a sales job done on you by Babiarz!!!” And of course everyone

had a favorite Free Town that they were absolutely sure we should have chosen. "We wuz robbed!" some of the disappointed Free Town partisans yelled. It was amazing. It was like a microcosmic replay of the Free State Project vote itself!"

Condon, a leader in the Free Town Project, characterizes the ridicule and second guessing of the decision as "amazing" and as a trend due to it being like a "like a microcosmic replay". Condon takes pride in the group members' lack of acceptance or desire to follow, and firm individualism. This quote also has an upbeat, joking, and excited element to it, conveying a sense of optimism for the coming project.

The quote above also speaks to the history of the movement and excited expectations of the group members. The libertarians are the third largest political party in the U.S. and yet they hardly ever win anything higher than a county election, minus the senator Rand Paul. One reason for this seems to be the intensely individualistic tendencies of libertarians, driving them to isolate over coagulate while often dispelling group categorizations. The Free Town project was the beginning of a libertarian endeavor to change this and organize in a way that would allow them to be successful, at least at the state level (Sorens, 2001).¹⁸ Thus, Condon is excited by the expression of individualistic and questioning values, coupled with the notion that the project is moving forward anyway. In this sense, he is also recognizing that the libertarian style of action is often incompatible and oxymoronic to organization, yet somehow works, which is "amazing" to him. This intense style of communication, focused on critical questioning and individual pursuit may have worked online but would lead to issues when practiced in live town meetings.

Another way that this critical and combative communication style can be exemplified is through what the libertarians jokingly call "libertarianitis."

"Libertarianitis - A disease where one is incapable of doing anything other than debate. The sufferer is rendered totally incapable of being constructive and constantly marginalizes him or herself by displays of extreme negativity, bitterness, and intransigence" (fsp.org, 2015).

This style of interaction would be exemplified in deliberative sessions in Grafton. The libertarian ideological strength seems to lie in its inherent tensions, allowing for adherents to develop a kind

¹⁸ The Free State Project and Libertarianism have gained increasingly pronounced power within N.H. in recent years, most likely due to the larger migration initiated in 2016.

of unyielding religious faith and pride derived from the notion that their style and ideology should not work, yet in their eyes does.

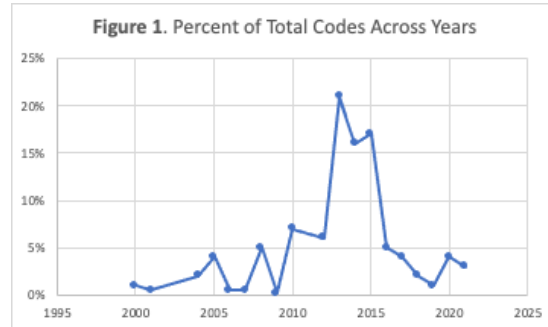
As noted, the online democratic style for the FTP and FSP was also highly focused on identifying threats to freedom while simultaneously working to practice dissidence via critical and questioning discourses in the everyday world. The group also utilized online voting and polling frequently as a kind of crowdsourcing. This was done when picking N.H. to be the Free State. Voting was also utilized to help narrow down the possibilities of what would eventually be the Free Town. However, voting was also conducted in a variety of other ways to decentralize and provide choice to members as much as possible.

Going through the forums of the FSP and FTP, what really sticks out is the desire to forge community. In the local groups section of freestateproject.org, one can find people all over the U.S. (and the world) attempting to meetup, form communities, make friends, and ultimately be with people they felt were ideologically like. While the members were content to talk online, a focus on meeting up in person seems to be very common.

Shifting to the physical realm required a move spatio-temporally and ritually, toward a multi-modal state of interactional performances. It also meant the end of their interactions being estranged from non-FTP members as the community they entered was already inhabited. As the libertarians knew each other online beforehand, where they could perform their most orthodox libertarianism, tapping into online personas and schemas for real world interactions once in Grafton was already primed. The echo chamber effect, with its intense reaffirmation of ideological orthodoxy, was coming offline to interact with those in the physical world.

Deliberative Session Code Frequency and Code Groups of Note

Code frequency across years is outlined initially. The section then focuses on codes found to be highly frequent and interactionally important. The codes presented here help orient one's understanding around the kinds of talking points and discussions occurring in the deliberative sessions. They also help one understand the kinds of things over which boundaries were instantiated.



As can be seen in **Figure 1**, the most intensive coding period occurred between the years 2010 - 2016. However, within this window, 2013-2015 had the most codes per year by far (see Appendix 10). Of the 398 codes applied, 21% were in 2013, 16% in 2014 and 17% in 2015. This period was thus considered the most active period of social conflict occurring during Town Meetings and thus a highly unsettled/unsteady societal state (Swidler, 1986; Alexander, 2018; Alexander, 2019). Participation at the sessions also skyrocketed. The percentages hovered between 0 - 5% before and after this period, indicating a climactic period of the socio-political conflict. This is due to the Free Towners' improved leadership, newfound organization, and ability to pass concrete policy, which caused a backlash from locals. One can see that the code frequency declined dramatically in 2016. This was partially due to the FSP launch in February 2016, as it gave Grafton FTP members new places to advance their movement in. However, it is later shown that this was also due to a fierce backlash by locals against the FTP.

Coding groups of note and around which themes were drawn are: “FTP and Gov. Control,” “FTP and Gov. Officials,” “FTP and Public Money,” “Graftonites and FTP,” “Insider,” “Representations of Grafton,” “Respect,” and “Town Meeting as a Game” (see Appendix 21 for a full list with constituent codes). These groups and their codes were utilized throughout the following chapters.

Possible Democratic Labor Alienation - An Insulated Simmering Strain

FTP members began trickling into Grafton in 2004, however, their impact did not really become felt until 2005. As one would expect with a migration, increasing numbers of FTP members arrived over time. With this increase in numbers came increasingly bold attempts to influence Grafton’s democracy and in particular its coffers. Local members of Grafton’s civil sphere began responding to this perceived threat to their labors during deliberative sessions. Warrant article introductions focused on decreasing tax revenue and diminishing the size of the government by privatizing it became increasingly common (GDSM, 2005 - 2013). Social

interactions between the FTP and local civil sphere members became somewhat more tense as democratic labor alienation became a possibility.

A strain around the possibility of losing control of the democratic governance of Grafton arose as members of the FTP began arriving. Working within the local government is a highly meaningful way to serve one's community. In a small rural community this can become even more pronounced as social networks are highly interconnected. The possibility of alienation from this meaningful labor can thus create serious uproar. After arrival in Grafton, the FTP began trying to alienate members of the civil sphere in Grafton from their democratic labor in the social, economic, and political spheres. They were mostly unsuccessful at passing concrete policy until 2013 (GDSM, 2004 - 2013; Summary of Warrant Articles, 2004 - 2013). The FTP introduced warrant articles aimed at privatizing Grafton's government functions, dissolving many government jobs and departments, and slashing tax revenue. They also wanted to take over positions such as the powerful selectboard(men) office. Alienation from democratic labor was not just possible for the smaller group encompassing public jobs, but also deliberative session participants. Moreover, the specter of privatizing most public goods, even if in some cases not possible, meant to some that they would lose their voice in the governance of Grafton.

“Keep in mind the local concern about the ‘Free Town Project’”

In 2005 boundaries began to be signified via uttering concerns about the FTP. Moreover, policy proposals concerning the introduction of zoning laws and thus antithetical to the FTP goals were considered. At the deliberative session meeting in 2005 there was an increased push to pass a “simple zoning proposal” (Grafton Deliberative Session Minutes (GDSM), 2005, 15). The FTP had chosen Grafton partially because of its lack of zoning laws (see chapter on FTP expectations). It seems that people in Grafton were worried about increased “sprawl” changing the rural landscape and thus wanted zoning laws to protect their town. On top of this it seems that some of the first interactional conflict at deliberative sessions occurred:

“Sue Jukowsky stated to keep in mind the local concern about the "Free Town Project". Anson

Smith stated it was unfair to target "Free Towners" (15).

Jukowsky was drawing attention to the perceived threat the FTP posed. She was also differentiating the “local concern” from the concerns of FTP, helping to signify boundaries between locals and outsiders. This was quickly called out as “unfair,” yet the rebuttal also differentiated the group from the locals. Here the locals were beginning to respond to concerns

about the FTP but were not yet considering the threat real and instead more of a possible threat to “keep in mind.” This local style of keeping the FTP in mind while working to stymie its political progress, without taking it too seriously, seems to have persisted until 2013.

Making things Private - The FTP Against Public Revenue

Staying true to their online rhetoric, the FTP attempted to alienate Graftonites from their democratic labor via the introduction of warrant articles designed to drastically diminish Grafton’s bureaucracy and government coffers. The coding group “FTP and Government Control” exemplifies this with the codes: “privatize government,” “against zoning,” “zoning law,” “anti-police,” anti-state/fed[eral] power,” “conceptions of government,” “slashing public assistance,” and “freedom.” Staying true to their online rhetoric, the FTP sought to drastically reduce the government bureaucracy of Grafton. The most obvious mechanism to do this was through cutting Grafton’s budget and tax revenue. Moreover, by privatizing public functions, the likelihood of workers “liv[ing] among” or within Grafton would diminish.

Much of the debate occurring at deliberative sessions revolved around money. Of all the codes used, 33% fell into the coding group “FTP and Public Money.” This group encompasses the codes, “against taxation,” “budget decrease,” “charity,” “funding specifics,” “investment out of Grafton,” “privatize government,” “slashing public assistance,” and “voluntarism.” Moreover, **Appendix 17** showcases common FTP warrant articles, many of which revolved around either directly or indirectly cutting tax revenue. These were also more moderate than many warrant articles discussed at Town Meeting as they made it onto the ballot.

FTP members were not just talking about diminishing government spending by a small amount. Instead, their beliefs about public money, seen vividly in their warrant article proposals, were often absolute. A common recipe for a proposed FTP warrant article was abolishing a governing body, board, department and/or its tax revenue. To compensate for the loss, charity contributions, voluntary work or the market was often suggested to fill the void.

Part of this recipe can be seen in the following 2008 deliberative session minutes introduced by two prominent FTP members, Tim Condon, and Rich Angell:

“Move to reduce Legal Expenses from \$10,000 to \$-0-.” Discussion included legal counsel by volunteer efforts, not being able to encumber the \$8000 balance from 2007, the eradication of the budget category, and insurance not covering all legal matters (Grafton Deliberative Session, 2008).

The warrant article exemplifies an attempt at a total and absolute cut to legal expenses. Moreover, the discussion included the “eradication of the budget category” completely. Cutting legal expenses thus turned into cutting the existence of a budget in general and thus the government of Grafton. These types of article introductions and discussions were very common during deliberative sessions and only increased over time until 2016.

While they were common, they also almost always failed. The move to cut Grafton’s legal defense fund would later become increasingly important as the FTP would sue the town of Grafton. This type of exchange exemplifies the rhetorical consistency of the libertarians. They had planned on trying to eradicate the government and its budget in Grafton (see chapter on the FTP Online) and indeed were making efforts to do so, though futile. This warrant article introduction was followed by a statement from Rich Angell, a volunteer ambulance driver. “I feel ‘personally attacked’ and ‘vehemently opposed [to] reducing legal expenses’” (Grafton Deliberative Session Minutes, 2008).

Here is an example of a person serving their community via volunteer work and facing the possibility of losing legal expenses which help to protect public servants. Angell thus faced the possibility of losing funding for legal protections and ultimately his role serving the community and alienation from his democratic labor.

This example also illustrates the lack of follow through accompanying one of the FTPs favorite solutions to a lack of funding, voluntarism. Even a position like a volunteer ambulance driver required some government funding for legal protection and the FTP wanted to dissolve this. In this sense, it put those not even employed by the town, but simply volunteering, in a position where they could not trust the town to cover something like being sued while helping the town. This type of exchange helps illustrate how the entirety of the town was at risk, as everything was fair game to defund for the FTP.

As was previously mentioned, this type of situation within town meetings was very common and created a feeling of being “personally attacked” within most public servants as all of the institutions they inhabited faced similar warrant articles and discussions calling for defunding.

Town Workers Should “Live Among Us”

Throughout the deliberative sessions minutes, it became clear that a preference for finding town workers inhabiting Grafton was preferred. This was true both before, during and

after the FTP. When FTP members suggested privatizing previously elected/appointed positions in town, it was not taken as just a market-based solution, it was taken as an attack on local laborers serving the community. Having democratically elected positions in town allowed Graftonites to choose who would serve the community (at least amongst those who wanted to). By ensuring that they were Graftonites, a level of social accountability could also be achieved on top of political accountability. Privatization, the FTPs desired policy, would thus take away both levels of democratic accountability, alienating the town from its democratic prerogative. Moreover, it would alienate the person who otherwise would have been elected. This desire to keep electing local laborers was seen in the coding group “insider” which encompasses the codes “insider knowledge” and “insider preference.”

The FTP members lived amongst the Graftonites but were demarcated as “newcomers” or often “this group” and therefore not locals in the collective consciousness of many Graftonites. Moreover, the FTP attempted to privatize many public servant positions, opening these local jobs to “outsiders.” This caused increasing angst amongst those serving in local public positions. It also caused angst among locals in general as “outsiders” would not be politically regulated nor as socially regulated by the community.

Many locals expressed a clear desire for townspeople to inhabit Grafton’s bureaucracy. FTP members were more concerned with privatizing and dissolving it. One example of the locals’ desire occurred while discussing a warrant article requiring that the health officer live in and be a taxpayer of Grafton (GDSM, 2008). It was noted that the appointed (by the selectboard) health officer should “live among us” (GDSM, 2008, 16). A prominent selectboard member, Steve Darrow, agreed and noted that the current one had lived in Grafton when appointed, but had since moved one town over to Canaan. It seems that the deliberators thought that by living “among us,” workers would have a vested interest in the town’s success and ultimately be beholden to social structural constraints. A preference to elect and appoint locals was thus being explicitly stated.

FTP Leadership

Not the Leader Imagined - From Libertarian Icon to Public Servant

One of the biggest pull factors to Grafton for the FTP was John Babiarz (see chapter: Choosing the Free Town). He had run the most successful gubernatorial campaign by a

libertarian in American history. On top of this, he had been chair of the Libertarian Party.¹⁹ Moreover, he is largely credited with inviting the FTP to Grafton (Condon, 2004; Hongoltz-Hetling, 2021). He was a vocal libertarian at deliberative sessions, attempting to pass a “UN Free Zone” warrant article for years prior to the arrival of the Free Towners (GDSM, 2000-2004). Strangely, during the FTPs attempts at securing political power in Grafton, Babiarz did not lead the FTP and instead shifted to insider status. He became one of the most influential bulwarks of Grafton institutionalism, fighting for tax revenue and even demanding an FTP bonfire be doused (Hongholz-Hetling, 2021). His cross-cutting group and social ties along with varying loyalties helped to stymie the FTPs threat to Grafton’s government. If he had instead helped organize and push for FTP policy in Grafton the FTP may have been more successful. As the following chapter shows, Jeremy Olson’s charismatic leadership helped the FTP gain some warrant article wins. The Babiarz case seems to be an example of what Abbott (2001) calls fractionation. He was an established libertarian, not ideologically orthodox enough for the new FTP libertarians. This seems to have been the case for many other libertarian minded Graftonites.

Babiarz was not a leader, nor even a clear supporter of the FTP. The FTP brand of libertarianism was not aligned with Babiarz’. His anti-UN warrant article disappeared for years after the FTP arrival and he did not speak on behalf of the Free Towners in deliberative sessions (GDSM, 2004 - 2015). While the article was largely symbolic, as its ability to do anything was almost null, it still speaks to the notion that Babiarz was becoming less willing to align himself with libertarianism and the Free Towners. Instead, he appears to have become more integrated with the local establishment in Grafton as he became the fire chief and advocated for one of the largest spending items at deliberative sessions, the replacement of the heating system at the fire department (GDSM, 2013-15). He would also call an FTP warrant article pertaining to the prevention of public official’s fraud, “ridiculous” (GDSM, 2015). Moreover, in deliberative sessions, Babiarz championed the long-term plan of the previous fire chief, which involved serious taxpayer revenue streams. This of course was antithetical to the FTPs goals. His role as fire chief and desire to further the department's goals seems to have created a situation where he was at odds with many in the FTP. This tension is also expressed in a Libertarian Walks into a Bear (Hongholz-Hetling, 2021). While one could make the point that he was exercising a key

¹⁹ This information was gathered from the personal website of John Babiarz: <http://www.johnbabiarz.com/>. It is corroborated by Hongholz-Hetling (2021).

tenet of libertarianism, voluntarism, he also was volunteering for the local government and attempting to further its expansion in the form of increased taxation. Assisting the government and raising taxes were antithetical to libertarian ideology and constantly fought by the FTP.

This is one example of the libertarians splintering around what it meant to practice the ideology, implying that fractionation (Abbott, 2001) occurred. Babiarz appears to have valued the voluntary part of the ideology, while the most orthodox FTP members valued pushing for anti-government and anti-taxation policies. In this sense, there was a rift between the local and integrated libertarian, Babiarz, with the newcomer FTPers.

Some Charismatic Authority?

FTP activist and organizer Olson is an example of the power individuals exercise in local politics. He organized the FTP from 2011-2015, helped author and advocate for FTP minded warrant articles, brought multiple legal cases against the town of Grafton, and was a Trustee of the Trust Fund (Olson, n.d). He also helped organize a local libertarian festival called “Burning Porcupine Festival.” Moreover, during his time in Grafton, he was mentioned in the deliberative session’s minutes 134 times from 2013 - 2014 (see appendix, 23). These mentions often concerned the usage of tactics aimed at prolonging deliberative sessions in a passive aggressive style. These actions helped to gamify deliberative sessions and were a mix of points of order, secret ballot motions, amendment proposals, warrant articles by petition, attempts to get rid of the moderator, and a constant stream of questions about every aspect of funding and procedure within the operations of the town (GDSM, 2013-2014).

The unsteady state in Grafton took off after his arrival and subsequent organizing, implying that for this period he supplied charismatic authority for the FTP, allowing it to become more adept at accomplishing its goals (Weber, 1947 [1922]). Building on Weber, Zablocki (1971) noted that intentional communities are often highly reliant on charismatic authority for continued functionality and often collapse without it if actions have not become sufficiently habitualized. It seems that this was the case with the charismatic authority of Olson. Olson thus helped initiate an FTP frontlash which caused a subsequent local backlash against the project. In this way, the increased organization and success of the FTP during this unsteady time seems to have later contributed to its decline.

Real Alienation - The Unsteady Societal State

Semiotic Code Switch - Moving to the Unsteady Societal State

Before 2013, the FTP attempted to pass warrant articles in Town, but was relatively unsuccessful due to a lack of organization, numbers, and leadership. At the 2013 Deliberative Session this changed. The group was highly organized and voted as a block. The FTP passed a 10% budget reduction warrant article at deliberative session (Deliberative Session Minutes, 2013; Valley New, 2013; Valley News, 2014). This would fail on election day but was close to passing and seems to have galvanized many locals (Valley News, 2013). One reason for this success was the increase in FTP member numbers over time since 2004. Secondly, the power of the individual in local politics seems to have been helpful. A new arrival and experienced libertarian activist, Jeremy Olson, helped to get the group organized and was extremely active during Town Meetings (GDSM, 2013; see previous chapter). The length of deliberative sessions skyrocketed (Valley News; appendix 10) along with the codes implemented (see appendix 11) and the number of voters present (see appendix 16). It seems that Graftonites were caught off guard by the much more organized and prepared FTP. The FTP members were no longer just a group performing intense libertarian ideology, they were making concrete policy gains as well.

While the social conflict was simmering before 2013, it came to a boil at the 2013 deliberative session. Thinking with Civil Sphere Theory and the mechanism of Societalization (Appendix, 19) one can observe a move from the steady to the unsteady societal state via a semiotic code switch (Alexander, 2018; 2019; 2021). Prior to 2013, the FTP was an “insulated strain” on Grafton’s democratic process, not a serious problem. When the semiotic code defining the FTP switched, the group increasingly became seen as a morally polluting threat to democracy, causing fear and alarm amongst established Graftonites. Polarization and boundary hardening became more pronounced, and the comedic frame shifted to the tragic, with political adversaries becoming real enemies. Moreover, the imagined possible alienation for Graftonites from their democratic labors became real alienation. Simply put, the FTP became a much more real threat and was responded to in kind.

The FTP desired to cut Grafton’s budget and tax revenue dramatically, meaning that most public servants would lose their jobs, already limited public services would diminish, and Graftonites would become increasingly alienated from their democratic process. Moving from a possible threat to a real threat thus caused real action from the local civil sphere in the form of

repairs. This was seen in the form of a backlash from locals. Boundaries were hardened in the social sphere and conflict ensued in deliberative sessions. Agents inhabiting the civil sphere such as civil servants, government officials, journalists and concerned citizens became much more active (GDSM, 2013-2015; Valley News, 2014). Deliberative session participation skyrocketed as well during this time frame from approximately 45 in 2012 to approximately 93 in 2015 (Appendix 15). Moreover, local coverage of Grafton and the FTP became more pronounced by local newspapers such as The Valley News.

The frontlash of the FTP in 2013 thus was responded to with a backlash. Group boundaries hardened and an intensified “sphere war” ensued within Grafton’s political sphere. The deliberative session became the stage on which the process could be most vividly observed. Beliefs were espoused, boundary demarcation occurred in real time, and the sphere war ensued.

Individuals are Institutions - “Respect Their Labor”

During the 2013 deliberative session local leaders felt as though their work was not being respected. This was one of the triggers for the semiotic code switch. This feeling of disrespect, coupled with concrete gains against them helped flip conceptions of the FTP as a possible threat into a real one. The coding group “Graftonites against FTP” encompasses some of the codes that exemplify the personal element of the social conflict. Some of these codes are: “respect institutions,” “hard work,” “defending selectmen,” “against free towners,” and “insider preference.” Many institutions were run by individuals and so calling out the need to respect an institution or the hard work done often meant referencing an individual. Moreover, when the FTP would introduce an article calling for the dissolution of a board, job, or institution, it meant that a local individual might lose their job. This section thus shows the importance of individuals in small town politics. It also shows their desire to protect their meaningful work.

Steve Darrow exemplified the profound impact of the individual for rural institutions and local politics. Throughout the 21 years of deliberative session minutes covered, Darrow was highly vocal in many of them. He embodied local technocratic knowledge to the point where he was typically the person answering questions about legality, departmental power, spending, rules, and regulations (GDSM, 2000 - 2021). His name came up 441 times (see appendix 23). Jennie Joyce, with the second most mentions at 167, did not have even half as many. Due to this seemingly limitless knowledge of local governance in small town New Hampshire, he was able to perform a level of local political knowledge unrivaled by anyone else at deliberative sessions

in Grafton. He was able to make statements in response to the FTP indicating the illegality of a proposal and oftentimes would be taken at his word by both the Free Towners and the locals (GDSM, 2000 - 2021). Moreover, he was often the official referenced as having put in a “lot of hard work” on warrant articles, and thus should not be questioned.

Locals pushed back against the FTP through calling out the need to respect the hard labor town officials put in. It was often noted that it required immense time for little pay in the form of stipends. Locals would often reference the time and effort put into a given warrant article by a given town official, seeking the evocation of sympathetic sentiments. This served to personalize articles and forge solidarity as it reminded those in attendance of the sacrifice made by public officials. Moreover, oftentimes the officials were those who had been residing in town for a very long time and were well known, creating the perception that acquaintances or even friends were being treated poorly by a group of “outsiders,” the Free Towners. By referencing a town official or leader, one could perform a degree of insiderness that would add credit to one's speech act. Moreover, by coupling the need to show respect with notions of ridiculousness, one could also perform outrage. Adding this emotional element to one's speech is a potent way to gain resonance with a given audience (Bail, 2016). This style became more pronounced as the threat the FTP posed became more real in 2013 (GDSM, 2013).

One public official who embodied this style of speech was the Police Chief and eventual selectmen, Merle Kenyon. When the free towners first arrived, Kenyon was the police chief, however, due to health reasons he stepped down, ceding his role to Russel Poitras. During Kenyon's reign, like other department heads, he had set up a long-term plan aimed at acquiring new police vehicles. When Poitras attempted to follow this plan as the new chief, the Free Towners hating taxes and government authority naturally progressed to attack the plan and the purchasing of new vehicles for the town. During this moment, Kenyon proceeded to defend his successor and called on people to “respect” the chief while also contending that the attacks brought by the libertarians were “out of line and ridiculous” (GDSM, 2013, 15). Here, a former official with a lot of “clout” in town stood up to call out what he thought was “ridiculous.” Kenyon would do this many times during the unsteady state.

This referencing of the past not only created the perception of something larger than individuals squabbling over tax revenue, but it also reminded townspeople of their history and staying power. It also reminded locals that the Free Towners were attempting to dismantle their

hometowns. Further, it served to remind the newcomer Free Towners that the town was resilient and had existed before their arrival. This implication, reference, and evocation of the past in conjunction with proposals toward the future, seems to have been a keyway the locals stood their ground and contested Free Towner articles.

Before 2013, these kinds of threats were not taken as seriously. The FTP was now more organized and effective at gaining political wins within deliberative sessions. Grafton officials were beginning to register the fact that the FTP was not just a possible threat but a real one. Moreover, their jobs, livelihoods, sense of community and livelihoods were on the line.

Alienation From Social Regulation - Interactional Boundary Demarcation

Throughout 2013 - 2016 a newly emboldened FTP performed intense ideological orthodoxy in deliberative sessions, like that of their online personas, creating intense rifts with locals. Free Towner warrant article proposals and interaction styles were not based in any spirit of integration or moderation, but instead were highly antagonistic in spirit to the institutions composing the town. The FTP attempted to instantiate its ideology absolutely around speech and democracy into the rules of sessions. This was attempted through the gamification of town meetings. This absolutism was taken by locals as a threat to their democracy and thus their labors practicing and performing it. As the town's institutions were typically inhabited by single individuals, with considerable social and political power, the interactions quickly became personal.

The interaction ritual characterizing town meetings in Grafton changed dramatically during the years 2013 - 2015. A noticeable shift in the sequential flow of town meetings occurred. The comedic frame became less utilized as a way of glossing over interactional tension, being replaced by the tragic. Moreover, a forced shift from the implicit to the explicit accompanied this.²⁰ This shift signaled a lack of collective and synchronous chains of emotional entrainment (Collins, 2004), that would otherwise create adhering expectations. Breeches became commonplace and emotional entertainment became aggressively dualistic, serving to harden boundaries between the groups. Cross cutting social ties, often glorified as a cornerstone of democracy, became hard to find (Parsons & Sciortino, 2007). Basic quantitative elements of

²⁰ “[T]he most robust and effective metapragmatic function is implicit, not denotationally explicit. It resides in cotextual organization itself, that is, in token co-occurrence patterns of emergent entextualization itself, that transcend, encompass, and supersede any denotationally literal metapragmatic discourse that may happen to manifest simultaneously in the plane of denotational function” (Silverstein, 2003; seen in Silverstein, 1993).

the meeting also indicate this as the meeting length skyrocketed, mainly due to constant interruptions, questions, and warrant article introductions.

Before the unsteady state, formal Town Meeting Rules were read by the moderator. They were not typically questioned, and when they were, the moderator would typically respond with a comedic frame. An understanding seemed to exist, grounded in trust, that the habitualized interactional style would also regulate Town Meeting. This all changed with the arrival of the Free Towners. One can expect a large influx of people to shift the interactional style, however, this shift was very dramatic. Interchanges like the following also imply that the Free Towners were continuing to fractionate and double down on the most orthodox beliefs amongst them, convinced that a liberation of Grafton from the “statist oppressors” was necessary.

Analysis of a Typical Deliberative Session Interactional Interchange

One moment that exemplifies the social conflict in Grafton is a disagreement between the moderator and a FTP member, Brian Fellers. The interaction is described in the deliberative session minutes:

“Brian Fellers stated that 40:8 took away his freedom of speech. Moderator Frost responded that personal attacks and name calling are not acceptable” (GDSM, 2014, 1). This gives a basic understanding of the interaction, a dispute over freedom of speech. However, by delving into the specific metapragmatics of the interaction, one can gain a much deeper understanding of what transpired. Moreover, it should be noted that Brian was eventually escorted out of the meeting due to disruptive behavior. He ironically sang “God Bless America” while being escorted away by police (Valley News, 2014). The following sequence of utterances helps to showcase boundary maintenance and formation in real time.

Brian: ... the rules of decorum, that seem to me to be a violation of my 1st amendment rights.

Frost: Uhh, he is talking about personal attacks against people, or their motives will not be permitted and will be considered disorderly conduct. Ok, anybody else have a comment on that.

Brian: I am looking for an answer actually, I am not allowed to personally attack somebody?

Audience member(s): Do it on your own time! (Muffled speaking by crowd).

Brian: All of this is a divisive game.

Frost: Ok. I think, Brian. My interpretation is, if you stand up and say what you feel, but personal attack is when you start name calling, things like that. If you say I disagree with this group or whatever.

Brian: Are we going to take a vote on whether or not what I said is a personal attack? Or

[unsure here] is that the way democracy works, or the first amendment works?
Frost: No, no, I don't think so ...

(Grafton Deliberative Session 1 of 4, 2014: 2:54-3:56)

Brian attempts to “nail down” an answer from Frost and win an interactional point for himself and his group, the Free Towners.²¹ Frost provides a token agreement, or the equivalent of a disagreement, which prompts Brian to upgrade his response (Pomerantz, 1984; Schegloff, 1987, 177). The interchange is filled with both explicit and implicit metapragmatics, or speech that references the co-occurring situation and provides varying levels of “metapragmatic function” robustness (see footnote on previous page). The metapragmatics serve both groups while trying to define the situation. The Free Towner, Brian, utilizes highly explicit utterances while Frost attempts to mainly reiterate the rules and gloss. Once she is forced to answer him explicitly, she utilizes a slower speaking cadence and calls him out by name in her response.

Moderator Frost initially responds with a comedic frame to Brian via a restatement of the rules around personal attacks, clarifying the non-permissibility of such a speech act without any upgrade. She then asks if anyone else has a comment, employing a gloss to keep the meeting moving past the implied question concerning the “violation of first amendment rights.” Brian attempts to nail down an answer from Frost by explicitly stating: “I am looking for an answer actually, I am not allowed to personally attack somebody?” Frost had re-stated the rules as a way of maintaining the comedic frame but was being interactionally forced via an upgrade to shift toward the tragic frame. Frost is rescued momentarily by an audience member who clearly recognizes the aggressive use of face work occurring and attempts to breach the interaction sequence with an utterance explicitly attacking Brian.

“Do it on Your Own Time!” - Demarcating Group Ownership Over Time

The interruption, “do it on your own time!” conveys a desire to preserve the sacredness of the ritual. Moreover, it shows boundaries being drawn around ownership of the present moment. The mention of time reminds the group of the slow pace at which town meetings were now proceeding and the subsequent anger at this. The immediate muffled speech after the outburst indicates that the room was charged. By stating “your own,” the utterer draws a line between himself and Brian. This helps to negate Brian's possession of the presently unfolding time, and instead reminds listeners that the time belongs to the broader collectivity. This implies

²¹ Nailing down an answer is described in Matoesian (2005). It can be thought of as reframing a question that was either glossed over or was not provided the answer desired.

selfishness on the part of Brian while implicitly (more robustly) denoting the collective possession of the present time. Moreover, as Brian is a FTP member, the utterer is stating that he feels the time is not for the broader FTP either. The time is of course for conducting Grafton's governance and so the utterance serves to convey that governance time is not FTP time. This signals a shift to the tragic frame and is a defense of locals' conceptions of Town Meeting sacredness.

“All of this a divisive game.”

The interchange is also filled with metacommentary on the broader Town Meeting interaction in general. After the audience member interrupted, Brian quietly continued, “All of this is a divisive game.” Here, Brian is describing not just his ongoing interaction but the broader meeting and interactions in general. Ironically, while stating that personal attacks should be permitted, he has been personally attacked. It seems that he is not addressing Frost, whom he implies is in on the game, but instead the audience at large and presumably those closest to him, fellow Free Towners.²² “All of this” references the town meeting interactions and “a divisive game,” the style of interaction he believes to be occurring. However, he is the one attempting to gamify the situation via his close rule reading coupled with a desire to allow personal attacks. In this sense, he is carrying out the dividing function in real time while also explicitly stating it. He is also stating that his pragmatic competencies will be/are directed toward the situation as a game he can score points in while exploiting those who might see the interaction as something sacred and worth attempting to save. Though his voice was lowered, the utterance serves to upgrade the social conflict for the audience within earshot (fellow Free Staters).

Implicitly Personal and Explicitly Impersonal: “Is that the way Democracy Works?”

Frost eventually does respond to Brian. She personalizes her response, utilizing Brian's name slowly and deliberately. She then describes her own interpretation of a personal attack as “name calling” while indicating that expressing feelings is ok. After giving this definition, she states: “If you say I disagree with this group or whatever.” Here, “this group” coupled with the context of Grafton and the contingently emerging interaction almost certainly serves to index the FTP. Ending the utterance with “or whatever,” she attempts to save her own face as the impartial

²² Via observing Grafton Deliberative Sessions on YouTube, one can see that Free Towners often sat together as a group. Notably, during hand votes the Free Towners can be observed voting as a block together.

moderator, utilizing a highly vague term. Her implicit utterance, “disagree with this group” thus becomes a robust interactional point against the Free Towners by toeing a very close line to a literal statement, while maintaining the sacrality of the ritual.

Here Brian indexes his orthodox FTP ideological beliefs and desire for Grafton to be run according to them. Brian responds with “Are we going to take a vote on whether or not what I said is a personal attack? Or [unsure here] is that the way democracy works, or the first amendment works?” Brian asks if a vote will be taken on if something is a personal attack or not. He then asks about the workings of democracy and the first amendment. For many longtime locals and public officials at the meeting, an implicit, well-practiced and experientially rooted understanding of the localized process of Grafton’s democracy was already ingrained.²³ The workings of participatory democracy were common sense social knowledge.

For locals there was no need to ask about something like the first amendment, degrees removed from the contingently emerging interaction, or imply the need for an out of place mechanistic vote, as there was an underlying assumption of social regulation. It served to convey a lack of knowledge pertaining to the social workings of deliberative democracy and the mediating effect of the emerging speech event or interaction ritual, rooted in social norms. By explicitly asking for a vote on something like personal attacks, Brian conveyed his lack of respect for the sacrality of the socially mediated side of town meeting style democracy. Frost followed this up with a quick “No, no, I don't think so ...” and then again restated the rules without upgrading her response.

Up until this point in the town meeting notes (2000-2014), there was never a question concerning the acceptability of personal attacks. There certainly were disagreements, however, it seems that matters like this were socially regulated and never addressed, except while reading the rules, as it was collectively understood to be out of line. Asking for the right to do this indexed the absolute orthodox libertarianism desired by the FTP. Moreover, the performance of this style meant alienation from democratic labor for locals. The commonsense social knowledge of how democracy works was under attack. Thus, the implicit knowledge undergirding the

²³ As noted previously, participants collectively perform, co-create, and enact democracy as a sequential social text, “that is to a large degree enabled and constrained by the nature of the legislative process as a speech event” (Townsend, 2009, p. 68).

town's democratic act sequence was being called into question and disregarded. This indicates that the libertarians were not very interested in forging connections with those who disagreed with them, and instead were there to supplant them. This stymied compromise and frenemy status between groups, the *sine qua non* of democratic politics (Polletta, 2016). Thus, alienation from democratic labor was very real.

Interestingly, Grafton's politics are and were highly personal affairs. Civil Sphere Theory notes that in democracies the impersonal is sacred, while the personal is profane (Alexander, 2006). To an extent this was the case in Grafton as well, as the move to allow personal attacks was condemned and taken as a serious threat to the democratic process. However, under the surface the democratic process of Grafton was highly reliant on social understandings forged through interpersonal interactions. The work thus helps show that explicitly personal significations are often profaned in democracies, while at the same time implicitly personal significations are sacralized and glorified.

Practicing What Was Preached - The FTP Language Ideology Offline

This sequence of utterances is evidence of the Free Towners practicing their online ideological style offline. As was noted earlier referencing Condon (2004), the Free Towners glorified individualistic, critical, and self-assured speech. The Free Towner style, with its own social logics, could maintain the sacredness of intra-interaction rituals. However, inter-interaction rituals within deliberative sessions were a different story. The highly critical and individualistic style created a sense of moral self-assuredness within the online community that was habitualized and normalized, eventually being offloaded out into the movement. Condon excitedly described the ridicule he received as "amazing." One might recall that the FTP website was also full of very explicit language calling for Grafton's liberation from the "statist oppressors." Quotes describing George Orwell's 1984 could be found attacking perceived government control of speech and thought (see Appendix 3). In this sense, any sort of control on speech, like the one Brian was fighting against, was considered a problem worth fighting.

By calling for no control of speech the FTP was also calling for its own definition of control to be instantiated. Graftonites thought personal attacks should be off limits and considered them a threat to their democratic process. While the FTP thought outlawing personal attacks was a threat to their own conceptions of democracy. The FTP members were thus coming to the realization that they would need to exert control over individuals if they began leading.

Thus, they were running into a common problem faced by social movements, how to gain power without reproducing the structures opposed (Polletta, 2002, 6).

Demarcating Boundaries “This group wants to live in the Wild West”

The FTP presence in Grafton ultimately strengthened democratic participation. Attendance at the annual town meeting skyrocketed (Appendix, 16). The debates were intense, but due to the metapragmatic nature, the democratic ritual process was also continuously reaffirmed.

Another moment showing the distinction made between the locals and newcomers was in a deliberative session in 2015. A concerned constituent references the desire to live without government, comparing this desire to the “Wild West”. “Karen Meyers noted that ‘this group’ wants to live in the Wild West and do not want any form of government” (Deliberative Session, 2015). She assumes that everyone knows “this group” referenced, which was a safe bet. There was no need to explicitly state which group was being referenced, indicating the assumption of automatic contextualization by those present. Referencing the Wild West, the constituent evokes a trope within the deliberative session’s collective imaginary, harkening to gun wielding, horseback riding vigilantes not beholden to any concrete laws, but more so beholden to local norms and ultimately power. In this sense, the constituent is attempting to stoke fear within the populace while simultaneously expressing her own outrage. By grouping the implicit with the more imaginative trope, and finally the explicit “do not want any form of government” she is able to demarcate boundaries with the FTP and categorize them as relics of bygone era.

Using Comedy to Signify the Tragic Frame

One very clear way to visualize the pushback or backlash against the Free Towners is through observance of the warrant articles introduced either directly against articles the FTP was attempting to pass, or through articles more broadly antithetical to libertarian ideology in general. Oftentimes, in speaking against libertarian leaning articles, speakers would use terms like ridiculous, embarrassing, offensive, foolish, and illegal (Appendix 21).

During the unsteady societal state humor was used to make fun of libertarian warrant articles. Graftonites introduced an article named “The Grafton Mickey Mouse Free Zone Act” and another year the “Sponge Bob Square Pants Free Zone Act.” As a rationale the author stated that “he submitted the latter article because the United Nations is as non-threatening to Grafton as Sponge Bob Square Pants” (Deliberative Session Minutes, 2015, 15). The warrant article thus

took on a ridiculous tone and referenced the article it was critiquing via “Free Zone Act” to convey and portray the ridiculousness of the concept. By referencing popular cartoons known for their absurdity, while utilizing wording similar to the UN article, the article’s author could categorize the ridiculousness via juxtaposition, contextualization, and humor. Moreover, the author could then have the entire town vote on the largely symbolic metacommentary. A vote in favor was in effect a vote condemning the Free Towners.

The Steady State

After 2016 Grafton seems to have moved into a new steady societal state. Code frequency and deliberative session attendance plummeted (Appendix, 11 & 15). Votes at deliberative sessions and articles by petition also became much less common (GDSM 2017-2021). The FTP seems to have lost much of its drive and organization. Moreover, its charismatic leader left town. The threat of alienation from democratic labor seems to have shifted back from the real to the possible in the collective consciousness.

Coming Back Down to Earth - Library and Historical Society Projects

After the move back to the steady state in 2016. It seems that deliberative sessions participants were very keen on streamlining warrant articles proposed by the governing bodies without much debate (Appendix, 16). With some of the most vocal and antagonistic Free Towners no longer participating in discussion, more consensus was expected, yet it seems that agreement became the norm. This suggests that those remaining in deliberative sessions had a hardening of group boundaries and were focused on affirming the “hard work” of governance officials without much discussion. The collective memory of the FTPs attempts at exercising power in Grafton was very much still present, yet without the dissenting FTP voices, an environment weary of conflict with warrant articles introduced by the governing bodies in town emerged (GDSM, 2017-2021).

Two projects took on new life during the most intense social conflict and thereafter. These were the restoration of Grafton’s historical records and a project aimed at building a new library. Both projects seem to have been galvanized by a desire to foster a closer community and utilize public funds for meaningful ends, directly contrasting the Free Towners ideology (see code group on community). One project looked toward the future while the other sought to illuminate and protect archival data of the past. It is relatively well established that competing groups tend to reimagine and ignite a newfound collective memory serving to nostalgically

construct and foster solidarity while simultaneously gaining control of collective memories (Alexander and Smith, 2003). Populism studies have also homed in on this phenomenon as a common feature of social groups (Alexander, Sciortino and Kivisto, 2020). The Graftonites were no exception to this.

When speaking about the library, proponents would often mention the role it served in bringing people together, directly referencing the fostering of “community” (GDSM, 2017; code group on community). Via this reference to “community” a couple of things happened. First, there is an implication that the “community” needs fostering and thus not perceived optimally by the utterer. Secondly, it serves an adversarial purpose, showing that the allocation of collective funds to the town, or taxation, can have positive effects. This directly contrasts the libertarian viewpoint that taxation is theft and should only be done on a voluntary basis. Moreover, as the libertarians themselves were engaged in a project aimed at fostering their own idealized community within Grafton, the project directly provided an alternative vision to that of the Free Towners. A similar happening seems to have occurred with the historical records as the Town Clerk pushed via the introduction of warrant articles to receive yearly funds for the purpose of restoration.

Conclusion

This thesis focused on understanding the social conflict caused by the Free Town Project’s (FTP) attempt to constitute an intentional community in the town of Grafton N.H. The thesis serves to illustrate the potent effect of perceived alienation from democratic labor in contexts practicing localized participatory democracy. It can galvanize people, harden boundaries, and cause intense social conflict. It is shown that when the FTP was only a possible threat to local forms of democratic labor, the town remained in the steady societal state. Locals only responded intensely when the FTP began to gamify and profane deliberative sessions.

Methodologically, the project leaned on interactional discourse analysis, qualitative coding, and historical analysis. This was done over time and across modalities both online and offline. The qualitative coding process was done utilizing ATLAS.ti. 238 pages of Deliberative Session (Town Meeting) minutes were read, coded, and analyzed from 2000 - 2021. 98 codes (c) were established, 397 were applied (a), and 17 code groups (g) were established around themes. Other data utilized includes warrant articles, voting results, tax records, voter estimates, personal websites, and local news reports.

The work first sought to gain a deeper understanding of the estranged FTP and FSP online, illuminating the interaction style via attention to metacommentary and the stories told to themselves about themselves. Particular attention was paid to the deliberative democratic style. The second part focused on understanding if this same style was reproduced and offloaded during interactions in town meetings. It is found that initially a relatively steady societal state (2005-2012) existed during the early phase of the FTP arrival in Grafton. Initially, the FTP was unsuccessful at instantiating its goals and so the FTP was considered only a possible threat by locals. Boundaries were demarcated during this phase, however, there was no serious local backlash to the project. The group was not considered a serious or real threat to the democratic labor and practices of locals. Therefore, no serious push was made against the FTP in deliberative session minutes.

The unsteady state was when democratic labor alienation for locals became real. It is found that locals in Grafton were highly embedded into the local democratic process. Many people were public servants working in the government or volunteers helping to run the emergency services of the town. Others were deliberative session participants or voters. The research found that many Graftonites took great pride in their democratic labors and practices. Moreover, most people had a vested interest in the success of the town. The FTP desired to drastically diminish the size of the government and cut taxes. Graftonites knew that if the FTP achieved its goals, many people would be alienated from their democratic labor. In 2013, the FTP profaned and intensely gamified the deliberative session, alienating locals from their sacred democratic interaction ritual. Through this process, locals were alienated from common sense knowledge and the localized social logics informing town meetings, and thus their democratic labor. At this point the code defining the FTP for the locals was switched from possible threat to a real threat. This sparked an intensified social conflict and a move to the unsteady societal state. It is found that when the FTP abused the interaction ritual, it was not just attacking the democratic act sequence, it was attacking the common-sense social knowledge of the Graftonites, and therefore the town itself. This is demonstrated empirically via analysis of an interchange featuring an FTP member asking about the right to personally attack others in town meetings. In other words, once the FTP began actually alienating locals from their democratic labor, the locals pushed back intensely. The frequency of codes skyrocketed throughout this

time. Town meeting minutes ballooned in length and participation at meetings more than doubled. Local news sources such as NPR and the Valley news also began covering the situation.

The social conflict was found to be most intense from 2013-2016. Thinking with Simmel (1955 [1922]) and Abbott (1995 and 2001) fractionation was observed, or boundary demarcation between ideationally similar groups claiming the other displays a lack of orthodoxy. The FTP chose Grafton thinking its inhabitants were ideologically similar to its own members. Initially the boundaries were not hardened. Yet, during the unsteady state, both groups aggressively demarcated differences and thus social boundaries between each other. This was especially the case when the newcomer FTP threatened the established locals. This process is of note as many of the locals such as Babiarez were indeed libertarians as well yet deemed not libertarian enough. It is thus an example of FTP style libertarianism forged online interacting with an offline libertarian ideology practiced in deliberative sessions and N.H. politics writ large. It shows that the FTP's libertarianism was far more absolute and orthodox than the brand practiced by Babiarez and his supporters.

The FTP ideology was found to be highly focused on espousing anti-government and taxation views, an unyielding faith in the market, intense criticality, pride, individualism, freedom, and a disdain for socio-cultural and political norms. The FTP interaction style could be characterized by what the FTP and FSP members called "libertarianitis," "a disease where one can only debate, marginalize oneself and be bitter and negative, while simultaneously being incapable of constructive conversation or deliberation" (freestateproject.org, 2015). The FTP and FSP members seem to have taken a pride in this style of interaction. While it worked in the estranged online world of the libertarians, it was less successful offline when not estranged. Moreover, the lack of "constructive conversation or deliberation" became a hallmark of the FTP during the unsteady state, showing that the online ideology was indeed offloaded.

During the unsteady state the local town meeting interaction style was found to be buoyed by a strong belief in respecting the socially mediated roots of the democratic process. Moreover, a clear belief in respecting public servants, their institutions, and the broader town government became commonplace during the unsteady state. It seems that this was most likely due to the defensive position the Graftonites found themselves in. It also seems that this established a new normal in Grafton politics. Participation at deliberative sessions and code frequencies fell back to pre-unsteady state levels. Yet, it seems that those who continued to

attend were very focused on strengthening Grafton's government and institutions. The work illustrates this via two common warrant articles from this period which focused on increased funding for the library and historical records.

The work also touched on Civil Sphere Theory (CST) and the agents of the civil sphere (Alexander, 2006). Civil Sphere Theory often neglects the treatment of small rural forms of democracy, instead focusing on larger national level politics. This work serves to strengthen the theory by illuminating its application to the rural political landscape. Adding to the theory, this work illustrates the importance of adherence to sacred locally established democratic interaction rituals. In this sense it adds another arena in which the theory can operate. Moreover, it provides an interactionally based and ground up approach to understanding the things held sacred by those inhabiting the civil sphere.

The thesis also builds on what has been deemed democracies act sequence (Townsend, 2009) and the deliberative play occurring within (Townsend, 2022). It has been noted that town meeting politics are composed of fluid "we's" that will shift depending on the issue at hand (86-87). At Grafton town meetings this was often the case. However, during the unsteady state, fluid "we's" seemed to disappear in favor of much more hardened boundaries. This is not that surprising, given the FTPs goals, however, it does imply more variation of town meeting styles.

The work also helps show the resilience of New England Town Meeting style democracy and the enduring importance of social relations rooted in compromise for the success of democracy. This work also bolsters the rather common but important notion that cross cutting social ties serve to bolster democracy via the facilitation of understanding, via connection across various roles, statuses, and strati (Parsons & Sciortino, 2007; Sciortino, 2021). This same variation seems to help foster compromise and frenemy status between groups (Alexander, 2006), the *sine qua non* of democratic politics (Polletta, 2016). It is also found that democracy is indeed rooted in the social for its functionality. One of the reasons for the FTP's lack of success was the lack of awareness or at least refusal, concerning the need to engage with the socially mediated and personal side of democracy. This was illustrated in its attempts to gamify deliberative sessions instead of gaining political allies.

The work has broader implications for the study of participatory democracy as it showcases the resiliency of the process in the face of groups attempting to dismantle its functionality. The work also has implications for American society writ large as the privatization

of public goods is a common occurrence. It suggests that more socially regulated, localized, and human centered forms of democracy can serve to safeguard public entities from privatization efforts. The work also illustrates exclusive side of newcomer/local integration processes as once the newcomers began to shift the social fabric of deliberative sessions toward their own interaction style, the locals quickly and overwhelmingly responded. Finally, the work also speaks to some of the cultural flashpoints prevalent in American society around privatization, conceptions of democracy, and ideas about the role of government to protect from, provide for or de Tocqueville's (1839) famous binary around free to/freedom from.

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Appendix

1. Free State Project website (2004)

"I just naturally assumed it was some of my business." -- Marge Simpson



DANGER! DANGER!

We have just discovered that the Town of Grafton has something called a "BUILDING NOTIFICATION". Seems the Selectmen require you to ask them like they're your mommy if you want to build on your own Private Property. This somewhat negates John Babiarz's belief that, since there is no such thing as a "Certificate of Occupancy", the Town of Grafton respects Private Property Rights.

We'll just have to work around that and keep taking names. So far it doesn't seem to be abused, but of course that's how ALL Oppression starts! It may be that it is not a matter of PERMISSION, but if not then why require it at all? The fact is that the Selectmen "REVIEW" the Notifications, and that's scary.

The Free Town Project intends to liberate Grafton, New Hampshire by moving in enough libertarians and [Free State Project](#) members to outvote the Authoritarians and Statists in the Town and remove offensive Regulation, such as Planning, Mandatory Recycling, and Building Code Enforcement.

[How Grafton was chosen](#)

Grafton currently has NO Zoning, NO Building Inspector, and NO "Certificates of Occupancy". We intend to keep it that way. One of our first acts will be to abolish the Planning Board.

We shall also withdraw Grafton from the School District, making Grafton its own School District. Then we shall reduce the Town School Tax to **ZERO** by the simple expedient of granting a Property Tax Abatement to anyone who asks for one.

The proper function of the Town Government ought to be to find ways to **protect** its Residents, not to use State Laws **against** them!

We shall enact ByLaws pursuant to RSA 236:124 to protect the residents of Grafton from the State Law forbidding more than two junk cars on Private Property. So far, the only thing the Selectmen have done has been to **threaten** their Residents with Enforcement of the State Law, never to **protect** them from it.

We shall also take advantage of the Statute that allows the Town Government to exempt its residents from the **Evil** Unconstitutional State Law that forbids conducting business on what that State Law Unconstitutionally refers to as "THE LORD'S DAY".

We also intend to ensure that the Town Police are never allowed to waste valuable Town resources (**taken from the residents as Taxes, AT THE POINT OF A GUN**) to oppress our residents by the investigation or enforcement of violations of Laws that punish Truancy ("Compulsory Schooling"), Stem Cell Research, Drug Trafficking, Prostitution, Obscenity, Organ Trafficking, BumFights, and other Victimless "Crimes".

For the related Yahoo! discussion group, go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/freetownproject>
For the related Web Forum, go to <http://forum.freecountyproject.com/index.php?board=8>

2. Free State Project website (2004)



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For the related Yahoo! discussion group, go to http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Free_Town_Project

3. Free State Project website (2006)




The Free Town Project intends to liberate either a New Hampshire Town, or a Western County, by moving in enough Libertarians to control the local Government and remove oppressive Regulations (such as Planning & Zoning, and Building Code requirements) and stop enforcement of Laws prohibiting Victimless Acts among Consenting Adults, such as Dueling, Gambling, Incest, Price-Gouging, Cannibalism, and Drug Handling.


The proper function of Local Government ought to be to find ways to **protect** its Residents from the oppressive State, not to use State Laws **against** them!
We intend to ensure that the Sheriff's Office or the Town Police are never allowed to waste valuable Town resources (**taken from the residents as Taxes, AT THE POINT OF A GUN**) to oppress our residents by the investigation or enforcement of violations of Laws that punish Truancy ("Compulsory Schooling"), Drug Trafficking, Prostitution, Obscenity, Organ Trafficking, BumFights, and other Victimless "Crimes".



Related Web Forum: <http://forum.freecountyproject.com/>

A New Hampshire Town: [New Hampshire Town Takeover](#)

Taking over a Western County: [FreeCountyProject.com](#)

 [Join the FreeTownProject Group](#)


 [Join the LibertarianHomeland Group](#)

[Please contribute whatever you can to help us make this happen](#)

1984 In 1948 George Orwell wrote a book that warned of a world in which the government controlled thought by controlling speech

4. Free State Project website (2008)



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"Pessimism of the world view and optimism of the temperament."
-- Jakob Burckhardt

"Pessimism of the mind. Optimism of the will."
-- Romain Rolland

"It is not necessary to hope in order to undertake, nor to succeed in order to persevere."
-- Charles The Bold

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[Please contribute whatever you can to help us make this happen](#)

1992 He cautioned against a government that has no concept of individual privacy

5.

Finding the Free Town in the Free State

By Tim Condon • 2/18/04

Free State Project Porcupines all support Jason Sorens' excellent idea: Why not geographically concentrate the (relatively) small number of liberty-lovers in the United States, and gain freedom through the power of the vote? It's a great idea, offered at the right time, and is coming to fruition, with the migration already beginning.

But wait! If it's a neat idea to gain political power through choosing a single low-population state for liberty-lovers to call home...why not pick a low-population town in that same state where Porcupines can congregate? Call it an "early demonstration project." An informal group within the FSP agree: It's another great idea, and one that will make for another excellent adventure. Now, after months of debate, research, and two exploratory trips to New Hampshire, the Free Town has been announced. (NOTE: The "Free Town Project" is an informal group of renegade Porcupines ;). We don't have any "official" connection with the Free State Project, Inc. other than being members, nor does the Free State Project officially endorse us or our group.)

Preliminary research took the form of searching New Hampshire to find small-population towns without zoning. The lack of zoning was a crucial attribute, second only to low population itself. Why? Because zoning might be used as a statist weapon by existing local political powers to block any large-scale immigration of Porcupines into the town. In addition, the existence of zoning suggests a "busybody-friendly atmosphere" among the current populace. We wanted no part of any such place.

The initial list had 21 towns without zoning, with populations ranging from 86 in Ellsworth to 4,196 in Haverhill. Other variables were introduced and debated online. Additional subjects included the following, all of which were discussed and argued at great length:

- Weather patterns (bitterly cold winters in towns "north of the notches" versus the less rigorous temperatures in the southern part of the Free State).

- Ready access to an Interstate highway for quick trips to nearby population centers.
- Availability of amenities in or near the town, such as grocery stores, restaurants, department stores, movie theaters, etc.
- Distance from larger population centers with their more extensive amenities, as well as employment opportunities.
- Availability and cost of land (Ellsworth, for instance, had only one parcel for sale, and it was purchased before we could make our move; other areas, such as Roxbury, had no land for sale at all).

Eventually the potential Free Towns resolved down to a few promising survivors: Dalton (pop. 854), Ellsworth (pop. 86), Grafton (pop. 971), Groton (pop. 341), Lempster (pop 1,036), and Orford (pop. 1,039). In 2003 two adventurous Florida Porcupines, Jay Denonville and Zack Bass, took an "exploratory trip" to New Hampshire, driving all the way to New England and back within a two week period. They were able to visit and examine various potential Free Town sites, including Orford, Dalton, and others.

Another exploratory trip was launched in early February, 2004. This time Porcupines Tim Condon and Zack Bass flew to New Hampshire from Florida, and had help from resident Free Staters in exploring. Also present was Robert Hull, who drove up from New Jersey to join us. Those in New Hampshire who volunteered to help included Bill Alleman, Wade Bartlett, Tom Kershaw (a former NHLP chairman), and Tony Lekas (we ended up spending the entire three days with Tony driving us around—bless you, Tony—while Tom Kershaw also helped with his van on our first day; we failed to make contact with Wade Bartlett and Bill Alleman, but hope to remedy that on our next trip). In addition to the main group of Tim Condon, Zack Bass, Bob Hull, and Tony Lekas, we were able to share time, talk, food, and drink with others, including Tony's wonderful wife Alicia, Keene resident and LP activist Jim Maynard, Connecticut Porcupine Tony Stelik, Texan Chuck Geshlider, NH Porcupine Mike Lorrey, and current New Hampshire LP chairman John Babiarz and his wife Rosalie.

Areas that we looked over as possible Free Town locations over the three-day period (of little sleep and lots of traveling) included the following:

- Roxbury (in the southwestern portion of the state, outside Keene, but where there was no land for sale).
- Lempster (where we looked over an old stagecoach hotel that came with lots of land, and talked with the town clerk, who said that the locals were "thinking about" instituting zoning).
- Grafton (where LP activists John and Rosalie Babiarz moved to after fleeing their home in Connecticut when a state income tax was instituted in the 1980's).
- Bristol (which wasn't on our Free Town radar, but which had a large property that was being considered for a freedom-oriented project by FSP member Bruce Hartgers, who asked us to "check it out").
- Ellsworth (where in the last election a total of 39 voted...with four of them voting Libertarian).

In the end, the four of us who spent the entire three days together—Tony Lekas, Bob Hull, Zack Bass, and me—agreed on the choice of the Free Town: It was to be Grafton.

Upon arriving back in Florida we made the announcement to those waiting to hear the results of the "Blue Floridian Tour" (blue because we turned blue in the winter weather...but that's another story). Perhaps predictably, immediately the complaining, moaning, second-guessing, and arguing began. "Why Grafton!?! " was the refrain. "You musta had a sales job done on you by Babiarz!!!" And of course everyone had a favorite Free Town that they were absolutely sure we should have chosen. "We wuz robbed!" some of the disappointed Free Town partisans yelled. It was amazing. It was like a microcosmic replay of the Free State Project vote itself!

Grafton, it must be said, is in the proverbial "middle of nowhere." It has two general stores and two gas stations, one of which is out of business and for sale. And that's about it. There are no

restaurants, no drug stores, no movie theaters, no Wal-Marts, no fast food outlets, no dry cleaners, no doctors, and no dentists. And it's a half hour drive to the nearest Interstate highway. So the "Why Grafton?" question deserves an answer. As it turned out, the decision wasn't hard to make. All four of us quickly and unanimously agreed on our choice.

The town of Grafton lies in the "town" of Grafton (which is like a county in the rest of the country), which contains about 40 square miles. The population (now, as opposed to the information we originally had on the list above) is about 1,100, with a voting list of 767. It's nicely located, about midway up the state, but "south of the notches" so the winters won't be as cold as they would be in the sparsely settled northern areas. It has some beautiful forested hills, and even a couple of "mountains" of about 2,000 feet. It also has plenty of water, with a number of small streams and brooks meandering through the area, along with a couple of lakes known locally as Grafton Pond and Kilton Pond.

Grafton is about a 40 minute drive from the population center of Lebanon on the Free State's western border (and is designed, apparently, to suck all the money out of heavily-taxed and regulated Vermont next door; we heard about the happy hordes of Vermont citizens who come across the Connecticut River border to eagerly spend their money in a no-sales-tax state). The smaller town of Enfield is a shorter distance to the west from Grafton; and the quaint, slightly larger towns of Danbury and Bristol (which sits on the shores of the beautiful Newfound Lake) are to the east. The state capitol, Concord, is about a 45 minute drive to the south.

One of the things we hoped to measure, as best we could, was the existing "political atmosphere" in the various potential Free Towns. In Lempster, for instance, the town clerk told us (apparently approvingly) that the imposition of zoning is being considered. In Keene, near Roxbury, we talked to Jim Maynard. Former LP Chairman Tom Kershaw filled us in about the parts of the state he was familiar with. And in Grafton we were able to talk to John Babiarez, who had run for Governor on the LP ticket in the last election, and in the process became friends with current Republican Governor Craig Benson (who has appointed Babiarez to several statewide advisory positions).

In Grafton we sat with the Babiarezes in the ambulance/EMT/volunteer fire department building and talked for some time, during which we peppered them with questions about their town.

"What's the political atmosphere here?" I asked. People like to be left alone, and they don't like taxes, bureaucracy, big government, or rampant regulations in general, John and Rosalie told us. What about enforcement of victimless crime laws, we wanted to know. Harassing and arresting people who are bothering no one is not high on the list of the town police chief (whom we met, along with his wife, when they came through while we were sitting around talking); in addition, the police chief is an elected position in Grafton, so if power were abused, he could be voted out of office.

What about the town selectmen who politically run the 40 square miles of the "town" of Grafton? Said John and Rosalie, one is somewhat with us, another is not with us at all, and still another is very friendly to our ideas. I asked what they could do with 200 to 400 activist Porcupines moving into the town over the next year or two. "Give me just 25 and we could win some elections," John predicted. How could that be, you ask? It turns out that John has a base of support of about 125 in the town. With 400 typically voting, it takes about 200 to win an election. If 25 Porcupines were politically active residents, they could be expected to positively influence at least two or three potential voters each...in which case John (or presumably another Porcupine) would be over 200 votes...just about enough to win.

What about the Planning Board that exists in Grafton? we asked. Unlike other venues, it appears the planning board in Grafton isn't out of control. In fact there is no requirement for a certificate of occupancy, the "permission slip" that local bureaucrats in other towns often give out (or withhold, if they don't like you) to let you live in your own structure on your own property. In addition, the Planning Board is an elective body, just like the town selectmen, so that an abusive, busybody board could soon be cleansed of aspiring power-trippers.

What about the relatively long drive—about a half hour either to the east or to the west—to get to an Interstate? Undeniably, this is one of the trade-offs. But John and Rosalie told stories of easily and repeatedly driving the 45 minutes back and forth to the state capitol to the south. "You get used to it," they told us.

I also peppered them with questions about how long it took to get to the closest doctor, dentist, dry cleaner, movie theater, restaurant, Wal-Mart, and other signs of civilization. The consensus was anywhere from 20 to 40 minutes, depending on what you need and where you want to go.

Lebanon, 40 minutes to the west, is next to Hanover, the home of Dartmouth University and one of the top medical centers in the world (which is being expanded over the next two years, adding about 3,000 new jobs in the area). Concord, a town of 45,000 to the south, has everything most people could want.

Was there land for sale, we wanted to know, after being disappointed by some of the potential towns that simply had little or nothing available on the market. There's over 40 square miles in the town of Grafton, we were told, and on much of it "there's nothing." As a result, "there's lots of land for sale around here," said John.

I also wanted to know about jobs, even though many Porcupines own their own businesses in the computer or Internet industries. As might be expected, there aren't many jobs in Grafton, especially with the small population of 1,100 spread out over 40 square miles. To get to jobs many will need to commute to Lebanon or Concord. Pretty long commutes, admittedly, especially for someone like me who hates to drive...but in the end, doable for liberty in our lifetime.

It was obvious to all of us that we couldn't have everything we desired in potential Free Town: Low population, no zoning, no planning board, no certificates of occupancy, a liberty-oriented populace, existing resident libertarians, economic and cultural amenities, jobs, land for sale, easy access to an Interstate, close-by population centers, etc. We had to make trade-offs. It is a tribute to Grafton that when all four of us put our heads together, it wasn't even close. The presence of John and Rosalie Babiarz, respected long-time residents who are already activists for individual liberty, had much to do with it. But the general feelings of Grafton residents—unsupportive of bureaucracy, desirous of being left alone, live-and-let-live attitudes, hostile toward zoning, increased taxes, and other schemes—also had much to do with it. When we asked if it might be possible to de-fund the local government school system in favor of free market alternatives, John and Rosalie told us there had already been talk about the possibilities. Similarly, for the past several years a resolution making Grafton a "U.N. Free Zone" has been presented during town elections. Each year it fails, but by fewer votes, and will appear on the ballot this year in March. Last year? It failed by only 5 votes.

Finally, I put it to John and Rosalie Babiarz: "Do you have any hesitation about a bunch of wild libertarians invading your quiet town? Would you have any second thoughts about Grafton being named the Free Town within the Free State Project? Should we choose Grafton as the Free Town?" Rosalie answered first, and immediately: "Absolutely!" When the same question was put to John, he smiled and said, "Sure! Why not?"

And so we're off to the races. Join us in Grafton. The Free Town.

— ### —

NOTE: Prior to leaving New Hampshire we asked John Babiarz whether he knew any real estate agents working in Grafton. He said yes, there's a couple who are home-schooling their children (!) who live in Grafton. The father, David Walthour, is a real estate agent in nearby Lebanon. When I called him at home, I spoke to his wife, who said she had heard of the Free State Porcupines. "It's great!" she said, "I can't wait till you get here!" If you're interested in owning property and/or living in liberty in the Free Town, you can contact David at 603-643-2039, extension 19, or email him at dwalthour@c21energysield.com.

6. The Free State Project-Statement of Intent (2001)

FREE STATE PROJECT
Statement of Intent

I hereby state my solemn intent to move to a state of the United States designated by vote of Free State Project (FSP) participants as specified in the Bylaws of the FSP. Once this move occurs, I will exert the fullest practical effort toward the creation of a society in which the sole role of civil government is the protection of citizens' life, liberty, and property. I have read and understood the Bylaws of the FSP and agree to be bound by them.

Signed: _____

Name (printed): _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

E-mail: _____

Name of spouse, if applicable: _____

Signature of spouse: _____

I sign the above Statement of Intent while reserving the right to refuse to move to the following states (if any): _____

Please sign and mail to:
FREE STATE PROJECT
385 Canner Street, #2
New Haven, CT 06511

7. Free Town Project Website (2004).



Here's information to help investors and potential homeowners to contact Grafton, NH property owners who might like to sell.

Many thanks to Robert Hull for acquiring this information.

For the related Yahoo! discussion group, go to http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Free_Town_Project

[Property Maps of the Town of Grafton](#)

[List of Property Owners in Grafton](#)
(with Map/Lot Numbers corresponding to above Maps)

[Names & Addresses of Property Owners in Grafton](#)
(corresponding to above Name List)

Videos of the Grafton area - optimized for 56K Modems
(under construction)

8. Timeline

2001	Libertarian Manifesto Published. Received very well by the Libertarian Community. Free State Project Launched. Members begin forming online.
2003	N.H. Voted to be the "Free State" imagined in the manifesto. Free Town Project Launched. Two FTP members explore N.H. looking for the right town.

2004	More FTP members explore N.H. looking for the right place to launch the FTP. Decide on Grafton. Move begins.
2005	FTP begins to grow in Grafton. First mention of FTP in deliberative session.
2006 - 2009	Throughout this period in green, warrant articles aimed at diminishing Grafton's government were introduced by the FTP but successfully stopped by locals. Aggressive interactions occurred. The threat of democratic labor alienation was possible but not real, Grafton remained in the steady societal state.
2008	
2009	
2010	Peaceful Assembly Church Established. Tax Exemption Requested.
2011 -2012	Prominent libertarian activist moves to Grafton.
2013	Unsteady societal state begins. Semiotic code switch on feelings toward the FTP. Annual Budget cut of 10% makes it on ballot. Town Meeting attendance grows dramatically. Attempt by FTP to remove moderator from her position.

2014	Peaceful Assembly Church denied tax exemption. Heated Town Meeting. Man removed by the police. Town Meeting attendance grows even more.
2015	Town Meeting attendance reaches peak.
2016	Free State Project (FSP) Launched as 20,000 signatures are reached. FTP begins to fade out. Peaceful Assembly Church wins lawsuit against the Town of Grafton and is granted a tax exemption. It caught fire the same year. The minister also dies in the fire.
2017 - 2021	Move back to the steady societal state. Town meetings become much less confrontational. Attendance declines. Library and historical projects become the dominant topic.

9. Archival Data from the Grafton Town Clerk Office

- Annual Reports 2000 - 2021
 - Deliberative Session Minutes
 - Selectboard(men) reports
 - Annual Tax Rates
 - Vital Statistics
 - Master Plan
 - Planning Board Reports
 - Warrant Article Summaries
 - Voting Results
 - Historical Documents

10. Coding Data

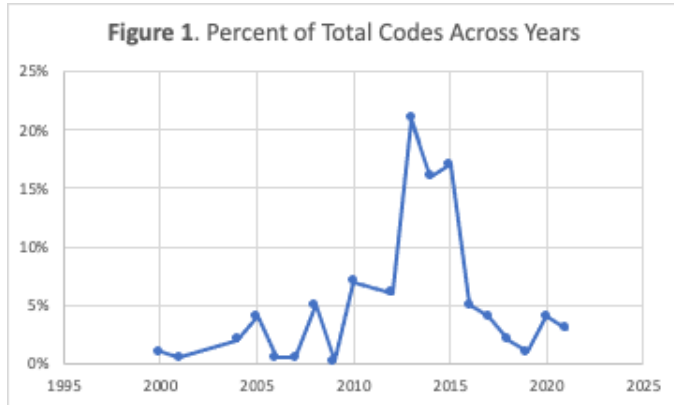
Years (Y)	Pages (P)	Codes (C)	Code Groups (G)	Codes Applied (A)
18	238	98	15	398

Year	Codes Applied	% of Total
2000	5	1%
2001	2	0.50%
2004	9	2%
2005	16	4%
2006	2	0.50%
2007	2	0.50%
2008	20	5%
2009	1	0.20%
2010	28	7%
2012	23	6%
2013	85	21%
2014	63	16%
2015	67	17%
2016	21	5%
2017	15	4%
2018	8	2%
2019	5	1%
2020	16	4%

2021	11	3%
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*Yellow indicates the uptick in codes.

11. Percent of Total Codes Graph

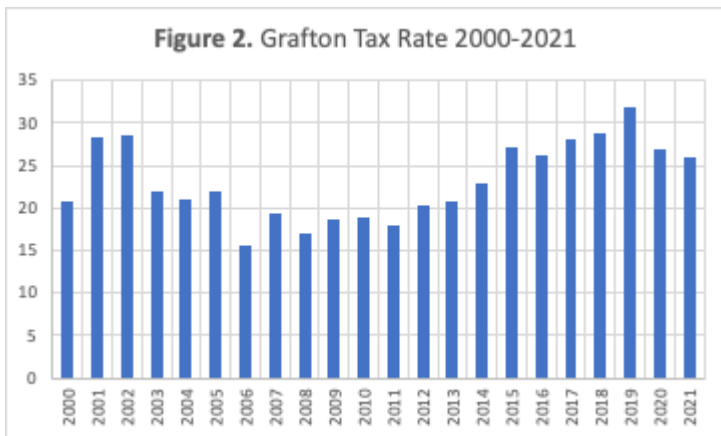


12. Tax Rate for the Town of Grafton (Rates reflect what was passed the previous year).

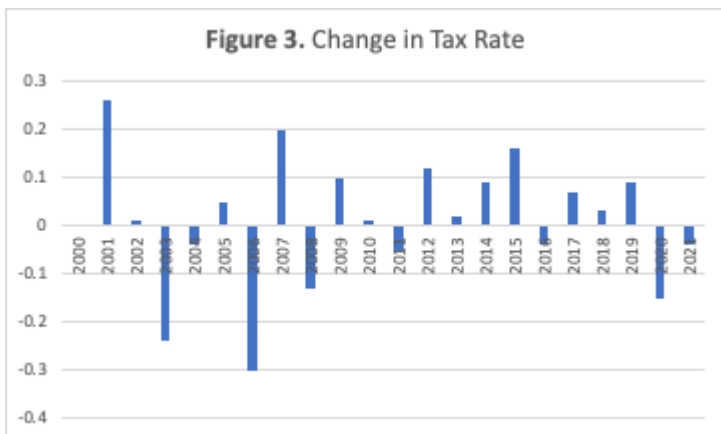
Year	Tax Rate	Change from Previous Year
2000	20.86	n/a
2001	28.24	26%
2002	28.64	1%
2003	21.85	-24%
2004	20.89	-4%
2005	21.95	5%
2006	15.54	-30%
2007	19.42	20%
2008	16.92	-13%
2009	18.7	10%
2010	18.91	1%

2011	17.93	-5%
2012	20.38	12%
2013	20.84	2%
2014	22.79	9%
2015	27.17	16%
2016	26.14	-4%
2017	27.99	7%
2018	28.79	3%
2019	31.77	9%
2020	26.85	-15%
2021	25.88	-4%

13. Tax Rate Graph



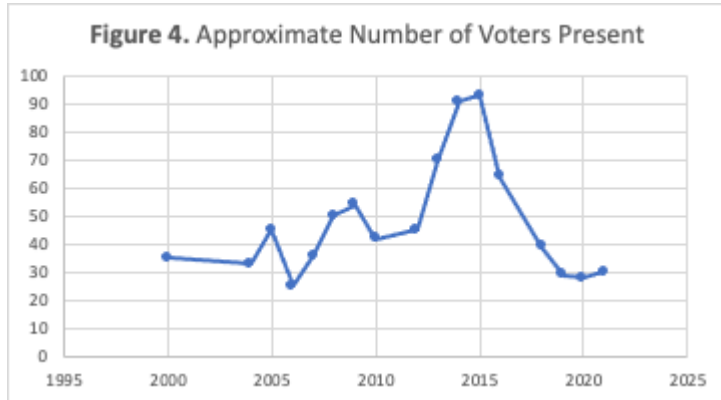
14. Change in Tax Rate Graph



15. Approximate Number of Voters Present at Deliberative Sessions

Year	Voter's present
2000	35
2004	33
2005	45
2006	25
2007	36
2008	50
2009	54
2010	42
2012	45
2013	70
2014	91
2015	93
2016	64
2018	39
2019	29
2020	28
2021	30

16. Graph of Approximate Number of Voters Present at Deliberative Sessions



16. Moderator FTP Member Exchange

Brian: ... the rules of decorum, that seem to me to be a violation of my 1st amendment rights.

Frost: Uhh, he is talking about personal attacks against people, or their motives will not be permitted and will be considered disorderly conduct. Ok, anybody else have a comment on that.

Brian: I am looking for an answer, I am not allowed to personally attack somebody?

Audience member(s): Do it on your own time! (Muffled speaking by crowd).

Brian: All of this is a divisive game.

Frost: Ok. I think, Brian. My interpretation is, if you stand up and say what you feel, but personal attack is when you start name calling, things like that. If you say I disagree with this group or whatever.

Brian: Are we going to take a vote on whether or not what I said is a personal attack? Or [unsure here] is that the way democracy works, or the first amendment works?

Frost: No, no, I don't think so ...

(Grafton Deliberative Session 1 of 4, 2014: 2:54-3:56)

17. Common FTP Warrant Articles

This list showcases some commonly utilized warrant articles. These have been pulled from the Summaries of Warrant Articles 2000 - 2021. All of them were not recommended by the selectmen and/or budget committee and instead added by petition. The articles have been

summarized in some parts for convenience. These articles made it past Deliberative Sessions and were featured on the ballot. None of them passed.

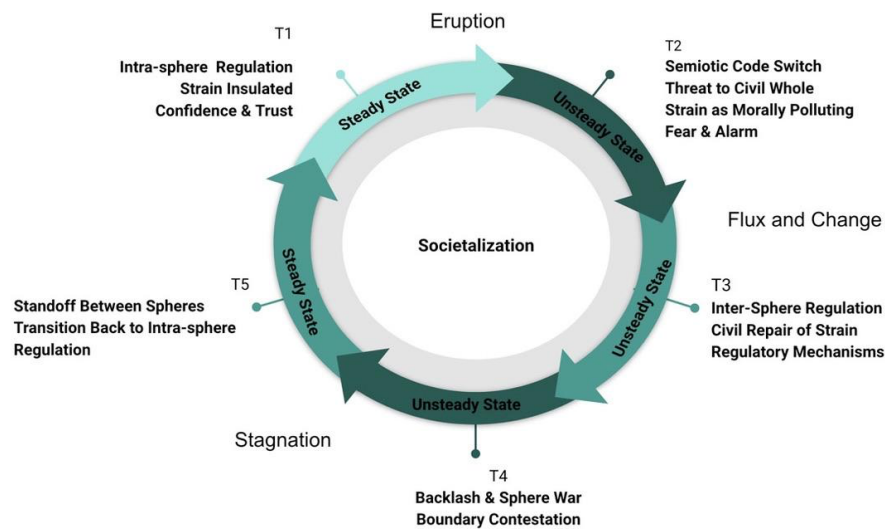
1. Abolish the planning board.
2. Eliminate the two town auditors.
3. Abolish the budget committee.
4. Establish a Grafton United Nations Free Zone Act.
5. Establish Grafton as a Communism Free Zone.
6. Establish Grafton as a Freedom of Conscience Town (allow citizens choice on which taxes to pay).
7. Stop spending money for the “maintenance and relief” of poor people.
8. Remove the Selectmen from their taxing authority.
9. Require the Moderator to follow “Robert's Rules of Order” at the Deliberative Session.
10. Reduce the Town budget by ten percent for three years.
11. Repeal Warrant Article 24 which prohibits open containers on town property.
12. Begin the process of withdrawing from the Mascoma Valley School District.
13. Preclude members of the Select Board (Selectmen) or Budget Committee of their immediate family members from bidding on contracts offered by the Town of Grafton.
14. Preclude members of the Select Board (Selectmen) of their immediate family members from bidding on or purchasing property owned by the Town of Grafton.
15. Preclude members of the Select Board (Selectmen) from placing any opinion of any Warrant Article on the Warrant, except for Warrants that appropriate funds or are otherwise required by RSA:3, VI.
16. Lower the amount of interest charged on delinquent property tax to be on par with the current prime interest rate.
17. Withdraw from multi-town agreement that allows for sharing of prosecutorial legal services.
18. Preclude Town Officials from receiving payments from accounts which they voted to fund.
19. Preclude the town from accepting Federal military equipment.
20. Preclude the town from cooperating with the NSA.
21. Preclude members of the same family from serving on the same town board concurrently.

22. Fund the library on a voluntary basis.
23. Preclude the town from paying personal legal and medical expenses for public officials.
24. Remove public officials who have committed fraud or abuse of office at the local level.
25. See if the town will have town meeting minutes transcribed by a reputable outside source.
(This is to avoid confusion when minutes are needed for court.)
26. Prohibit the town from evicting residents from their homes after the town has deeded the property to itself as a result of unpaid taxes.
27. Grafton's right to a sustainable energy future and community self-government Ordinance.

18. Common Anti-FTP Warrant Articles

1. Allocate money for the restoration of town records.
2. Declare the town of Grafton as against Citizens.
3. The Grafton Mickey Mouse Free Zone Act

19. Societalization Process (Graphic made by me)



(Based on Alexander, 2018; 2019)

20. On FTP YouTube Videos

Many YouTube videos exist documenting deliberative sessions and selectmen meetings. As one might expect, the videos were produced by libertarians. The Free Towners proposed having professional audio recordings produced along with transcriptions covering the entirety of deliberative sessions. Another citizen, who was clearly against the Free Towners, given previous remarks, suggested that town meetings could be filmed. This appears to have sparked the

beginning of the Free Towner's filming of public meetings as this all transpired in 2014, the same year that film of meetings began appearing on YouTube.

The videos focused heavily on the documentation of the present happenings in Grafton via video recordings. The Free Towners also set up a large repository of town data. They also conducted a survey project in Grafton, started several websites, initiated a Church (Peaceful Assembly), and planned regular events.

The recordings also served to put more pressure on the locals, particularly those in governmental positions. When the recordings were initially discussed in a deliberative session, court documentation was one of the main points brought forth. The Free Towners were using the possibility of recordings to threaten legal cases against Grafton. Moreover, by recording events, one is putting a given set of actors on display and forcing them into a more performative setting encouraging careful word choice.

21. Code Groups and their codes.

ATLAS.ti Report

Deliberative Session Minutes

Code groups(selection)

Report created by Daniel Belback on Nov 14, 2022

Town Meeting as a game

Members:

- attacking moderator
- attacking selectmen
- commentary
- deliberative session purpose
- deliberative session strategy
- fairness
- insider preference
- joke articles in response to libs
- making fun of anti-UN amendment
- moderate proposal after lib extreme
- paid

political ad ○ plan ○ procedure ○ questioning of character ○ rules ○ selectmen deflection
○ time ○ video record meetings ○ witch hunt

Time

Members:

○ time

Respect

Members:

○ hard work ○ respect institutions

Representations of Grafton

Members:

○ library ○ preserving history ○ Symbolic gesture ○ transcription by outsider ○ video
record meetings

Out there Warrant Articles

Members:

○ communism free zone ○ making fun of anti-UN amendment ○ peaceful assembly church
○ UN free zone

Moderator Codes

Members:

- attacking moderator
 - moderator
 - overrule
 - rules
-

Legality

Members:

- illegal
 - implying corruption
-

Insider

Members:

- insider knowledge
 - insider preference
 - lack of access
 - small town opposed to change
-

Higher Authority

Members:

- beliefs about the constitution
 - citing higher authority
-

Graftonites and FTP

Members:

- against free towners
 - budget increase
 - defending selectmen
 - hard work
 - insider preference
 - joke articles in response to libs
 - making fun of anti-UN amendment
 - opposition to lib point of order
 - poor taste
 - respect institutions
 - ridiculous
 - small town opposed to change
-

Getting Personal

Members:

- attacking selectmen
 - hard work
 - hurt feelings
 - poor taste
 - questioning of character
 - respect institutions
 - ridiculous
 - witch hunt
-

FTP and Public Money

Members:

- against taxation
 - budget decrease
 - Charity
 - expensive
 - funding specifics
 - investment out of grafton
 - privatize government
 - school
 - slashing public assistance
 - voluntarism
-

FTP and Gov. Officials

Members:

- accountability
 - anti-police
 - attacking moderator
 - attacking selectmen
 - implying corruption
 - transparency
-

FTP and Gov. Control

Members:

- accountability
 - against zoning
 - allow open containers on town property
 - anti-police
 - anti-state/fed power
 - conceptions of government
 - eviction
 - Freedom
 - implying corruption
 - moderator
 - privatize government
 - respect institutions
 - slashing public assistance
 - zoning law
-

Expanding Government

Members:

- budget increase
 - conceptions of government
 - effects of budget slashes
 - library
 - pro taxation
 - public assistance
-

Community

Members:

- civility
 - community
 - for zoning - community
 - library
 - preserving history
 - pro taxation
 - public assistance
-

Beliefs

Members:

- beliefs about the constitution
- citing higher authority
- conceptions of government
- democratic or not?
- Freedom
- individualism
- rights

22. Codes

ATLAS.ti Report

Deliberative Session Minutes

Codes

- accountability
- against free towners
- against planning board
- against taxation
- against zoning
- allow open containers on town property
- anti-government
- anti-police

- anti-state/fed power
- article from 1977
- attacking moderator
- attacking selectmen
- beliefs about the constitution
- big discussion
- budget decrease
- budget increase
- calm feeling
- Charity
- citing higher authority
- civility
- colloquialism
- commentary
- communism free zone
- community
- conceptions of government
- conservation
- defending selectmen
- deliberative session definition
- deliberative session purpose
- deliberative session strategy
- democratic or not?
- digitization
- effects of budget slashes
- eviction
- expensive
- fairness
- family
- for zoning - community
- Freedom

- funding specifics
- hard work
- hurt feelings
- illegal
- implying corruption
- individualism
- insider knowledge
- insider preference
- investment out of grafton
- joke articles in response to libs
- lack of access
- legalize marijuana
- Lib point of order
- libertarian
- library
- longevity
- making fun of anti-UN amendment
- moderate proposal after lib extreme
- moderator
- opposition to lib point of order
- overrule
- paid political ad
- peaceful assembly church
- plan
- planning board pro
- pleasantries
- poor taste
- power
- preserving history
- privatize government
- pro discourse

- pro taxation
- procedure
- property
- public assistance
- questioning of character
- raise
- respect institutions
- ridiculous
- rights
- rules
- school
- selectmen deflection
- sell property
- slashing public assistance
- small town opposed to change
- support
- Symbolic gesture
- tax credit
- time
- transcription by outsider
- transparency
- UN free zone
- video record meetings
- vigilante
- voluntarism
- vote registration
- witch hunt
- zoning law

23. Named Entity Recognition (via ATLAS.ti).

- 441 paragraphs containing entity categories: (person) “Steve Darrow” & “Steve”

- 134 paragraphs containing entity categories: (person) “Jermy Olson” & “Jeremy”
 - Notably, these only occurred between 2013 and 2014.
- 167 paragraphs containing entity categories: (person) “Jennie Joyce[‘s]” & “Jennie”

*Context was checked to ensure that first name occurrences were indeed the same actors.

24. Grafton

Grafton is a small hilly town located in rural New Hampshire. It has some minor contemporary fame due to the once popular tourist attraction, Ruggles Mine. In the 1800s Grafton had over one thousand people, however, the population declined to a low point of 370 in 1970. Since then it has grown to 1,385 at the 2020 census. Between 2000 and 2020 Grafton’s population grew by 247 people. It has an area of 42.4 square miles and a population density of 32.1 people per square mile. At the 2000 census it was 96.7% white and had a median household income of 38,654\$. In 2013 just over 16% of the population was under the poverty line. It has been known throughout its history to have a libertarian lean, seceding shortly after the Revolutionary War from the newly established U.S. to still independent Vermont due its refusal to pay taxes (Hongholz-Hetling, 2021). It has also played host to some other minor utopian projects throughout its history, most famously as a summer getaway for the Unification Church of Sun Myung Moon (Hongholz-Hetling, 2021). It practices participatory New England style Town Meeting democracy and is governed by a three-person selectboard.²⁴ The town is highly reliant on voluntary labor for staffing its fire department and broader emergency services. It also relies on volunteers for helping to staff public spaces like its library.

25. What is a Deliberative Session or Town Meeting?

A deliberative session can be thought of as a highly localized and participatory form of democracy practiced in New England. It is a formal gathering in which citizens discuss, amend, accept, or deny warrant articles that are eventually voted on during elections. It is a voluntary session and so relatively active citizens often participate. As it is voluntary, attendance levels fluctuate. Only registered voters can actively participate. Unregistered voters can attend.

²⁴ All statistics are from the Grafton Wikipedia page, the vital statistics section of Grafton’s annual reports, and census.gov.

Warrant articles constitute proposed changes to the formal governance of the town. Warrant articles are typically introduced by elected officials in the town, such as selectboard and budget committee members. However, they can also be proposed by individual voters via a signature process which reads on the warrant as “via petition”. Warrant articles are typically relatively technical and revolve around divvying up tax revenue to fund the needs of various town departments. Oftentimes, the question of legality arises, as warrant articles must be compliant with overarching state and federal laws. This creates situations of disagreement as folks will often have differing opinions on what the law actually is.

The moderator in a deliberative session plays a highly important role as they oversee handling disputes and promoting order. The moderator is also typically in charge of enforcing deliberative session rules around points of order, voting, seating, time, and anything procedural or functional.

Selectboard and budget committee members often play a vital role in deliberative sessions. They typically answer questions about the intent and content of proposed articles as they often write most of them. Due to this acquaintance with drafting warrant articles, governance members present are often also turned to for their expertise concerning technical and legal problems with warrant articles. Though not always lawyers, they typically reiterate what they have been told by legal counsel.

Public servants such as the fire and police chiefs, road agent, town clerk, librarian and supervisor of the checklist also play important roles in the functioning of deliberative sessions. In small towns such as Grafton, each public servant often advocates for their department and proposes warrant articles in conjunction with the selectboard and budget committee. Oftentimes, they are the entirety of their department. They will often field questions about funding, projects, and issues as they attempt to advocate for the needs of their specific departments.

On warrant articles in Grafton, one can sometimes find the phrase recommended or not by the selectboard and recommended or not by the budget committee. This serves to indicate the level of support for an article by the two most powerful governing bodies. Other committees can also voice their support for various warrant articles, though they typically do not have a spot directly below the warrant article and thus on the ballot, which diminishes their relative power to influence voters. They can still exercise their power in deliberative sessions by making points for or against articles. Articles not introduced by town officials state “by petition” at the end.

Time also plays an important role in a deliberative session. There is typically not a uniform number of people present throughout the entirety of a session. The number of voters present vary, meaning that the number of voters constituting a majority can change. Typically, one can expect the number of voters present to diminish as a session progresses. This is particularly true for exceedingly long sessions. The ways in which the meeting proceeds, the sheer volume of articles, points of order, questions and the number of proposed amendments can serve to slow down the pace of the meeting drastically. One can thus gamify a session through various formal and informal strategies or tactics.