

**POLITICAL POWER AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT:  
THE SOCIAL LOGIC OF PAST POLITICS**

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The discovery of new types of data (individual) and the revival of long established paradigms (contextual) for the study of past political life present new opportunities to further an understanding of what politics meant to the American citizenry of the nineteenth century. These advances have important implications for the future of American political history which has shifted from a singular focus on those in the political world – who the voters were and whom they voted for -- to a fascination with the political influence of those precluded from that world. A focus on contextual factors in localized studies may present opportunities to reconcile these two conflicting tendencies. The four case studies presented in this paper identify quite different patterns of contextual influences on nineteenth century political engagement; three relate to partisanship with influences categorized here as communal suasion, individualized instrumentalism, and hierarchically induced deference. The final case study explores the importance of context – in this case religious membership -- on rates of political participation.

**Two Approaches to the Basis of Political Life**

This interest in contextual effects is particularly evident among our colleagues in political science, where it has emerged in the last several years as a significant trend and a challenge to the dominance of the field by survey-based research strategies emphasizing

non-contextual explanations. This paper argues that political historians may find common ground with the new emphasis on contextual effects in political science and in so doing discover opportunities to help refine our understanding of the nineteenth century American electorate, so often employed as the base from which the trajectory to the modern is calculated.

The new work in political science seeks to re-invigorate and advance an older tradition that we might term political sociology. This approach developed in the 1940s and early 1950s based on findings from community demonstrating the significance of social networks and contextual factors in the shaping of political views and voting decisions. The two studies that loom largest in the restoration project are two classics from this era: Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson and Hazel Gaudet's study of Erie County, Pennsylvania in the presidential election of 1940 and Berelson, Lazarsfeld and William McPhee's study of Elmira, New York in the 1948 presidential election.<sup>1</sup> Both studies emphasized the shaping force of contextual factors on political views and the influence of family and networks on a voter's decision. The studies arose from the first mass panel surveys and probed work networks, charted family influences, and asked about neighbors. Yet within a few years this sociologically based work, with its emphasis on community study and the influence of context on electoral decision, was displaced by a new model, arising more from psychology and focused on the notion of a decontextualized partisan identification.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet, *The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944); Bernard Berelson, Paul Lazarsfeld, and William McPhee, *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954).

It is striking to remember how closely aligned the practitioners of these two tendencies once were. As Nancy Burns has recently reminded us, the University of Michigan “model” of contemporary voting behavior, with its emphasis on the decontextualized notion of “partisan identification,” had its very beginning in the contextually rich political sociology approach to electoral analysis, and in particular the Erie County project.<sup>2</sup>

In 1948, just four years after the publication of *The People’s Choice*, Angus Campbell, with his Stanford PhD in psychology and critical experience in teaching social psychology at Northwestern, teamed up with Robert Kahn and the new Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan to adapt the Erie County research technique for a pilot for a study of the voters across the US, rather than just those in a single community. Almost as an after-thought, the Michigan researchers decided to include in a small (577 respondents) pre-election survey two questions on voter intention, linked to attitudes, a prescient concept as it turned out. Of course it was the inaccurate national surveys, largely informed by sociological factors, which provided the triumphant Harry Truman with his most famous political picture: the election-day banner headline in the *Chicago Tribune* proclaiming a victory for Dewey. But the pre-election results using the Michigan techniques, based around a probability sample pioneered by Campbell and attitudinal information, predicted a near draw.<sup>3</sup> The predictive failure of the existing polls, combined

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<sup>2</sup> Nancy Burns, “The Michigan, then Nation, then American National Election Studies,” [www.isr.umich.edu/cps/anes\\_history](http://www.isr.umich.edu/cps/anes_history). pdf : 2-3.

<sup>3</sup> The Michigan researchers compared their predictions against the results as they came in on election night and found their prediction of a very tight race confirmed.

with the sense that the innovative new techniques pioneered by the Michigan researchers would be more accurate, ushered in a new paradigm for electoral analysis.

### **The Triumph of the Social Psychology Approach**

Though only slowly achieved, the displacement of the contextual model by a psychological approach was in retrospect almost inevitable, given the attraction of a national poll. The nationally funded Survey Research Center chose the University of Michigan for its location in recognition of its strong social psychology program: both Campbell and Warren Miller, then a graduate student hired to help design a national survey of the voters in the 1952 and 1956 president elections, were students of psychology.

The 1952 panel questionnaires -- the first national study of the US electorate— still reflected both the sociological and the theoretical – those “embedded contending theoretical frameworks,” as Nancy Burns puts it. The very first footnote in *The American Voter*, the volume reporting on the 1952 and 1956 surveys which solidified the reputation and dominance of the psychological approach, cites Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and William McPhee’s sociologically informed study of political engagement in Elmira, New York. And, as Alan Zuckerman has noted, the authors of *The American Voter* acknowledged that,

Not only does the individual absorb from his primary groups the attitudes that guide his behavior; he often behaves politically as a self-conscious member of those groups, and his perception of their preferences can be of great importance for his own voting act. Our interviews suggest that the dynamics of these face-to-

face associations are capable of generating forces that may negate the force of the individual's own evaluations of the elements of politics.<sup>4</sup>

But this rather difficult balancing of the “intra-psychic mechanism,” the central psychological concept eventually redefined as party identification, and “extra-psychic process” in the form of context and “social communication in a congenial primary group,” did not long persist.

While, as Zuckerman notes, the “behavior revolution in political science began with the principles of the social logic of politics,” [e]very revolution draws on, negates, and transforms what preceded it.”<sup>5</sup> It did not take long for contextual questions to disappear from the methodology of a now triumphant psychologically informed approach to electoral analysis.

The reasons for this were not complicated. Miller brought to the project two critical interests: his conviction that psychological variables were important in the study of politics and his wish for a national rather than a local study. Arising from his interest in psychology, he designed an approach that “drew its conceptual tools and measurement strategy from psychology that spoke to but departed from what he saw as the largely demographic analyses that had come before.” Secondly in considering whether the approach should be national or local, Miller argued that, “the study would have a larger

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<sup>4</sup> Angus Campbell, Philip Converse, Warren Miller, Donald Stokes, *The American Voter* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1960): 76. Quoted in Alan S. Zuckerman, “Returning to the Social Logic of Political Behavior,” in Zuckerman (ed.), *The Social Logic of Politics: Personal Networks as Context for Political Behavior* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005): 3-4.

<sup>5</sup> Zuckerman, “Returning to the Social Logic of Political Behavior,” 5.

constituency if it were national.”<sup>6</sup> These two interests greatly reduced the likelihood of contextual matters continuing to figure predominately in the ensuing analysis.<sup>7</sup>

The wish for a national sample, suspicion amongst the social psychologists as to the reliability of attributions of influence, statistical measures that required independent respondents and the elimination of co-variance all played a part in the demise of the contextual based study.<sup>8</sup> Contextual questions and contextual analysis soon all but disappeared from a newly assertive social psychological approach: “Isolated respondents aggregated into nationally representative sample surveys [came to] provide the locus of study....[and] [t]he explanatory principles of the social logic of politics recede[d] into the analytic distance.”<sup>9</sup>

### **The Return of the Contextual Approach**

In recent years a group of political scientists led by Alan Zuckerman, Ron Johnston, Robert Huckfeldt, and John Sprague have led the revival of interest in what they increasingly refer to as “the social logic of politics.” Sustaining this development are new data, new statistical techniques, and dissatisfaction with the decontextualized Michigan model. New household data now available in Britain and Germany have aided some work and imaginative uses of Michigan data have sustained others. Secondly, new

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<sup>6</sup> Burns, “The Michigan, then Nation, then American National Election Studies” 3.

<sup>7</sup> Also of interest was the decision to publish *The American Voter* with Wiley, a commercial press, whereas the community studies had been published by academic presses.

<sup>8</sup> See Zuckerman, “Returning to the Social Logic of Political Behavior,” 11-13. For V. O. Key’s rejection of the sociological approach and his evocative opening phrase that it “threatened to take the politics out of the study of electoral behavior” see V. O. Key and Frank Munger, “Social Determinism and Electoral Decision: The Case of Indiana,” in Eugene Burdick and Arthur Broadbeck (eds.), *American Voting Behavior* (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1959): 281-99, quotation 281.

<sup>9</sup> Zuckerman, “Returning to the Social Logic of Political Behavior,” 16.

statistical techniques that can relate personal and broader phenomena and can deal with mutual effects have removed the dilemma that confronted the Michigan researchers a half century ago when the choice seemed to be, as Zuckerman put it, “between Elmira and America.” Finally, the older theories sustaining contextual effects have remained attractive, made more so by a newly enhanced capacity to reveal features of political life that would not otherwise be apparent.

Political historians should welcome this development, perhaps finding within it a way of rejuvenating their own field. While the new practitioners of the “social logic of politics” may wish to reach for national findings, political historians have the opportunity to use community studies to intersect with the localized base of that research. The attractiveness of providing an historical framework for contemporary research findings may encourage political historians and political scientists to explore opportunities for fruitful interaction.

Certainly they will find clear resonances between the thoughts of Alexis DeTocqueville as he observed American political life in the nineteenth century and the findings of the classic works from the contextual school. DeTocqueville, “the first social scientist,” observed long ago that there were political consequences associated with his appreciation of the deep engagement of Americans within their local communities:

Each part of the land [has] its own political life so that there should be an infinite number of occasions for the citizens to act together and so that every day they should feel that they depend on one another....and they are forced, in a manner to know and adapt themselves to one another.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> A. DeTocqueville, *Democracy in America*, J.P. Mayer and M. Lerner (eds.); G. Lawrence (trans), (New York,; Harper and Row, 1966): 648.

This is not so far from the famous statement in the *People's Choice* published 109 years later that because of voters' "...common group membership, they will share similar attitudes and will exhibit similar selection tendencies."<sup>11</sup>

Consider too DeTocqueville's wonderful observations on the way in which the suasive power of local community that accompanied this social embeddedness was more than a match for the threat of the American tendency toward heedless individualism:

[w]henver conditions are equal, public opinion brings immense weight to bear on every individual...[t]here is no need for the majority to compel him; it convinces him. Therefore, however powers within a democracy are organized and weighted, it will always be very difficult for a man to believe what the mass rejects and to profess what it condemns. This circumstance is wonderfully favorable to the stability of beliefs.<sup>12</sup>

This too approximates a conclusion advanced by Bereleson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee that,

True, the individual casts his own personal ballot. But...that is perhaps the most individualized action he takes in an election. His vote is formed in the midst of his fellows in a sort of group decision – if indeed, it may be called a decision at all.<sup>13</sup>

And of course it was for all of these reasons that DeTocqueville, when addressing the British House of Commons Select Committee on Bribery at Elections in 1835, was so bemused by the British enquiry and testified that there was so little danger in a man's making his vote known that it was of no particular significance whether the act was identifiable or not.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, *The People's Choice*: xxxii.

<sup>12</sup> DeTocqueville, 834.

<sup>13</sup> Bereleson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee, *Voting*: 320-1.

<sup>14</sup> See Paul F. Bourke and Donald A. DeBats, "Identifiable Voting in Nineteenth Century America: Toward a Comparison of Britain and the United States Before the Secret Ballot," *Perspectives in American History*, 2(1977-1978): 259-88; Paul F. Bourke and Donald A. DeBats, "Charles Sumner, The London

DeTocqueville understood two things. First he knew, as many American political historians have forgotten, that all voting in nineteenth century America was “knowable” – because either votes were delivered orally or *viva voce* (as in Britain) and recorded in poll books, or because voters made their choices via a party supplied ticket that was brightly colored and patterned to ensure a minimal degree of security and a high degree of public visibility. Second, DeTocqueville understood that the social logic of politics had a special applicability and centrality in the political culture of nineteenth century America.

### **Poll Books and Other Historical Sources of Individual Level Political Information**

The new data resources which are spurring the return of political science to the social logic of politics are survey data, which include individual political information. While historians of the nineteenth century can hardly undertake surveys, there is a surprising amount of individual level political information available from the nineteenth century and it is very largely unused. Included here are individual petition files (of the type which Margo Anderson has recently unearthed in the National Archives), the famous Indiana *People's Guides* used most recently by Samuel DeCamio, voter registration lists used recently by Daniel Bogen, and of course the American poll books which I have long developed.<sup>15</sup>

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Ballot Society and the Senate Debate of March, 1867,” *Perspectives in American History*, n.s. 1 (1984): 343-57.

<sup>15</sup> See the poll book work described in Bourke and DeBats, 1977; Paul F. Bourke and Donald A. DeBats, *Washington County: Politics and Community in Antebellum America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Donald A. DeBats, “German and Irish Political Engagement: The Politics of Cultural Diversity in an Industrial Age,” in Wolfgang J. Helbich and Walter D. Kamphoefner (eds.), *German-American Immigration and Ethnicity in Comparative Perspective* (Madison: Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies, University of Wisconsin Press, 2004): 171-220; Donald A. DeBats, “Using GIS and Individual Level Data for Whole Communities: A Path Toward the Reconciliation of Political and Social History,” *Social Science Computing Review*, 27 (August, 2009): 313-30.

Oral voting systems were used in Scandinavia, England, Canada, Australia and some American states. Virginia until Reconstruction, Oregon until 1872, and Kentucky through much of the nineteenth century, mandated this British (and European) mode of voting, requiring that voters call out their political preferences and that election officials record those individual political preferences in poll books. The Canadian provinces voted this way too until, after the 1874 elections, they adopted the British reform and moved directly to the state-printed Australian secret ballot. It is perhaps not surprising then that hidden in archives, court-house attics and basements, are a great many nineteenth century poll books, the official documents of *viva voce* elections, which preserve the name of each voter, the order in which the voters appeared, and the choice of each for every office to be filled, from president to constable.

Of course a great many poll books have been lost, destroyed, or wantonly disposed of. Where they survive, however, these records constitute a unique trove of individual level political information from nineteenth century America and an ideal opportunity for historians to explore the social logic of past politics and, from that, to establish a connection to recent developments in contemporary political science.

The discussion that follows uses surviving poll books to present three examples of contextual effects in nineteenth century political choices in North America, each illustrating a different type of political influence. But of course contextual effects are also evident in participation and the final case study illustrates that theme.

For each case, complete individual-level socio-political data sets have been constructed for whole communities, linking all social, economic, and cultural information surviving from nineteenth century social inventories for all residents and these in turn linked to individual level political information preserved in the poll books. Finally these nineteenth century households and families have been spatially located within their towns, villages and counties, using land records, tax records, city directories, and plat maps, returning approximately 80 percent of these nineteenth century individuals to their nineteenth century homes. All information has been linked to these individual places of residence using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) techniques and the two cities and two counties considered in this paper geo-referenced.<sup>16</sup>

Table 1 below sets out the individual level data social and political data included in each of the four case studies considered in this paper, the total populations of the four places, and the relative success in terms of linking each household to a precise place of residence. In all, the paper reports on the social and political circumstances of 36,637 individuals, of whom 30,746 (83.9 percent) have been spatially located.

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<sup>16</sup> For a detailed description of the processes and techniques used in urban case studies, which are applicable to the rural case studies, see Donald A. DeBats, "A Tale of Two Cities: The Utility of Tax Records in Mapping and Understanding the Nineteenth Century American City," *Historical Methods*, 41 (Winter, 2008): 17-38.

**Table 1: The Four Case Studies**

	Individual Social Information	Individual Political Information	Percent Individuals Spatially Located	Individuals in Data Set
Washington County, Oregon	1860 census, Land records, Annual tax records	Federal and state elections, 1855-72; referenda	70.7%	3,328
Newport, Kentucky	1870 census, Plat maps, Annual tax records, Religious membership	Local elections, 1865-1892; referenda	85.5%	14,748
Oxford County, Ontario	1871 census,	Federal and provincial elections, 1865-1874	100%	6,268
Alexandria, Virginia	1860 census, Annual tax records, Religious membership	Federal and state elections, 1859-1860; referenda	77.4%	12,293

The four case studies represent opportunities to explore political engagement at a new level of detail and in very different environments. The Washington County study takes us to the Oregon frontier in the late 1850s and an almost Turnerian environment; Newport, Kentucky presents an urban industrial setting defined by immigrant European labor on the cusp of the great Depression of the 1870s; Oxford County, Ontario takes us north of the US border in that same era and to a context defined by British deferential culture; the work on Alexandria, Virginia, a southern commercial city resting on slave labor, is set in the late 1850s as the slavery crisis began to etch more deeply into the ties that bound the nation together.

In a broad sense, these four projects – two set in rural environments rural and two based on small cities --can be seen as a return to an earlier political science associated with Erie County, Pennsylvania and the small city of Elmira, New York. In developing historical case studies of contextual effects, these projects may also help extend and enrich the case being made by contemporary advocates of the need to return to “the social logic of politics.” Alexandria and Newport present an opportunity to explore contextual effects in contrasting urban settings, just as Washington County and Oxford County present very different contextual effects in contrasting rural settings. Together the four case studies are reminders, from a time close to DeTocqueville’s original observations, that “democracy in America” needs to be understood in terms of how context has always shaped the meaning of the American democratic experiment.

### **Communal Suasion: Founding Effects on the Oregon Frontier**

The run of poll books that survive for Washington County are the most complete for the Oregon Territory and the new state which was being created; they provide an ideal opportunity to examine the contextual influences in the political life that developed on the American frontier.<sup>17</sup> Washington County was settled by Overland pioneers who originated in two divergent cultural hearths being brought into increasing conflict: settlers from New York, New England, and the Old Northwest on the one hand and others from the South and Border states on the other. The northerners represented a tie to the Congregational missionaries who came west to save the souls of the Native Americans and subsequently became alarmed by the thought of slavery (and African-Americans) being permitted in this frontier utopia; the southerners personified a tie to the even earlier

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<sup>17</sup> Bourke and DeBats, *Washington County*.

arrival in the area of hunter-trapper “Mountain Men” who were perhaps even more resistant to salvation than the Native Americans and found little morally abhorrent about the slavery they recalled and increasingly came to defend.

Washington County, stretching west from just outside Portland to the crest of the Cascades, had a limited amount of excellent agricultural land of which the Donation Land Claim Law provided 160 acres free to each man and his spouse who arrived and settled between 1850 and 1855. Wagon trains westward to Oregon along the Overland Trail were organized in locales and families and groups often made the trip together; having arrived, they also tended to settle together and to establish neighborhoods and communities, often times in close proximity to their cultural opposites.

Forest Grove was a small frontier town of perhaps 250 settlers which in 1860 represented the very core of the New England Protestant missionary movement that had once defined non-aboriginal settlement on the Oregon frontier. Indeed a great many of the missionaries, conceding finally their collective failure “to rescue a single heathen,” had settled in Forest Grove and created within it an almost exact replica of a New England town and a college, later to be known as Pacific University. The adult residents in the area of Forest Grove were drawn mainly from that northern cultural hearth (45 percent Northeast, 22 percent Old Northwest; 33 percent South and Borders States) and, as Table 2 indicates, voted overwhelmingly for the American and then Republican parties. The people living in Forest Grove were in pursuit of functions associated with town life, many associated with churches and education.

Hillsboro, just a few miles away, was different in function and tone. It was the county seat, containing the courthouse and jail, and was a surprisingly close approximation on the far distant Oregon frontier of a southern courthouse town. Most of its residents owned rural property as well; while a more consolidated settlement than Forest Grove in terms of layout, Hillsboro was more a place occasionally visited than a settled place. The adult residents of Hillsboro and the surrounding area were drawn from the Southern and Border States (51 percent South and Border State, 23 percent from the Northeast, 26 percent from Old Northwest) and voted overwhelmingly for the Democratic Party.

The political hinterland of the dispersed community of Hillsboro reached south and west of Forest Grove, encompassing another small ruralized village known locally as Pasonsville after the interrelated families that defined its core. The founding families of this culturally diverse area came in equal parts from the three regions but reflected the political coloration of its Democratically inclined founders.<sup>18</sup>

These cultural differences and values reflected in these three settlements were not benign. Disputation over matters of religion, education, partisanship, and most critically slavery were intense. Even though small populations, these culturally defined tectonic plates ground against one another generating pressures that produced sudden violent spasms. On October 11, 1856 James H. McMillan, the head of one of the families most associated

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<sup>18</sup> By 1860, 69 percent of adults in the Pasonsville area were born in the Northeast (38 percent) or the Old North West (31 percent) as against 45 percent and 22 percent respectively for Forest Grove. Yet the votes of the two areas were diametrically opposed: Pasonsville voting 94 percent Democratic and Forest Grove 81 percent Republican.

with the Forest Grove, shot and killed Andrew J. Masters, his neighbor. Masters and McMillan defined the point of intersection of the Forest Grove and Hillsboro areas: Masters lived west of Hillsboro and McMillan east of Forest Grove with their properties nearly abutting. Masters was a native of Kentucky and deeply associated with Democratic politics in the area to the east and south of Forest Grove. The agitating issue that led to the killing was the charge that Masters had effectively brought slavery to the frontier: treating a young Indian boy, Baptise, as his slave and providing an intense local manifestation of the increasingly divisive national debate.<sup>19</sup> McMillan and Masters were neighbors, but they were neighbors across a cultural and political divide that had its own clear regional manifestations.

In defining the spatial differentiations within Washington County, we divided the population into a set of “natural communities,” ignoring formal divisions such as townships and precincts in favor of carefully researched patterns of kinship, connections, and interaction. In the end we had networks of association, involving every attribute *except* politics, which was our dependent variable. In this way we made contact with the Columbia studies of network, groups and influence and of course the two classic studies of the political communities of Erie County, Pennsylvania and Elmira, New York.<sup>20</sup>

Using this approach in historical settings provides an opportunity to explore the behavior of similar persons in different contexts, identifying influences, but acknowledging always the great variety of individual circumstances that can shape outcomes. The three “natural

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<sup>19</sup> See Bourke and DeBats, *Washington County*: 19-35.

<sup>20</sup> See Bourke and DeBats, *Washington County*: 251-68, 274-95.

communities” surrounding the McMillan-Masters killing (Figure 1) yielded quite different political outcomes in the three Congressional contests of 1855, 1857, 1859 and the 1860 Presidential election, Forest Grove resolutely supporting American and Republican Party choices while Hillsboro and especially Parsonsville were very much inclined in the opposite direction, as Table 2 shows. These allegiances were firm, varying hardly at all from election to election. Transported cultural hearths were important in each setting in establishing the initial political tone which, once established, influenced individuals from other heartlands who entered there and were inclined, as DeTocqueville would have expected, to reflect that collective choice.

**Table 2: Washington County, Oregon: Partisan Preference by Natural Community, 1855-1860**

	Percent American/Republican	Percent Democrat	N
Forest Grove	80.9	19.1	157
Hillsboro	34.0	66.0	162
Parsonsville	5.6	94.4	71

So for example, in Forest Grove, Benjamin and William Catchings, Overlanders from Kentucky, cast straight American and then Republican Party votes as did Thomas Naylor and three generations of the William Jolly family (William Senior, William Junior, and his son Joseph), all emigrants from Virginia. In Parsonsville, Andrew Harper born in Maine and married to Eliza who was born in Connecticut, voted for Democratic Congressional candidates in 1855, 1857, and 1859 and William Breckenridge for President in the 1860 election. Overall, Virginia and Kentucky born men voted 68 percent Democrat in Hillsboro and Parsonsville and 100 percent non-Democratic in

Forest Grove; the small group of Maine born voters, split exactly 50/50 across the County, but voted 100 percent Republican in Forest Grove and 100 percent Democratic in Parsonsville.

On frontier Oregon, the neighborhood effects seem to have been in evidence. V.O. Key and others once denounced the contextual approach that lead to findings of this sort, saying that they “threatened to take politics out of the study of electoral behavior.”<sup>21</sup> But a closer examination of an environment like Washington County reminds us of the complex and intense politics which operated at a neighborhood level and led individuals entering that community to absorb the politics of their environment.

### **Individualized Instrumentalism: The Prussians of Newport, Kentucky**

The second case study developed in Newport, Kentucky moves from a frontier rural society to an urban industrial society. The Newport study is part of a new approach to urban history, focusing more now on smaller cities in order to develop holistic analyses. Several projects of this type are underway in Canada, reflected in the work of Jason Gilliland on London, Ontario; Patrick Dunae on Victoria, British Columbia; and the continuing investigations of Montreal led by Sherry Olsen. Much of this work is at the individual level and encourages “a new kind of fine-scale urban geography,” an “*individual-based* approach to residential segregation,” and a recognition that segregation

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<sup>21</sup> On the increasing divergence between V.O. Key and the contextual school, see Zuckerman, “Returning to the Social Logic of Political Behavior,” 5, 11, 14.

can occur at many different levels simultaneously, based upon “perceived neighborhoods” defined by individual residents themselves.<sup>22</sup>

Kentucky, like Oregon, conducted its elections *viva voce* and a good run of poll books survive for the new industrial city of Newport, on the banks of the Ohio opposite Cincinnati. Newport had thrived during the Civil War and was a fast developing iron and steel town in the 1870s as its population approached 15,000. This trajectory came to a sudden and violent halt with the Panic of 1873, which led locally to massive wage reductions and labor unrest and nationally to a devastating Depression.

Germans were the largest group of foreign born residents of Newport and critical to the city’s commercial and industrial successes and ambitions, making up 17 percent of the total population and 28 percent of voters. This large population from the newly united Germany was finally differentiated by Henry Wise, who conducted the 1870 census in Newport, and recorded, without instruction, the province of birth of every one of his fellow countrymen.

Wise’s careful work provides the data that demonstrates the Prussian-born as the largest, and perhaps the most successful, of Newport’s many Germanic groups.<sup>23</sup> Exploring the spatial distribution of Prussians and other groups in a (relatively) large and complex

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<sup>22</sup> Michael Batty, “The New Urban Geography on the Third Dimension,” *Environment and Planning*, 27 (2000): 483-4; Itzhak Omer and Othak Benenson, “Investigating Fine-Scale Residential Segregation by Means of Local Spatial Statistics,” *Geographical Research Forum*, 12 (2002): 54.

<sup>23</sup> See Donald A. DeBats, “Political Consequences of Spatial Organization: Contrasting Patters in Two Nineteenth Century Small Cities,” *Social Science History*, forthcoming. See also DeBats, “German and Irish Political Engagement.”

urban environment demands a more complex methodology than we used in identifying the “natural communities” of Washington County. The GIS statistical devices used for this purpose plot the geographic distribution of selected populations, identifying the most spatially clumped “core” of a population and, in contour-like lines, additional percentages of the group in question.<sup>24</sup>

Figure 2 reveals the spatial distribution of the “60 percent core” of those of Prussian birth, indicating that this large group was split into two very different residential areas – one core near the industrial factories along the Licking River and the other straddling the tracks of the Louisville, Cincinnati, and Lexington Railway that ran down Saratoga Street, one of Newport’s main commercial streets, before crossing the new bridge over the Ohio to Cincinnati.<sup>25</sup>

In social and economic terms, the “Mill core” and the “Saratoga Street core” were relatively similar socially, as Table 3 indicates; but this social similarity contrasted greatly with their political differences, summarized in Table 4. The Prussians in the Mill Core were consistently Democratic while their compatriots along Saratoga Street were Republican, with the Prussians of the Mill area more unequivocally committed as Democrats than the Saratoga Street Prussians were as Republicans.

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<sup>24</sup> Donald A. DeBats and Mark Lethridge, “GIS and the American City: Nineteenth Century Residential Patterns,” *Historical Geography*, 33 (2005): 78-98.

<sup>25</sup> These cores caught up 55 percent of the Prussian-born population of the city, amounting to 333 individuals, 137 in the Mill core and 196 in the Saratoga Street core.

**Table 3**  
**Social Profile of Two Newport Prussian Populations**

	Mill Core	Saratoga Street Core
<b>Prussian Population, n=</b>	137	196
<b>Male, Percent</b>	54.0	52.0
<b>Occupational Status, Percent</b>		
High	1.4	9.8
Medium	56.8	59.8
Low	41.9	30.4
<b>Home Ownership, Percent</b>		
Home Owner	77.3	75.2
Tenant-Boarder	22.7	24.8
<b>Assessable Property, Percent</b>		
\$ 0-\$ 199	17.6	14.6
\$ 200-\$ 999	38.2	31.4
\$ 1000 +	44.1	54.0

**Table 4**  
**Partisan Preferences of Two Newport Prussian Populations**

	Mill Core		Saratoga Street Core	
<b>Prussian Voting Population, n=</b>	51		58	
<b>Partisan Preference, Percent</b>				
Republican	22.2		64.1	
Democratic	77.7		35.9	
<b>Occupational Status, Percent</b>	Republican	Democratic	Republican	Democratic
High	NA	NA	80	20
Medium	16.7	83.3	70.7	29.3
Low	30.0	70.0	80.0	20.0
<b>Home Ownership, Percent</b>				
Home Owner	23.5	76.5	60.4	39.5
Tenant-Boarder	20.0	80.0	75.0	25.0
<b>Assessable Property, Percent</b>				
\$ 0-\$ 199	22.2	78.8	66.7	33.3
\$ 200-\$ 999	26.7	73.3	50.0	50.0
\$ 1000 +	16.7	83.3	70.0	30.0

Here is an urban echo of the Washington County pattern: similar subgroups of Prussians in two neighborhood settings voting in opposite directions. Prussian tenants and boarders were 80 percent Democratic in the Democratic Mill area and 75 percent Republican in the Republican Saratoga district. Wealthy Prussians voted 83 percent Democratic if they lived in the Mill area, but 70 percent Republican if they lived in the Prussian Saratoga Street core area.

Even finer gradations of this pattern are represented in Table 5, which compares the political performances of Prussian men in the same occupation in the two areas. Laborers, the largest single group in both areas, behaved in a politically consistent fashion across areas, voting solidly Democratic regardless of the setting in which they found themselves. Indeed, Prussian laborers were slightly more Democratic in Saratoga Street’s Prussian Republican enclave than they were in the solidly Democratic area near the mills. On the other hand, Prussian carpenters, tailors, and grocers – men who depended on trade with the residents of the area -- voted in opposite directions in the two neighborhoods. Prussian carpenters were 75 percent Democratic in the Mill area and 88 percent Republican in the commercial area; tailors were 75 percent Democratic in the Democratic area and 80 percent Republican in the Republican area; grocers were unanimously Democratic in the Democratic area and unanimously Republican in the Republican area.

**Table 5**  
**Partisan Preferences of Prussians in Particular Occupations, Percent**

	Mill Core		Saratoga Street Core	
	Republican	Democratic	Republican	Democratic
Laborers	35.7	64.3	30.0	70.0
Carpenters	25.0	75.0	87.5	12.5
Tailors	25.0	75.0	80.0	20.0
Grocers	0.0	100.0	100.0	0.0

Of course there are small numbers here – six grocers, twelve carpenters, 21 tailors and 24 laborers. And it is possible that additional work will discern important co-variances. Present evidence, however, does not suggest that these differences were the result of a “religious effect.” This individual level work for whole cities reminds us of how limited was the reach of organized religion in the nineteenth century. In Alexandria, where a complete religious census has been constructed for the white population only 27.6percent of adult men were on the membership lists and only 22.5 percent of adult men and

women.<sup>26</sup> The same was likely the case for Newport, though this work has not been completed. We have determined that of the 40 Prussian carpenters, tailors and grocers captured in Table 5, only 13 (33 percent) were members of the German churches in their neighborhoods. To be sure far more of the Prussian men in the Mill core were Catholics than Protestants and far more of those in the Saratoga Street commercial core were Protestant than Catholic. But none of the seven men who “dissented” from the political complexion of their area were members of a religious congregation. On present evidence religious adherence does not appear to be the motivating factor for those who did not align with their area.

All this suggests that the “contextual effect” associated with the different outcomes in the two Prussian enclaves was real, though hardly deterministic. Perhaps religion will emerge as a stronger explanatory variable, but the striking political neighborhoods that developed in industrial Newport also seem to have exerted some influence on political persuasions and perhaps particularly so for those who as “independent contractors,” dealt directly with the residents of those neighborhoods.

### **Deference**

For the third case study we travel north of the border to Canada, just a few years after Confederation where, in the late 1860s and early 1870s as the Canadian party system began to take shape, we can see another example of contextual effects, this one much more classically British and hierarchal in nature. The case study is centered on Oxford

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<sup>26</sup> The over-all pattern is the reverse of the modern “feminized” Protestant and Catholic churches. Less surprising is the evidence that men who were members of religious groups voted at a higher rate than those who were not: in all, 37.8 percent of those who voted were on a religious roll.

County, Ontario, a settled farming area with a scattering of small villages. In one of those villages – Tillsonburg -- we can detect in surviving political correspondence a clear example of a “social better” successfully shaping a political outcome using his “influence” to change the votes of his neighbors and to enlist new voters in his partisan cause.<sup>27</sup>

In a unique sequence of private letters, very British in tone, subject, and theme – none of which is evident in the considerable correspondence of Washington County’s political leaders -- Edwin D. Tillson pursued a politics of deference.

Tillson was the principal person in southeastern Oxford County and lived in, and dominated, Tillsonburg, the only quasi-urban place in Dereham Township. With an estate valued at \$14,830, he was by far the wealthiest man in the town and its hinterland. At 46 years of age, Tillson was also the prominent local merchant and the owner of the local grist and sawmills as well as some 2300 acres of farmland, 100 lots and 46 houses in the town named after his father. Born in Ontario of English descent, Tillson was a member of the local Wesleyan Methodist church and a local benefactor of some note. It would have been almost impossible for any resident of the south riding of Oxford County not to be aware of Edwin D. Tillson, his stature and, just perhaps, his political views.

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<sup>27</sup> The suffrage in Canada, as in Britain, remained highly restrictive. The 1871 census for Dereham Township, the township surrounding the village of Tillsonburg, reports an adult male population of 1369 but there were only 861 eligible voters on the 1871 voter’s list and 607 voters in the election. In other words, 37 percent of the age eligible population in Dereham was disenfranchised and the turnout was 70 percent of the eligible voters and 44 percent of the total adult male population. See Province of Ontario, *Sessional Papers: Volume 4, Part 2, Number 39*: “First Session of the Second Parliament of the Province of Ontario, 1871-1872” 26.

Tillson fits neatly in S. J. R. Noel's definition of a nineteenth century Ontario politics revolving around patrons, brokers and clients. Whereas pure deference of the British mold was based on social position, the Canadian adaptation of that mold was a patron-client relationship based on "a type of reciprocity, an exchange of mutually valued goods or services between individuals ...of unequal status and in control of unequal resources."<sup>28</sup>

In both Britain and Canada, deference ultimately arose from an organic view of society in which the understanding of the political act was that the voter was to "express in his vote the network of influences of which he was a part."<sup>29</sup> Noel's argument is that this type of relationship – rooted in land and office -- was not simply political. Rather it was a pattern of relationships "woven into the total fabric of the community, and whose political effectiveness and durability [were]...all the greater precisely because it [was]...*not* exclusively political."<sup>30</sup> This pattern of unequal relationships was "the operative principle of Upper Canadian politics;" it was "prominent in the life of the province from the very beginning and was long assumed to be a normal part of the political process *because it was a normal part of practically everything else.*"<sup>31</sup>

What Canada contributed to the more traditional British pattern of deference was a certain practicality and functionality, based on the distribution of land and office,

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<sup>28</sup> S. J. R. Noel, *Patrons, Clients, Brokers: Ontario Society and Politics, 1791-1896* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990): 13.

<sup>29</sup> T. J. Nossiter, *Influence, Opinion and Political Idioms in Reformed England: Case Studies from the North-East, 1832-1874* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1975): 6. For the argument that Canada develops from this same organic tradition, see also John Conway, "An 'Adapted Organic Tradition,'" in Stephen Graubard (ed.), *Daedalus: In Search of Canada*, 117 (Fall, 1988): 381-96.

<sup>30</sup> Noel, *Patrons, Clients, Brokers*, 14.

<sup>31</sup> Noel, *Patrons, Clients, Brokers*, 14-15.

evolving eventually in the late 1890's into a kind of machine politics.<sup>32</sup> Despite his American connections (his parents were American migrants to Canada), Tillson readily employed the words and images of these British and Canadian patterns of deference and as the 1871 approached, applied them politically.

Newly converted to the principles of the Conservative Party, and in pursuit of a classic item of Canadian political patronage -- a local postmastership -- Tillson initiated a correspondence with the local Conservative leader noting that he owned "considerable property" in and around Tillsonburg and that, "I can use more influence in getting out the votes than any man in this neighbourhood."<sup>33</sup> Two days later he wrote again to Conservative Party apparatchiks saying that, "I think I can have a good deal of influence in working up an election."<sup>34</sup>

There is every indication that he did so in the ensuing contest between the Conservative candidate Stephen Richards and the Reform candidate, Adam Oliver. Indeed immediately after the contest, Tillson counted his results and reported to Sir Francis Hincks, Conservative leader and "the consummate broker," in interesting terms:

Of the eighty-one votes in Tillsonburg, we gave sixty-five for Richard's [,] nine for Oliver [,] two sick [,] and five would not vote.

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<sup>32</sup> Noel, *Patrons, Clients, Brokers*, 317-20.

<sup>33</sup> E. D. Tillson to E. Dotty, Tillsonburg, January 28, 1871 Tillson Letterbook, Volume 2, held privately by Ms. Kate Rogers of Ottawa. I wish to thank Ms. Rogers for her generosity in making the contents of this volume available to me.

<sup>34</sup> E. D. Tillson to A. Walsh, Tillsonburg, January 30, 1871, Tillson Letterbook, Volume 2.

Tillson concluded that “the people” had “done their duty.”<sup>35</sup> This is a remarkably revealing statement, suggesting first a determined effort of Tillson to exert influence -- “five would not vote” – and second, his construction of a list of the voters, methodically compiled at the polling station.

Tillson’s statement provides an opportunity to explore more carefully the patterns of influence detectable in the politics of frontier Oregon compared to those in British Canada’s Ontario. Linking the five sets of poll books to each individual voter’s place of residence, using addresses from the 1871 census and the poll books as well as occupations from the census and poll book records, allows us to identify the voters in each category of Tillson’s election report, including those refused to vote.<sup>36</sup> More broadly the Tillsonburg material, when compared with that from Forest Grove, allows us to develop tests of Tillson’s claim of “influence” in his neighborhood and to distinguish between the nature of “influence” brought to bear on voters in Washington County compared with the efforts to influence the election outcome in Oxford County.

### **Distinguishing Deference from Community Suasion**

The tests used here are: 1) rates of vote changing, 2) the geographic specificity of vote changing, and 3) the association of local economic elites to vote changing. Taken together these indicators may help identify critical differences “on the ground” between the suasive power of community and the operation of a deference-based system. Communal influences we might expect to see manifest in slow rates of vote changing,

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<sup>35</sup> Noel, *Patrons, Clients, Brokers*, p. 142. E. D. Tillson to Sir Francis Hincks, March 25, 1871, Tillson Letterbook, Volume 2.

<sup>36</sup> We are not, however, aspiring to identify the two voters who reported in sick.

spatial evidence of relatively uniform dispersion of both new voters arriving at the polls and vote changing, and no evidence of efforts from powerful elites to change electoral outcomes. Deferential politics might be expected to exhibit opposite patterns: sudden vote change, highly specific areas of political effects in terms of new voters and vote changing, and clear evidence from elites of their intention to influence an election result.<sup>37</sup>

### Rates of Vote Changing

Nineteenth century party attachment was remarkably firm with individuals rarely switching from one party to the other. Ceasing to vote was a much more common response to disaffection than support for the opposition: elections then, as now, were primarily contests in mobilization rather than conversion.<sup>38</sup> Aggregated election returns obscure the distribution of voters in the nine categories of voter choice posed by any pair of elections; only individual level information such as that provided in the poll books allows a precise statement of the effect of new voters entering the electorate, existing voters dropping out, voters converting from one party to the other and of course those who, while eligible to vote, abstained in both elections.

While voters in both Washington County in the late 1850s and Oxford County in the early 1870s were participating in the emergence of a new national party system, the rate

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<sup>37</sup> It is important to note here that while the vote in Oregon, as in the US generally, was open to all adult white citizens, the vote in Oxford County, as in Canada (and England) generally, was restricted to those with property holdings until a general loosening of the restrictions in 1885. While this restriction was ineffectually applied in Ontario, the best estimate is that about a third of adult white males were excluded from voting. See Gail Campbell, "The Most Restrictive Franchise in British North America? A Case Study," *Canadian Historical Review*, 71 (June, 1990), pp. 159-88. See also J. Patrick Boyer, *Election Law in Canada: The Law and Procedure of Federal, Provincial and Territorial Elections*, 2 vols (Toronto: Butterworths, 1987) and George Emery, *Elections in Oxford County: A Case Study of Democracy in Canada West and Early Ontario*, forthcoming.

<sup>38</sup> See Bourke and DeBats, *Washington County*, 187-209.

of electoral change in the two places was, as Table 6 shows, substantially different, especially in respect of the 1867 and 1871 elections in Oxford County's Dereham Township.

**TABLE 6**  
**Percent of Voters Changing Partisan Choice**

	Washington County		Dereham Township
1855-1857	13	1867-1871	45
1857-1859	11	1871-1874	23

Washington County election results reveal a pattern closer to a stochastic process of gradual change in outcomes so that between the elections of 1855 and 1857, just 44 of the 351 consistent voters (13 percent) changed their decision as to the party they supported. On the other hand, of the 395 men who voted in both the 1867 and 1871 elections in Dereham Township, nearly half (177 or 45 percent) changed the party they supported. In Tillsonburg the direction of that change was strictly one way: of the twenty-three residents of the town who changed party in the 1871 election, twenty (eighty-six percent) shifted to the Conservatives, whose cause Tillson had so enthusiastically championed. Finally, the rate of vote switching in Dereham was also higher in the 1874 elections – an election in which Tillson did not vote and was not apparently active -- as 56 percent of the sudden converts to the Conservative cause in 1871 either failed to vote in 1874 or returned to the Reform camp.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> The unformed character of the Canadian party system at this time, its cadre basis, and the penchant for political leaders to switch political allegiances also had some effect here. Noel argues that deference was most important in precisely this era, prior to the development of mass parties and machine politics. On the other hand, 18 of the 45 converts to the Conservatives cause in 1871 remained Conservatives in the 1874 elections -- 14 of the non-voters in 1867 and four of the converts. Of the 32 men who had not voted in 1867 and voted Conservative 1871, 11 failed to vote in 1874 and six turned to Reform; 14 of the 32 voted Conservative in at least one of the 1874 elections. Two voters new to the Conservative cause in 1871 cast a vote each way in the two 1874 elections.

The analysis identifies the 1871 election as a clear outlier, worthy of close attention, especially if we accept the premise that political change in a political culture of deference is likely to be sudden while change in a system defined by communal suasion is likely to be slower and more gradual as community norms are defined and observed.

### Geographical Specificity of Vote Changing

A second measure of political influences that might alert the historian's eye is the geographic specificity of changes in voting preference and in the recruitment of new voters. Deference is, almost by definition, highly localized. No one, even in the grim rural English realities described by Vincent, Moore, and Nossiter, however grand their position or how supine the voting population, was able to exert "influence" over a wide area<sup>40</sup>. The very nature of deference was that it was local; Nossiter identifies the job of the party canvasser as the discovery of each voter's local networks and obligations in order that influence could be brought to bear along those points of access. It was modernity's challenge to these highly localized politics that made the survival of deference politics so troublesome to nineteenth century English political leaders of all persuasions, whether leading or resisting the move to enlarge the electorate.

GIS techniques, instruments newly arrived in the historian's toolbox, allow the exploration of spatial aspects of past behavior in new ways. The databases created for Oxford County and Washington County allow the mapping of the precise places of

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<sup>40</sup> J. R. Vincent, *Poll Books: How Victorians Voted* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967); David C. Moore, *The Politics of Deference: A Study of the Mid-Nineteenth Century English Political System* (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1976); Nossiter, *Influence, Opinion and Political Idioms in Reformed England..*

residence of large proportions of their nineteenth century populations (100 percent in Ontario and 75 percent in Oregon), attaching all social, cultural and political variables to those residential locations. The hypothesis is that deferential politics, more than communal politics, is likely associated with greater geographical specificity in both the appearance of new voters and the conversion of existing voters. Figures 3 and 4 indicate the place of residence of vote changers in Washington County between the 1855 and 1857 Congressional elections (Figure 3) and between the 1857 and 1859 Congressional contests (Figure 4). The figures show that political conversions were widely dispersed with the cases dotted right across the County.<sup>41</sup>

A very different pattern emerges in Dereham Township. Figures 5, 6, and 7 use a GIS statistic called the kernel density estimator to define the boundaries within which specified percentages of individuals of interest resided. Figure 5 shows us that voters who switched allegiance from Conservative to Reform between 1867 and 1871 were, as in Washington County, quite widely dispersed. But those who switched the other way, as Edwin D. Tillson so ardently urged, were highly concentrated in the immediate area of Tillsonburg (Figure 6).

We can see that there was a second concentration of Conservative converts located in the far northwest of the Township and this, we suspect, was part of a similar effort centered on the town of Ingersoll. There is no known correspondence detailing this vote harvesting in Ingersoll, but the map provides good cause to look very carefully for evidence of

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<sup>41</sup> We can determine the residence of 38 of the 44 men who changed their votes in Washington County between 1855 and 1857 and the residence of 30 of the 38 men who changed their vote between 1857 and 1859.

exactly the same exercise of deferential politics. An early indication is the fact that it was here that Richards' candidacy under the Conservative's colors had begun; he was, reported the *Tillsonburg Observer*, "invited by a large number of influential men in Ingersoll to contest the Riding."<sup>42</sup>

Table 7 again identifies the specificity of the vote change to the Conservative cause in 1871. Whereas vote changers from Conservative to Reform in 1871 and those in both directions between 1871 and 1874 occupied about 13 percent of the area of the township, those who followed Tillson to the Conservative cause in 1871 occupied only three percent of the area of the Township. These were, overwhelming, the voters within Tillson's arena of influence.

**Table 7**  
**Percentage of Area Covered by the Core of Vote Changers in Dereham Township, 1867-1874**

	To Reform	To Conservative
1867-1871	12	3
1871-1874	10	14

Figure 7 shows a similarly concentrated spatial pattern of the men who had not voted in 1867 but were recruited to the Conservatives in 1871: they were even more concentrated in Tillsonburg than the political converts. Of course voters can be newly mobilized for many reasons – coming of age, moving into the area, and, in Canada, acquiring sufficient property to qualify for the franchise. Equally, however, the mobilized may be those who were, for one reason or another, suddenly moved to vote by the exercise of influence.

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<sup>42</sup> *Tillsonburg Observer*, March 30, 1871.

Figure 7 suggests that Tillson's effort at mobilizing new voters was remarkably specific, once again, to his area of influence.

Tillsonburg residents made up 12 percent of the Township voters in the 1871 election but accounted for 19 percent of the converts to the Conservative cause and 28 percent of the new voters for that party. Conversely, not a single one of the 102 men who switched their vote from Conservative to Reform between 1867 and 1871 lived in the village. In 1874, when Edwin Tillson did not vote, the town of Tillsonburg exhibited just the opposite behavior, accounting for 31 percent of those switched from Conservative to Reform. The 1874 pattern is precisely the opposite of that in 1871 when Tillson's "influence" produced precisely twice as much movement (24 percent) to the Conservative party as we would expect given the Township's performance, and suppressed entirely the movement of voters to the Reform party.

Tillson's absence from the political lists of 1874 is associated with as much change as did his determined presence three years earlier. Political change developed via community suasion, as in Washington County, was slower, wider, and, consistently reinforced by wider community forces, more enduring. On the other hand, in Ontario as in England, deferential induced behavior was quickly produced and highly focused, but required continuing effort by those exerting it; if influence was not consistently exerted, it would wane and the political preferences of individuals and even a town could revert to more "normal" patterns.

## The Role of Economic Elites

These case studies suggest that a third difference between community suasion and deferential behavior arises from the materialist base of the transactional patterns. In the political culture that Noel describes in nineteenth century Ontario, influence was likely to be directed from the patron to a wider client base of economic notables whom ordinary voters could see as providing the economic opportunity on which they and their community relied. In a politics of community, on the other hand, this type of transactional process might not occur at all or, if it did, might be tied into conversations with social elites whose views were respected but who could not promise or provide material rewards.

The economic base of Tillson's effort at influence was captured in a description of his town in the *Oxford Gazetteer* for 1871:

Tillsonburg contains many important manufacturers, of which the numerous and extensive establishments of E. D. Tillson, Esq., justly claim the foremost rank. The flour and grist mill is a frame building 70 x 34, 3 stories containing 3 run of stones – average custom work about 120 bushels daily, The sawmill is 85 x 70 feet, contains two large circular and one upright saw, edgers, besides lath machines and two shingle mills. At this mill, about 4 1/2 millions of feet of lumber are sawn annually. The sash, door and blind factory is 60 x 65 feet, and two stories high. The machinery in all of these mills is propelled by water power, which is here afforded by the Otter and is abundant.

Mr. David Kelso employs a good many hands in cabinet-making. The shop is frame, 63 x 23 feet, and two stories high.

Mr. S. H. Palmer, in the same line, employs about 3 hands –cabinet-making, upholstering and undertaking.

Mr. R. H. Burke, founder and manufacturer of agricultural implements, employs about 12 hands, and an engine of 8 horse power.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *Oxford Gazetteer and General Business Director, 1870-1871 Containing Brief Historical and Descriptive Sketches of the Towns, Villages and Post Offices with the names of residents in Each Locality, Arranged Alphabetically* (Toronto: Hunter, Rose and Co., 1870): 125.

Kelso and Palmer followed Tillson from his support of Oliver and Reform in 1867 to Richards and the Conservatives in 1871 and Burke, who did not vote in 1867, joined the group in 1871. Also converting to the Conservative cause was William S. Law, editor of the town's weekly paper, *The Tillsonburg Observer* who had been a supporter of Oliver and Reform in 1867 but was a loud voice for Richards in 1871. Tillson and his support from other notables resembles Noel's description of the pattern of patron-client relationships that was "woven into the total fabric of the community, and whose political effectiveness and durability [were]...all the greater precisely because it [was]...*not* exclusively political."<sup>44</sup>

The politics of Washington County was remarkably different. If we consider the election of 1859 in the village of Forest Grove, for example, we witness a deep political division arising from matters overwhelmingly cultural. Forest Grove was an American Party and now a Republican village. Its networks, visible in diaries such as Mary Walker's, describe a social world of cultural congruence – of visits to other wives of ex-missionaries and of associations like the Maternal Association that bound together the missionary women for the benefit of the larger community.<sup>45</sup>

Almost never did the social patterning of Democratic and Republican diarists overlap: even in a small rural village like Forest Grove there were sub-communities and they kept remarkably to themselves. We see exactly this in the order that men came to the polls in Forest Grove in the election of 1859. About 150 men had cast their votes by the end of

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<sup>44</sup> Noel, *Patrons, Clients, Brokers*, 14.

<sup>45</sup> Bourke and DeBats, *Washington County*: 310-11.

the day and the Republicans carried the result. But the end was not known when the voting began and if we return to watch, as many village residents did, as the men came to cast their votes, we can sense the uncertainty. First there was a phalanx of eleven Republicans who, as Paul Bourke and I noted, “could almost have walked out of the door of the Congregational Church of Forest Grove.”<sup>46</sup> These men were linked by their birthplace in the Northeast of the United States and/or by their membership in village institutions, including an association with Tualatin Academy, the foundation of Pacific University. Then came thirteen Democrats, almost none residents of the town, but mostly migrants from the upper South who resided in the hinterland of Forest Grove. These men were the leading Democratic Party organizers of the area, deeply linked through the neighborliness of a frontier rural community – families who signed one another’s affidavits required by the Donation Land Claim Law, families who inter-married and families who voted together. They defined, in spatial terms, a near continuous circle around the village of Forest Grove.

The order of the polls in Tillsonburg was different, heavily weighted toward the town’s wealth and power. As already noted, Richards’ candidacy began on the invitation of influential men.<sup>47</sup> In Tillsonburg the election result was never in doubt: the Conservatives led every step of the way, beginning with their own phalanx of a dozen men, anchored by William Law. Then came a small group three Reformers -- the two Darrow brothers who owned the Union foundry and Malcolm Bain, “gentleman.” Four Conservative laborers appeared, a Reform merchant, a Conservative farmer and then, in a

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<sup>46</sup> Bourke and DeBats, *Washington County*: 311.

<sup>47</sup> *Tillsonburg Observer*, March 30, 1871.

block of six Conservative voters, came Edwin Tillson himself. Delayed only by a single Reform voter, then arrived the largest voting bloc of the day: 13 straight Conservative voters who seemed to form around David Kelso, the cabinet maker employing “a good number of hands.” The next Conservative bloc, separated by a single Reform voter, included Silas Palmer, owner of another cabinet making factory.

By now, as those keeping tally of the vote would have known, the Conservatives had a lead of 41 to 7. Richard H. Burke appeared to vote a bit later as did the Clerk of the County Court (Charles Hawkins) and three of the town’s four doctors (John M. Ault, Sylvanus Joy, and Lachlin Sinclair) – all Conservatives.<sup>48</sup> The largest block of Reform voters appearing all day was a group of four who voted halfway through the poll, in a disastrously defeated cause.

Edwin Tillson’s brother, George, voted toward the end of the day just before many of the farmers from the hinterland appeared to cast their ballots. George Tillson was a farmer too, but the wealthiest farmer in the district with an estate worth \$8350 and owner of another 25 village lots. Shortly thereafter the Tillsonburg poll closed, returning, to Edwin Tillson’s great satisfaction, a result of 65 votes for the Conservative party against nine for Reform. Perhaps Tillson was being ever so slightly ironic when he concluded that the people indeed had “done their duty.”

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<sup>48</sup> Dr. Joseph Tweedale was also Conservative, but he voted earlier in the poll in the same group as David Kelso.

## Patterns

In these three tests we see confirmation of the differing patterns of influence in the American and Canadian case studies. Culture and community do indeed seem to have been more a part of Washington County politics while deference, on the British pattern, does seem to have been at work in our Canadian example.

In summarizing nineteenth century Ontario politics, Noel reminds us that this was a politics with real strength, particularly at the local level:

There, for the most part, power and authority effectively rested in the hands of leaders who typically combined governmental office...with important social and commercial roles in the community. There were not mere petty officials sent out by the central administration to impose its writs. Rather, they were local 'men of standing' whose offices contributed to their status but who at the same time lent their own considerable personal weight to those offices. They belong, in other words, to that vital low-level elite whose members I have term the "local patrons." And if there leadership was often idiosyncratic, overly zealous in the pursuit of perquisites, and stubbornly resistant to central direction, it was rarely weak.<sup>49</sup>

Here was the world of Edwin Tillson and the voters of Tillsonburg and Dereham Township. Here was a politics built around "interest," patronage and influence; it was a politics built from the top down rather than the bottom up and it was a politics, as Noel said, *not* built around, "feelings of common identity, whether of class or nationality or religion, in which the rewards of membership are essentially psychological or emotional rather than material."<sup>50</sup>

The forces of community were different in America at least as represented here by Forest Grove and Washington County. Here we are perhaps best reminded of Samuel Hays'

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<sup>49</sup> Noel, *Patrons, Clients, Brokers*, 312.

<sup>50</sup> Noel, *Patrons, Clients, Brokers*, p. 317.

community-society continuum in which party was built upon voters “who formed their political values within the parochial context of community” and were organized by party leaders articulating regional and national ideologies.<sup>51</sup> At that local level, “[t]he party’s leaders were closely akin to the community’s leaders. If the community sustained a leadership of its more affluent families, so did the party; if it gathered around such local functionaries as the real estate developer, the saloonkeeper, or the grocer, so did the party. Moreover, the party’s position on substantive demands reflected the community’s values.”<sup>52</sup> And, at the base were the voters and “the shared patterns of values and the social organization of the local community as a fundamental and persistent force in political life...[and] the long-term durability of the alignments in question.”<sup>53</sup>

Hays noted too that, “[a] major task of American political history is to reconstruct the community roots of political parties.”<sup>54</sup> The argument here is that new data (the poll books) and new tools (GIS) may finally allow us to accomplish the task Hays set out so long ago. The results reported here suggest that the local roots of politics were different and differently organized on the Oregon frontier of Washington County than they were in the “British” world of Oxford County. In providing a context for his findings on the value differences between Canadians and Americans, Seymour Martin Lipset recalled the wisdom of his teacher Paul Lazarsfeld who emphasized the significance of “consistent, though very small quantitative differences, which coincide with theoretical

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<sup>51</sup> Samuel P. Hays, “Political Parties and the Community-Society Continuum,” in William Nisbet Chambers and Walter Dean Burnham (eds.), *The American Party Systems: Stages of Political Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975): 157.

<sup>52</sup> Hays, “Political Parties and the Community-Society Continuum,” 157.

<sup>53</sup> Hays, “Political Parties and the Community-Society Continuum,” 158.

<sup>54</sup> Hays, “Political Parties and the Community-Society Continuum,” p. 158.

explanations.”<sup>55</sup> In reconstructing with new information and new tools the political lives of the ordinary voters in these two very different places, we do indeed confront those differences between a politics of deference and a politics of community.

### **Participation**

The contextual approach applies to understandings of participation as much as it does partisanship with the beginning point of the analysis arises from the same reality: namely that as with partisan attachment, “turnout is highly correlated among friends, family members, and co-workers even when controlling for socioeconomic status and selection effects.”<sup>56</sup> Indeed, this literature suggests that an individual influencing the decision of others to participate will also affect the political choice of those additional participants. The effects of context on participation overlaps with the notion of “social capital” with both concepts revolving around the notion that “the density of social networks helps encourage civic engagement...”<sup>57</sup>

Each of the four case studies outlined in this paper can contribute to building the historical case for contextual effects on participation. The individual case which is perhaps most interesting because it relates most closely to the concept of social capital is the data on religious memberships for the antebellum city of Alexandria.

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<sup>55</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, “Voluntary Activities: More Canadian-American Comparisons – A Reply,” *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 14 (3, 1989): 382.

<sup>56</sup> James Fowler, “Turnout in a Small World,” in Alan S. Zuckerman (ed.), *The Social Logic of Politics: Personal Networks as Context for Political Behavior*: 269.

<sup>57</sup> Fowler, “Turnout in a Small World,” 270.

The forcible occupation of Alexandria by Union troops on the day of Virginia’s secession spared the city and its records from the destruction visited on so many Southern cities during the War. Among the surviving documents are the membership records of all the city’s religious institutions from the late 1850s, bar the two black-only churches, Roberts Memorial Chapel and Alfred Street Baptist church. These files have been linked to all other individual level information for the 1859 residents of the city.

This unique religious census reveals much, in at least this case study, of the extent of religious membership amongst the white population and the political effects associated with that membership. While, as already noted, the percentage of the adult white population listed in the city’s religious institutions was limited (22.5 percent of all adult white men and women) and only slightly higher among the eligible electorate (27.5 percent of all adult white males), there are nevertheless interesting associations amongst status, religious membership and political participation, as Table 8 below indicates.

**Table 8: Church and State:  
Religious Membership and Political Participation, Alexandria, Virginia 1859  
By Percent**

Occupational Status*	City Distribution of Status	Percent Who Vote	Percent Member of a Religious Organization	Percent Non-Members Who Vote	Percent Members Who Vote	Percent Increase in Voting Associated with Religious Membership
High	9.8	71.4	58.1	61.5	78.6	27.8
Medium	60.6	54.1	30.5	47.4	69.5	31.8
Low	29.6	35.8	20.5	31.5	52.6	67.0
n	2218			1547	671	

Political participation was associated with both occupational status and also religious membership. As expected, political participation went along with status. But religious

membership was also associated with status, with membership highest amongst men in the high status occupations and lowest amongst those in the low status occupations. Separating participation among religious members from non-members suggests that by a large margin the “contextual effect” associated with religious membership looks to have been greatest amongst men at the very bottom of the status hierarchy.<sup>58</sup>

While a good many variables are associated with religious membership, including length of residence, economic well being, and home ownership, the Alexandria work does provide evidence of another type of contextual effect, one associated much more with participation than partisanship.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has sought to demonstrate the relevance for political history of the “contextual turn” that is rapidly emerging in other disciplines, most significantly in political science. Each of the four case studies considered here features linked individual level data for whole communities, approximating the type of data featured in the studies of small communities which did so much to begin the modern study of factors shaping electoral behavior. At the heart of these studies were sociological and political constructs, many associated with notions of context, influence and networks in the shaping of an individual’s political life. Regrettably this promising beginning was displaced by an ambitious wish for national studies, from which contextual effects were gradually excluded in favor of psychological variables more amenable to those leading the new

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<sup>58</sup> Members of St. Mary’s voted significantly Democratic: 70 percent Democratic in a city where 60 percent of non-Catholics voted for the Opposition Party. Members of St. Mary’s reflected the city’s status hierarchy more faithfully than any other white religious organization ; St. Mary’s engaged a section of the community largely excluded by other religious institutions in Alexandria and thus contributed significantly to maintain the city’s political competitiveness

paradigm. For political historians, this shift from the contextual to the psychological and from the local to the national was regrettable, diminishing, if not precluding, the connections they could establish with what became the dominant motif for understanding political behavior and the engagement of the American public in politics.

After a half century of dominance the psychological paradigm has begun to fade and we are witnessing in political science the revisiting of the contextual turn. Localized studies with comprehensive individual level information is re-connecting and radically expanding an older literature under the mantra of “the social logic of politics.” This contextual (re)-turn presents a wonderful opportunity for political historians to engage in an interdisciplinary research agenda with their political science colleagues, exploring the extent to which the social logic of politics and its emphasis on the significance of context resonates in American – and Canadian -- history.

The four case studies advanced here – each based on individual level data for whole communities -- suggest that the gains here might be considerable. Whether in rural areas as in Washington County and Oxford County or in the small cities of Alexandria and Newport, focusing on the significance of context, whether expressed spatially or in terms of network and whether focused on partisanship or participation, adds important insights to the ways in which North Americans engaged in politics at a critical time in their nations’ political history, as the modern party systems emerged.

DeTocqueville highlighted the danger of the over-weaning power of community suasion creating political monocultures in which individuals succumbed to group pressures. The Canadian case study suggests important differences between American and British Canadian political cultures and different types of communal pressures to which they gave rise. But even in Edwin Tillson's village, some "would not vote" and unanimity was not achieved, even if decided influence was. In frontier Oregon, perhaps at another extreme of community type, community suasion was also significant, if much more benign and gentle in its suasive powers. And finally in the networks of Alexandria and the neighborhoods of Newport, we see contextual effects, first on political participation and then on individual autonomy.

All of this suggests that the "social logic of politics" has a historical logic as well.