



2008

CIVIC HEALTH INDEX

BEYOND the VOTE

Florida





FLORIDA'S 2008 CIVIC HEALTH INDEX BEYOND

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 2** Preface
- 4** Executive Summary
- 6** Introduction
- 7** *Toward an Index of Florida's Civic Health*
- 12** Understanding Citizen Engagement in Florida
- 18** After the Election
- 20** *Support for Policies to Strengthen Our Civic Health*
- 22** Endnotes

the VOTE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was written and produced through collaboration between The Florida Joint Center for Citizenship and The National Conference on Citizenship.

The National Conference on Citizenship would like to give special thanks to the following foundations for their generous support of this project:

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
McCormick Foundation
Surdna Foundation
Case Foundation

Our key partners:

CIRCLE, Tufts University
Saguaro Seminar, Harvard University
Bob Graham Center, University of Florida
Lou Frey Institute, University of Central Florida,
Harry T. Wilks Leadership Institute, Miami University



The Florida Joint Center for Citizenship

A Partnership for Florida's Civic Health

Responsible citizenship is at the heart of American democracy. In penning the immortal words of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson argued for a new and radical vision. Government in America was not to be based on the arbitrary exercise of power. It was to be a contract; a contract between publicly chosen leaders and ordinary citizens. The terms of that contract have now been clear for more than 200 years. Leaders have the right to govern only insofar as citizens give their consent to be governed. Citizens, in turn, have a responsibility; a responsibility to exercise informed judgment in giving their consent. Jefferson underscored the fundamental importance of informed citizenship when he wrote that the "objects of primary education" are to "instruct the mass of our citizens in these, their rights, interests and duties as men and citizens." One of these objects, Jefferson argued, was "To understand his duties to his neighbors and country, and to discharge with competence the functions confided to him by either...."

The education of responsible citizens was, in the view of the nation's founders, to be a primary purpose of a system of public education. In his farewell address, George Washington called for the creation of "institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge" that would enlighten public opinion. In the years that followed, Washington's vision provided the foundation for what we now understand as American public education. It also gave to schools the unique challenge of preparing young people to effectively meet the critically important responsibilities of America's democratic contract.

As we approach the close of the first decade of the 21st Century, there is cause for concern about the quality of American citizenship. For more than a decade now, scholars have pointed to a disconnect between citizens – particularly young citizens – and the civic world around them. We have one of the lowest voter turnout rates in the world. Participation in virtually all forms of civic life appears to have declined over the past half century. School reforms appear to be reshaping the civic mission of public schools. As the "Greatest Generation" passes from the scene, there are real questions about how we will replace their commitment to the common good.

With these concerns in mind, we have created the Florida Joint Center for Citizenship as a statewide bi-partisan resource that can join with others in efforts to restore the civic mission of Florida's schools and strengthen our civic health. This report is a first step toward the goal of measuring where we are and understanding the some of the steps that we need to take to build a healthier civic culture in Florida. We are deeply appreciative of the support of the National Conference on Citizenship and CIRCLE. Their leadership and willingness to partner with us was the essential ingredient that made this effort possible. We offer this report as a point of departure; the real work of building and maintaining the enlightened discretion of Florida's citizens will require the combined talents and long-term commitment of all of those who care deeply about the state's future.

Lou Frey
Orlando

Bob Graham
Miami Lakes



The Florida Joint Center for Citizenship

A Partnership for Florida's Civic Health

The Florida Joint Center for Citizenship is a partnership between the Lou Frey Institute of Politics and Government at the University of Central Florida and the Bob Graham Center for Public Service at the University of Florida. Established in 2007 by the University of Florida and the University of Central Florida, the Joint Center works to strengthen civic education and improve the condition of Florida's civic health.



The Lou Frey Institute of Politics and Government promotes the development of enlightened, responsible, and actively engaged citizens. The Institute accomplishes its mission through civic education programs that encourage thoughtful debate and discussion about current policy issues; through experiential learning programs that encourage the development of civic and political skills; through research, policy analysis, and advocacy; and by working with others to help strengthen the civic education capacity of Florida's k-12 education system.



College of Liberal Arts & Sciences
Bob Graham Center for Public Service

The Bob Graham Center for Public Service seeks solutions to public problems in three areas. These include: (1) *public leadership*, by providing students with the broad training necessary for successful and productive careers in the public sector; (2) *the Americas*, in cooperation with the University of Florida's Center for Latin American Studies and (3) *homeland security*, by supporting courses and degree programs in less commonly taught languages, critical thinking, analysis and area studies.

PREFACE

The National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC) was founded in 1946 to sustain the spirit of cooperation that we now associate with the America's greatest generation. In 1953 Congress granted NCoC a formal charter and charged it with the responsibility of promoting more effective citizenship and working with other organizations to encourage the development of active, alert, enlightened, conscientious, and progressive citizens. Throughout its rich history, NCoC has worked to achieve these goals in a variety of ways, including an annual conference that brings together the leading public and private initiatives to strengthen citizenship in America.

In 2006, NCoC launched an ambitious initiative to establish a national index to measure the state of America's civic health. Since that time, developmental work on the *Civic Health Index* has been undertaken in partnership with the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), Harvard's Saguaro Seminar: Civic Engagement in America, and a wide range of distinguished scholars and practitioners. Much like a variety of economic indicators, the *Civic Health Index* is intended to help the nation chart its progress toward building and maintaining engaged, effective, and responsible citizens.¹

Unlike economic systems in which the federal government takes the lead in gathering information that helps to paint a continuing picture of the state of the nation's economy, there is no centralized source of information about the condition of America's civic health. To take the first steps toward building an information system that would remedy this condition, NCoC and its partners drew on a variety of public and private surveys that have routinely collected data that are important indicators of key aspects of civic health. NCoC's 2006 report, *America's Civic Health Index: Broken Engagement*, documented a 30 year-long decline in the nation's civic health. The 2007 report, *Renewed Engagement: Building on America's Civic Core*, gave hope to the bleak picture of

civic decline by identifying a core of about 15 percent—roughly 36 million people—who participate in impressive ways and stand out as civic leaders. It is those citizens, the report argued, who serve as a foundation upon which to build a stronger civic America. The 2008 report, *Beyond the Vote*, takes note of increased levels of citizen activity surrounding the presidential elections and argues that a central challenge for the nation's civic health will be that of capitalizing on and maintaining post-election engagement, particularly among young people.

To address the longer term question of developing a stable and continuing data collection system, NCoC and others have been working with the U. S. Census. The Current Population Survey (CPS) has been collecting data on voter turnout for more than 20 years. In 2002, in partnership with the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and others, the CPS began collecting annual data on volunteering in America. In 2006, the CPS added items indicating the extent to which citizens attend public meetings in their communities and work in cooperation with others to help solve community problems. In this report, we will rely on those data to take a first step toward building an Index of Florida's Civic Health. Beginning in 2008, NCoC will expand its partnership with CNCS to collect and report on a greater

range of information related to the civic engagement of American Citizens. As this data becomes annually available, they will permit NCoC and its state partners to improve measurement and to routinely monitor the civic condition of the nation and the states.

We wish to express our deep appreciation to the National Conference on Citizenship, CIRCLE, and the Civic Health Index Advisory Group for their support and guidance in this effort. Without their assistance this project would not have been possible.

The Sample

The survey data on which this report is based were collected as part of a national online sample taken by Peter D. Hart Research Associates in July 2008. Hart Research partnered with Greenfield Online for sample recruitment for the online sample of respondents (both national and state) for the Civic Health Index survey.

Greenfield maintains a pre-recruited, opt-in global respondent panel in addition to utilizing their proprietary Real-Time Sampling (RTS) capabilities. Greenfield's proprietary Real-Time Sample provides a significantly larger sample to draw from for each survey, above and beyond Greenfield's pre-recruited panel. These respondents are continuously recruited for surveys, in real-time, via a wide network of hundreds of website affiliates, providing access to a broad universe of respondents nationally and regionally beyond the pre-recruited panel.

Respondents are recruited via ads placed on various Web sites, and there is a double opt-in process for participants to join the panel. Respondents receive a small cash incentive for the completion of a survey. The panel and Real-Time Sampling do not include people who do not use the Internet.

The sample for this survey was structured to achieve targets for gender, age, race/ethnicity and census region. Quotas were put in place to ensure these targets were achieved to produce a nationally representative sample of the target audience. The Florida sample includes 506 respondents.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In partnership with the National Conference on Citizenship and with the advice of the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at Tufts University and others, this report takes a first step toward the development of a continuing index of Florida's civic health – an index that will allow us to chart the condition of our civic life as well as we chart the condition of our economic life. It also sheds light on some of the major factors that shape citizen engagement in the state. Finally, it considers public support for policy changes that would institutionalize pathways to participation for Florida's young people. The report is based on data provided by the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey and an online sample of 506 Florida residents.

Florida's civic health is among the worst in the nation.

Compared to other states, Florida ranks

32nd in average voter turnout;

40th in the percentage of our citizens who have worked with others in their neighborhood to solve a community problem.

47th in the percentage of our citizens who attend public meetings; and

49th in average rate of volunteering;

47th taking all of this into account, Florida's Civic Health Index for 2007 puts it at 47th in the nation.

Education plays a critically important role in shaping the state's civic health. Education – especially intentional civic education – provides the civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are essential to engaged citizenship. Reflecting that, Florida citizens who have attended college are significantly more engaged in their communities and more engaged in electoral participation than are those with a high school degree.

The lack of formal education creates life-long barriers to engaged citizenship. High school dropouts are virtually unrepresented in Florida's active civic life. This is especially critical in Florida since the state ranks 45th in the percentage of entering high school freshmen who actually graduate – more than one out of three high school freshmen fail to do so. This means that many of our citizens face a lifetime of not only economic hardship, but second-class citizenship as well.

Providing students with early civic experiences may well portend a more engaged citizenry as the Millennials take center stage in adult

roles. Florida's Millennial generation (those aged 15 to 29) show higher rates of voluntary community service than do Gen-Xers, Boomers, or Seniors. Much of that engagement is undoubtedly spurred by an increased emphasis on volunteering and community service in high schools and colleges.

Increased levels of political interest in the 2008 election are not likely to translate into a continuing higher level of engagement among Floridians.

There has been an upsurge of participation and interest in the 2008 presidential election, particularly among young Floridians. Nonetheless, the majority of Florida's citizens report that they do not expect to take any action on major campaign issues once the election is over. This appears to be true even among those who are now actively engaged.

Despite the fact that most Floridians are not personally engaged in civic life, they see the need for an engaged citizenry and support policy actions that would institutionalize pathways to engagement for younger citizens. We find majority support for two initiatives that have recently been considered by the Florida Legislature:

Over 70 percent support the idea of requiring high school students to do community service as part of their course work.

Almost 70 percent support the idea of requiring students to pass a new test on civics and government.

Taken together, the findings in this report indicate that Florida should probably be on the critical care list. Our civic health is failing and in need of serious attention. Indeed, the quality of governance and the very quality of life in our cities, towns and villages depends on engaged citizens who make responsible choices and shoulder the civic responsibility for public work. An important part of the prescription for what ails us involves education. More of our students need to graduate and more need to go on to college. We need to encourage programs that teach students the skills of service and civic participation. And we need to find ways to encourage the rising Millennials to stay the course and to engage in the world of policy-making as well as the world of service. Strengthening Florida's education system and restoring the civic mission of our schools can do much to help us out of intensive care.

INTRODUCTION

Florida has a rich and diverse culture. That diversity, reflecting the values and experiences our 18 million citizens, strengthens our economy, enlivens our arts, and brings new perspectives and traditions to our state. At the same time, the unique characteristics that are part of that diversity may present special challenges to building and maintaining a strong civic culture.

Florida ranks 50th among the states in terms of the percentage of its native population born in the state, with only about 41 percent of its 2005 native population having been born here.

It ranks 4th in the percentage of total population that is foreign born and almost a quarter of the population speak a language other than English in their home.

It ranks 14th in terms of intra-state mobility, with about 14 percent of the state's population making a move within the state each year.

It ranks substantially below the national average in newspaper circulation.

The context in which Florida's civic health must be understood, then, is one of high levels of diversity combined with high levels of mobility both across state lines and within the state. There is large and growing immigrant population and many are not fluent in English. This is compounded by what appears to be a relatively low rate of attention to traditional news media.

There has not yet been a comprehensive study of the health of Florida's civic culture. The data that have been

available suggest, however, that there is some cause for concern about the civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions of Florida's citizens – particularly its young citizens. As the Florida Joint Center for Citizenship's recent report *Enlisting a New generation of Florida Citizens* observed, the fragmentary indicators that are available point to low levels of civic knowledge and participation. They also suggest that levels of social trust, the foundation of collaborative problem solving, may be low.

In this report, we take the next steps toward understanding Florida's civic health. Our goals are modest. First, and most importantly, we will take an initial step toward the goal of building a reliable and continuing civic health index that will permit citizens, educators, and policy makers to chart our long-term goal of an engaged and responsible citizenry. Along the way, we will also attempt to shed light on some of the key underlying factors that shape citizen engagement in Florida. Third, recognizing the increased level of citizen involvement associated with a long and intense presidential campaign, we will consider the challenge of maintaining that engagement beyond the election. Finally, we will consider the question of public support for policy initiatives that seek to institutionalize pathways to engagement, especially among the nation's youth.

TOWARD AN INDEX OF FLORIDA'S CIVIC HEALTH

Background.

The idea of measuring the health of our communities, states, and nation is not new. Many of the urban observatories formed in the late 1960s and early 1970s sought to develop systematic quality of life indicators that would help chart our progress toward a revitalization of urban America. Building on that same theme, the National Civic League developed in 1990 a Civic Index to assess what they called “civic infrastructure,” those characteristics that communities possess to effectively solve problems.” Applied by hundreds of cities across the U.S., the index includes 10 components:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 civic participation; | 6 civic education; |
| 2 community leadership; | 7 community information sharing; |
| 3 government performance; | 8 capacity for cooperation and consensus building; |
| 4 volunteerism and philanthropy; | 9 community vision and pride; and |
| 5 intergroup relations; | 10 intercommunity cooperation. |

In the mid-1990s, Robert D. Putnam's seminal article, *Bowling Alone*, re-introduced the idea of social capital and argued that it is a precondition of both effective government and economic development.² Putnam's work stimulated considerable research and discussion on the question of the extent of citizen engagement – both socially and politically – and on the factors that shape that engagement. It also led to a renewed interest in the development of a civic index that would permit, as economic indicators do, periodic assessment of the state of the nation's civic health. One of the first efforts was that undertaken by the National Commission for Civic Renewal. The Commission's Index of the National Civic Health consisted of 22 variables including political components

(such as turnout), trust components (such as trust in others and confidence in the federal government), membership components (such as membership in groups, church attendance, and charitable contributions), security components (such as crime rates), and family components (such as divorce rates). The Commission was able to amass consistent data from 1972 through 1994. Their central finding was that the nation's civic health had declined significantly during that period. Based on their analysis, the Commission warned that America was becoming a “nation of spectators” rather than the engaged participants that are essential to democracy.

TOWARD AN INDEX OF FLORIDA'S CIVIC HEALTH CONT.

As described in the Preface to this report, the NCoC assumed the mantle in the effort to build a continuing national civic health index beginning in 2006. The Civic Health Index that NCoC and its partners developed is based on some 40 measures across eight component areas, including: connecting to civic and religious groups; trusting other people; connecting to others through family and friends; giving and volunteering; staying informed; understanding civics and politics; participating in politics; trusting and feeling connected to major institutions; and expressing political views. The NCoC's initial results echoed those of the National Commission for Civic Renewal, documenting a 30 year-long decline in the nation's civic health.

A central challenge facing any effort to build an index of civic health is that of the availability of continuing periodic measurements of the elements that make up the index.

NCoC confronted this problem when, after publication of the 2007 Index results, a private firm which had been a major supplier of data changed its methodology. As a result, several data items that were part of the index were no longer fully comparable to previous years. To address this issue, NCoC and its partners are working with the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey to conduct the 2008 Voting and Civic Engagement Supplement to the Current Population Survey. The survey will provide reliable data, from 60,000 U. S. households, on connecting to civic and religious groups; connecting to others through family and friends; staying informed; understanding civics and politics; participating in politics; and expressing political views. Importantly, including these data within the framework of information routinely collected by the U. S. Census Bureau will provide a mechanism for building the long-term, uninterrupted data series that are essential for meaningful monitoring of the nation's civic health.

Florida's Civic Health: A First Approximation.

In this report, we take the first step toward building a reliable and continuing index of Florida's civic health. Our approach will be to begin with the limited data that are currently available from the Current Population Survey. In the longer term, future reports will incorporate additional CPS data as it becomes available. When possible, we will supplement CPS results with survey data -- as we will do here -- in order to add depth to our understanding of the state's civic condition.³ We expect that future CPS data will add richness to our understanding of Florida's civic health. We do not, however, expect that they will change the fundamental picture suggested by the results presented here.

We begin with the simple act of voting. A bare minimum civic responsibility in democratic systems requires that citizens engage in the opportunity to exercise choice in the selection of those who would govern. Indeed, citizen participation in free elections is the *sine qua non* of representative democracy. Without it, a critical link in the chain of accountability is broken and citizens yield

control over the choices made by their leaders. **Figure 1 shows** the average turnout across the past three elections (2002-2006) by state. Setting a standard for the nation, an average of over seventy percent of Minnesota's registered citizens showed up to vote. In another half-dozen states, an average of more than 60 per cent of registered citizens voted. At the other end of the spectrum, there were 11

states – anchored by West Virginia – in which fewer than half of the registered voters went to the polls. Florida fell closer to the bottom of the list than the top. Florida is ranked at number 32 in turnout; only slightly more than half (52.3%) of registered Floridians actually voted. Since only about 56 percent of adults over 18 are registered, this means that *less than 30 percent of the Florida's eligible population can typically be expected to participate in a general election.*

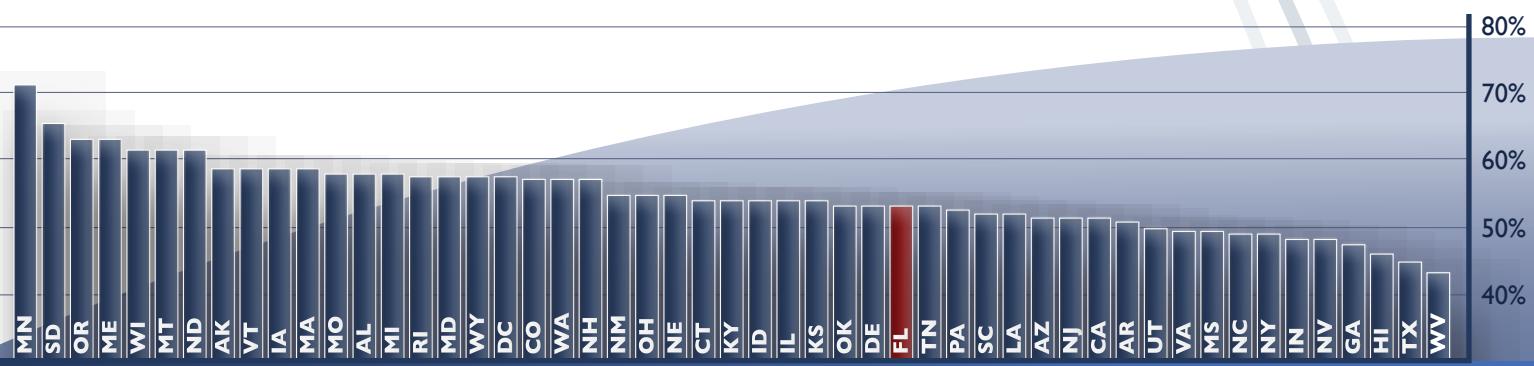


FIGURE 1
CIVIC HEALTH INDICATOR 1: AVERAGE VOTING TURNOUT 2002-2006

Alexis de Tocqueville observed of America in 1834, that “in no country of the world has the principle of association been more successfully used or applied to a greater multitude of objectives than in America.”⁴ Indeed, voluntary associations are at the heart of citizen engagement. It is in associations that we build arts centers, advocate for and against ideas, feed the homeless, solve community problems,

and hundreds of other purposes. By aggregating citizens with common interests and articulating them in the decision-making process, associations give voice and power to ordinary citizens. The viability of voluntary associations depends, however, on willingness of citizens to contribute their time and other resources to the association’s goals.

Figure 2 shows, by state, the average – for 2006-2007 – percentage of citizens who reported that they had undertaken any volunteer activities either for or through an organization in the past year. Not surprisingly, perhaps, because of its extensive and active Mormon population, Utah tops the list with more than 40 percent of its citizens reporting that they had volunteered during the past year.

Several others are within striking distance of the Utah volunteering rate, including Minnesota, Alaska, Nebraska and Montana. At the bottom of the list are three states in which the rate of volunteering is less than half the rate of the top tier states. Florida, at 19 percent, ranks 47th in the nation. Clearly, something is amiss in this aspect of the state’s civic health.

TOWARD AN INDEX OF FLORIDA'S CIVIC HEALTH CONT.

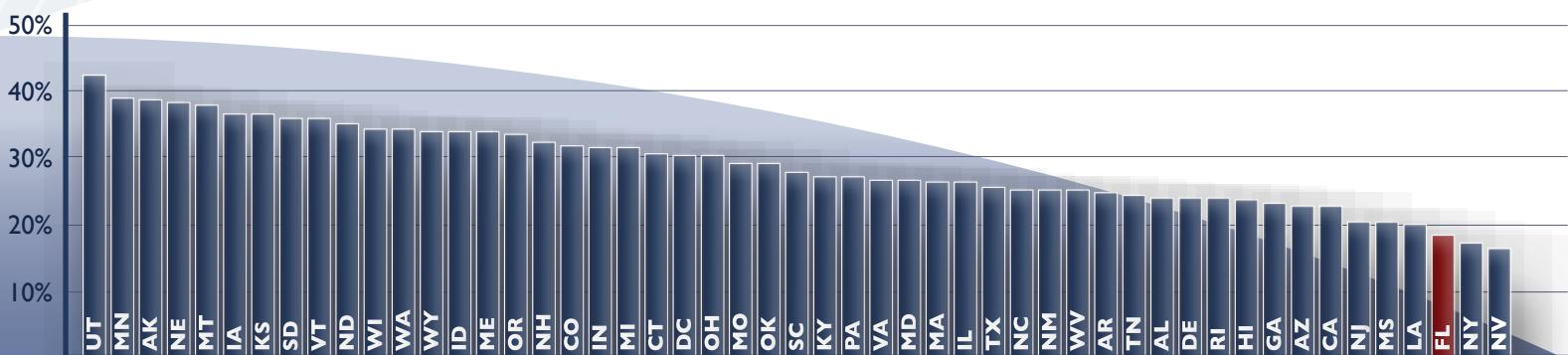


FIGURE 2
CIVIC HEALTH INDICATOR 2: VOLUNTEERING 2006-2007

Our third indicator considers the extent to which citizens choose to involve themselves directly in the process of governing. **Figure 3 shows** the average – for 2006-2007 – percentage of citizens who reported that they had attended a public meeting during the past year. With strong traditions of participatory local governance, Vermont tops the list with more than 20 percent of its citizens reporting that they attended a public meeting. Alaska falls only slightly behind with over 19 percent of its citizens attending public meetings. At slightly under 6 percent, Florida, Tennessee, and Louisiana anchor the bottom of the public participation list. At 49th, evidence points to another dimension of Florida's civic culture that seems less than healthy. Indeed, the state rate of public participation in public meetings is less than one-third of the highest ranked state.

Our final civic health indicator focuses on collaborative problem solving. Communities with strong civic cultures are those in which citizens have the skills and the inclination to join together to address issues of common concern. **Figure 4 shows** the average percentage – for 2006-2007 – of citizens who report that they have worked with other people in their neighborhood to fix a problem or

improve a condition in their community. Once again, Utah stands out at the top of the list with almost 18 percent of its citizens reporting that they have worked with others to address community issues. At the bottom of the list, collaborative community problem solving appears to be almost non-existent.

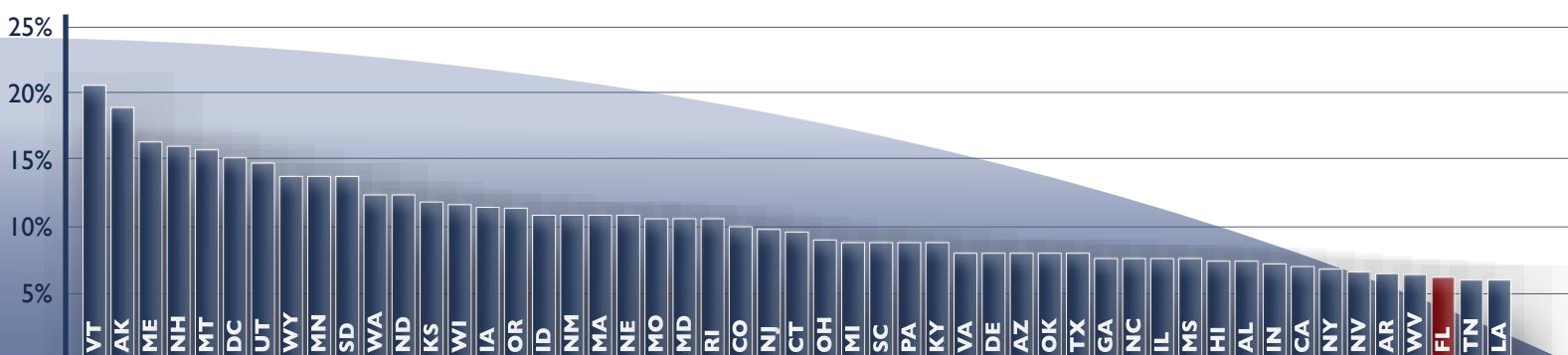


FIGURE 3
CIVIC HEALTH INDICATOR 3: ATTENDING PUBLIC MEETINGS

Fewer than four percent of New Jersey's citizens reported that they have worked with others in their neighborhood. While Florida ranks better on this indicator than others, only about 5.6 percent of our citizens join with others to collaborate in community problem solving. This rate, again less than one-third of the highest ranked state, puts Florida at 40th in the nation.

Combining these four measures, **Figure 5 shows** our Florida Civic Health Index for 2007. Ranked 47th in the nation, Florida earns a civic engagement score of 20.7. It is only 1.7 points from the bottom ranked state – Nevada. The top ranked states, Minnesota, Alaska, and Vermont all earned scores that are over one and a half times that earned by Florida.

We underscore the point that we regard this as a first approximation in an effort to measure Florida's civic health. We will incorporate additional measures as they become available through the CPS. That said, our first approximation leads unalterably to the conclusion that Florida's civic health is among the worst in the nation. While we may not yet need to reach for the defibrillator, there is clearly evidence that a serious checkup and a change of lifestyle is in order.

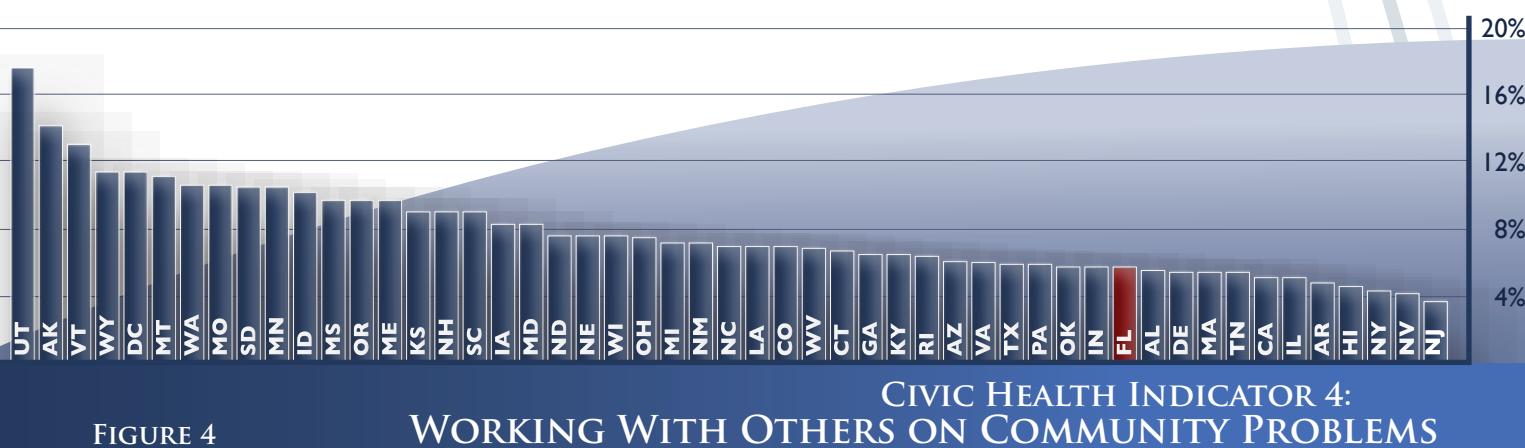


FIGURE 4



FIGURE 5
OVERALL CIVIC HEALTH INDEX 2007

UNDERSTANDING CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

IN FLORIDA 2008

It is important that we begin to systematically understand some of the reasons that underlie the condition of Florida's civic health. As a point of departure in that effort, we turn in this section to the question of differences between Floridians who are engaged and those who are not. It is essential to underscore from the outset that the data from which we will draw have significant limitations. The sample, as described earlier in the report, is relatively small. This means that estimates have relatively large statistical error associated with them. Additionally, the online sample reflects only those Florida citizens who are internet users. Thus, there are clear limitations in the extent to which we can generalize to the entire population. Even with these limitations, however, there are important first steps that we can take to begin to understand the forces that shape Florida's civic health.

Citizens engage with the civic world around them in several ways. Some may simply pay attention to campaigns and, when the time comes, exercise their democratic responsibility to vote. Others may seek deeper involvement and actively engage with campaign organizations by working for a candidate or donating money. Still others may largely eschew politics and devote their time and energy to improving their neighborhoods and larger communities. These are the

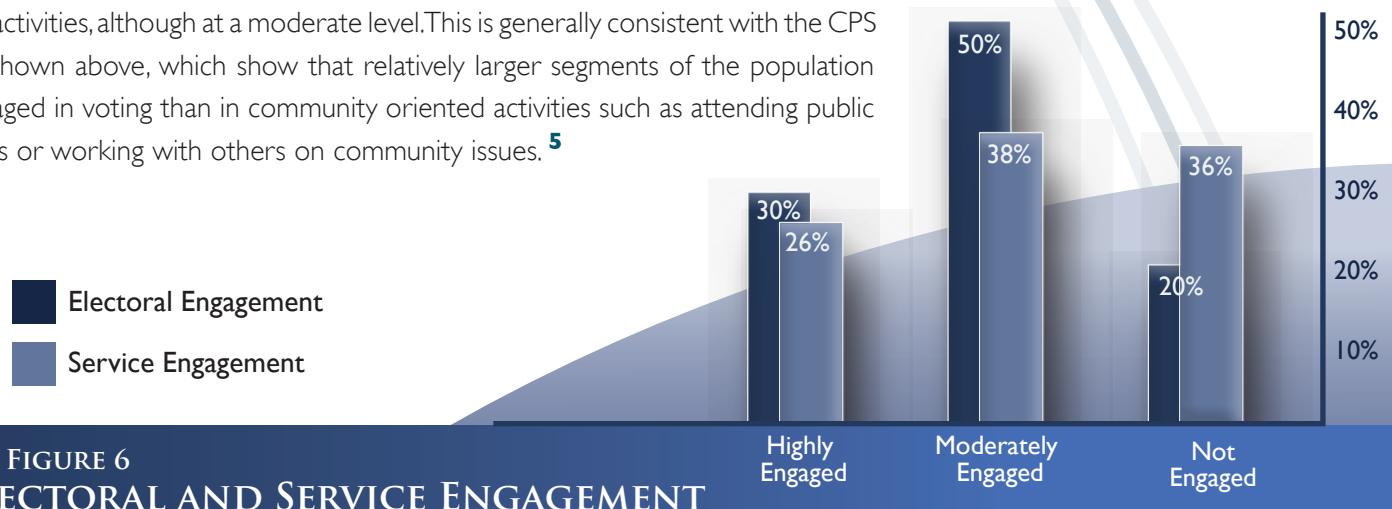
Electoral Engagement: Respondents were given one point for each of the following electoral activities which they reported having done: registering, voting, volunteering for a candidate or campaign, attending political meetings and rallies, giving money to a candidate in person, giving money to a candidate online, and talking to someone about voting for a particular candidate. We counted as "Highly Engaged" those who reported three or more activities. Those reporting one or two activities were designated "Moderately Engaged" Those reporting none were designated "Not Engaged."

individuals whom we see sitting on non-profit boards, feeding the homeless at the local shelter, raising money for an arts center, attending zoning board meetings, or joining a campaign to change the way the community levies taxes.

To reflect different patterns of civic involvement, we created two measures of citizen engagement: Electoral Engagement and Service Engagement. They are defined as follows:

Service Engagement: Respondents were given one point for each of the following service activities which they reported having done: volunteering, belonging to a group/organization, going to a club meeting, and working on a community project. We counted as "Highly Engaged" those who reported three or more activities. Those reporting one or two activities were designated "Moderately Engaged" Those reporting none were designated "Not Engaged".

The distributions for these two measures are given in Figure 6. The overall patterns suggest that relatively more citizens are engaged in electoral activities than in service-related activities, although at a moderate level. This is generally consistent with the CPS results shown above, which show that relatively larger segments of the population are engaged in voting than in community oriented activities such as attending public meetings or working with others on community issues.⁵



**FIGURE 6
ELECTORAL AND SERVICE ENGAGEMENT**

There are good reasons to suspect that there may be generational differences in both levels and patterns of engagement among Florida's citizens. Although there appears to be a turnaround in recent elections, numerous studies have pointed to a low and declining level of voting among youth under 25.⁶ Reports on surveys of college freshmen done by the Higher Education Research Institute suggest a long-term decline in following public affairs by full-time students.⁷ At the same time, Scott Keeter and his colleagues, NCoC and others have pointed to increased rates of volunteering and service engagement among the rising Millennial generation.⁸

We see some evidence of both of those observations in Figure 7, which shows the percentage of each generation engaged in both electoral and service activities. Millennials, along with those who are Generation-X show somewhat lower levels of electoral engagement than do Baby Boomers and the Seniors. The distinction is somewhat sharper when we consider those who are completely disengaged from electoral activities. Almost a third (31 percent) of the Millennials (who are age-eligible to vote) eschew electoral activity completely. This rate is three times that of the Boomers and the Seniors (10 percent). Despite the fact that Millennials show lower levels of electoral

engagement than prior generations, it appears nonetheless that the current presidential election has engaged many young people who have never been involved in politics. The point is buttressed by our finding that about 40 percent of Millennials who are not yet age-eligible to vote report moderate to high levels of electoral involvement. We suspect that if there were comparable data from earlier years, the current level of electoral engagement among Millennials would be somewhat higher than prior years.

UNDERSTANDING CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN FLORIDA CONT.

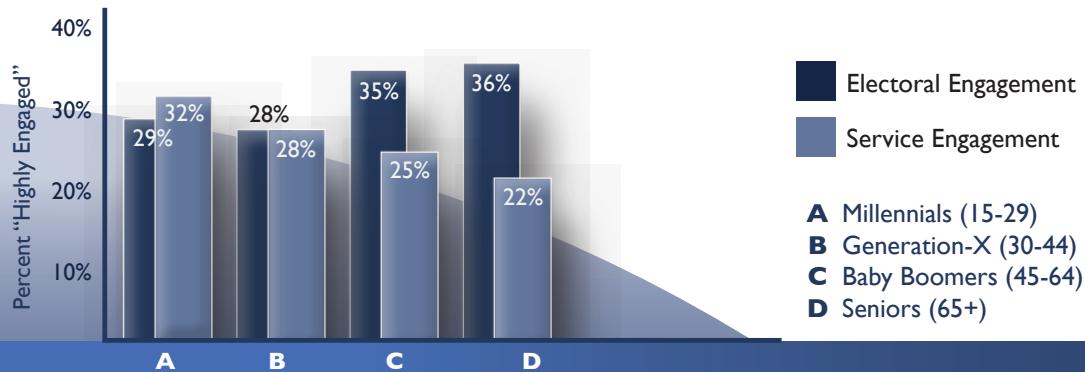


FIGURE 7
ENGAGEMENT ACROSS GENERATIONS

Generational differences in service engagement reported by others also appear among Florida's citizens. Millennials are more likely than either Boomers or Seniors to be highly engaged in service activities. In part, of course, this is undoubtedly due to an emphasis on volunteering and

service learning in both secondary and post-secondary education. Such early experience offers the prospect that the Millennials will be a positive force for civic change and carry with them a commitment to community and service engagement as they move through the life cycle.

Figure 8 shows differences between levels of engagement among Florida's principal racial groups. Interestingly, these data indicate relatively high levels of both electoral and service engagement in the African-American community as compared to both whites and Hispanics. While African-Americans emerge as the most engaged in this snapshot, they along with Hispanics also report relatively high levels of complete disengagement from the electoral process. About a quarter of both African-Americans and Hispanics reported that they had engaged in none of the activities that we asked about, compared to about 16 percent of whites. Undoubtedly the presidential race that includes the nation's first African-American candidate has served as a strong mobilizing force among many African-Americans and perhaps, Hispanics as well. Unfortunately, our data are not sufficient to permit an examination of differences between African-Americans and Hispanics who have been mobilized and those who have not.

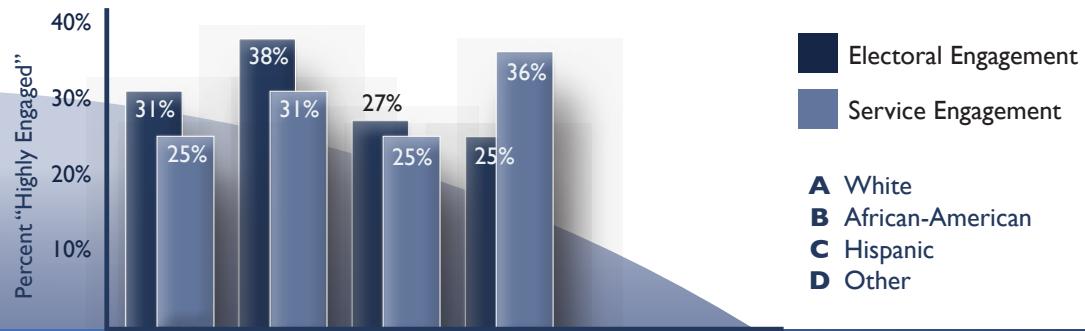


FIGURE 8
ENGAGEMENT BY RACE

As suggested earlier in this report, Florida is not only a diverse state from a racial and ethnic perspective; it is a highly mobile state. “Snowbirds” live here for part of the year and in their “home” state for the other portion of the year. Gross in-migration has hovered close to 2,000 people per day in the past few years, with net in-migration in the range of 1,000 new residents per day. This has no doubt slowed in the face of current housing and energy issues. Nonetheless, mobility is frequently offered – in the press as well as decision making circles – as a principal explanation for some of the apparent weaknesses in Florida’s civic culture.

In Figure 9, we consider a part of this explanation. There, we show the percentage of respondents who are not engaged in electoral and service activities by the length of their residence in the state. While this is an admittedly crude measure, it nonetheless provides some modest support for the notion that residents who have recently moved to the state are more likely to be disengaged than are other, longer-term residents. This is particularly the case

with regard to service engagement, although the pattern is clear with respect to electoral engagement as well. Among those who have lived in Florida for less than five years, nearly half (45 percent) indicated that they are completely uninvolved in electoral activities. Among those who have lived in the state for more than five years only about a third did so. Similarly, about a third of those who are relatively new to the state indicated that they are not involved in any form of community service activities. Among those who have lived here for 10 years or more only about 17 percent report that they are completely uninvolved.

These data suggest that the steady influx of residents to the state may, to some extent, contribute to Florida’s relatively poor civic health. Certainly, there is constantly a pool of citizens who have not yet “put down roots” and developed the social and political networks that offer pathways to engagement and the evidence here indicates that they are less involved than those who have been in the state for a longer time. The effect does not appear to be large, however, and many newcomers are engaged at some level. The condition of Florida’s civic health results, no doubt, from a combination of factors and population mobility is only a part of the picture. The question bears further exploration and it is important that it be considered because population mobility and rapid development are a significant part of the context within which civic engagement occurs – or does not – in Florida.

UNDERSTANDING CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN FLORIDA CONT.

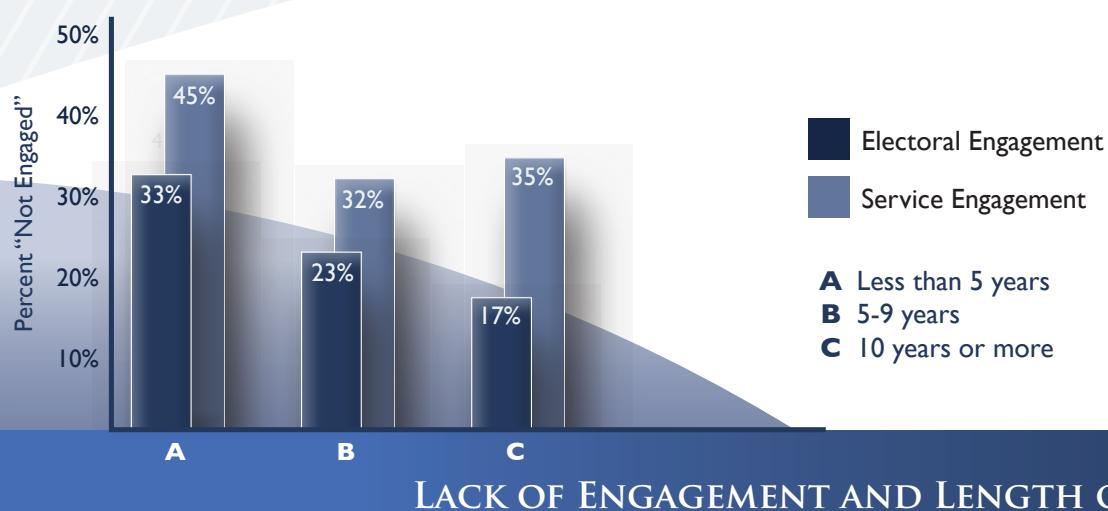


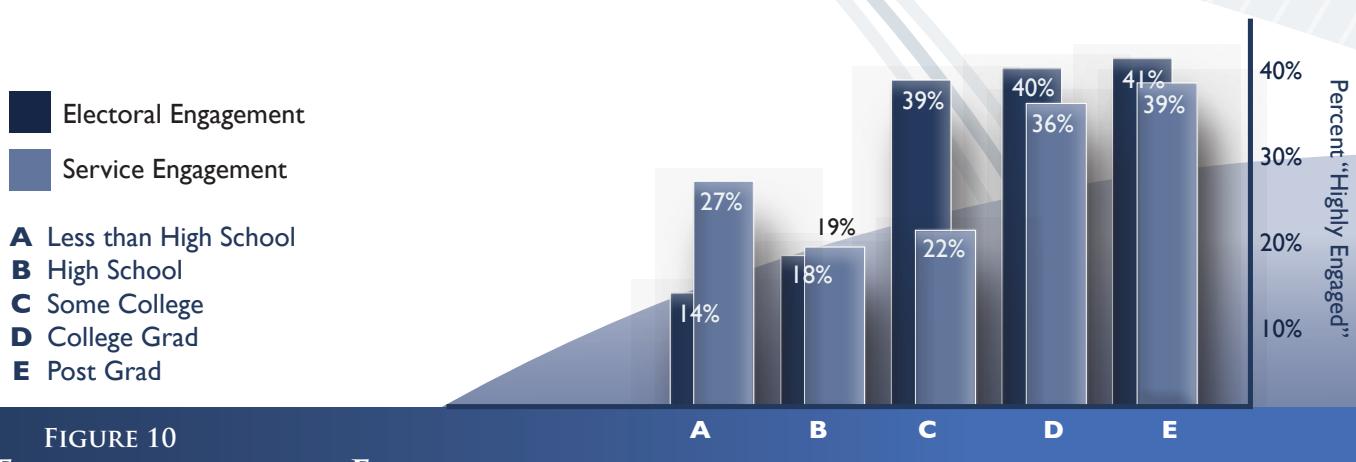
FIGURE 9
LACK OF ENGAGEMENT AND LENGTH OF RESIDENCE

We turn finally to the question of education. One of the things we know from more than 40 years of social research is that education (along with income) has an important influence on citizen involvement.⁹ As [Figure 10 shows](#), the impact of education on the civic involvement of Florida citizens is both clear and consistent. Those who have attended or graduated from college are almost three times as likely to have a high level of electoral engagement as those who have not completed high school. Similarly, except for the “less than high school” group, service oriented engagement shows a sharp

increase with increasing education. The exception among those with less than high school education is attributable to the fact that some of the sample respondents who are under 18 are still in school and are, no doubt, engaged through school related activities. To account for this we examined those who reported that they had less than a high school education and had not been a student within the past year – dropouts. Although the number of cases is small, the results are significant. *Virtually no high school dropouts reported that they were highly engaged either in community service or electoral activities.* In fact, majorities of the dropouts in our sample reported that they had engaged in no community service or electoral activities.¹⁰ Based on these results and our understanding of the long-established relationship between education and civic involvement, it is not unfair to conclude that the vast majority of Florida’s citizens who slip through the cracks of the educational system do not live in the same Tocquevillian world that many of the rest of us experience on a daily basis.

This is an especially important point. Florida’s graduation rate is among the worst in the nation, as [Figure 11 shows](#). While a dozen states, led by New Jersey, managed to graduate an average of more than 80 percent of their entering high school freshmen between 2000 and 2005, Florida graduated only 64.5 percent of its entering freshmen – ranking 45th in the nation. In fact, Florida did only 5.5 percent better than the bottom of the list – South Carolina. What this means is that more than a third of our entering freshmen each year are likely to be completely cut off from civic life – unaware, uninformed, and uninvolved.

Though far from conclusive, this preliminary exploration of factors that underlie Florida’s civic health has been instructive. Consistent with national findings, it appears that Florida’s youngest generation (the Millennials) is more engaged in community service than are earlier generations. It is possible, as some have suggested, that these young people are the front of a new wave of citizen engagement

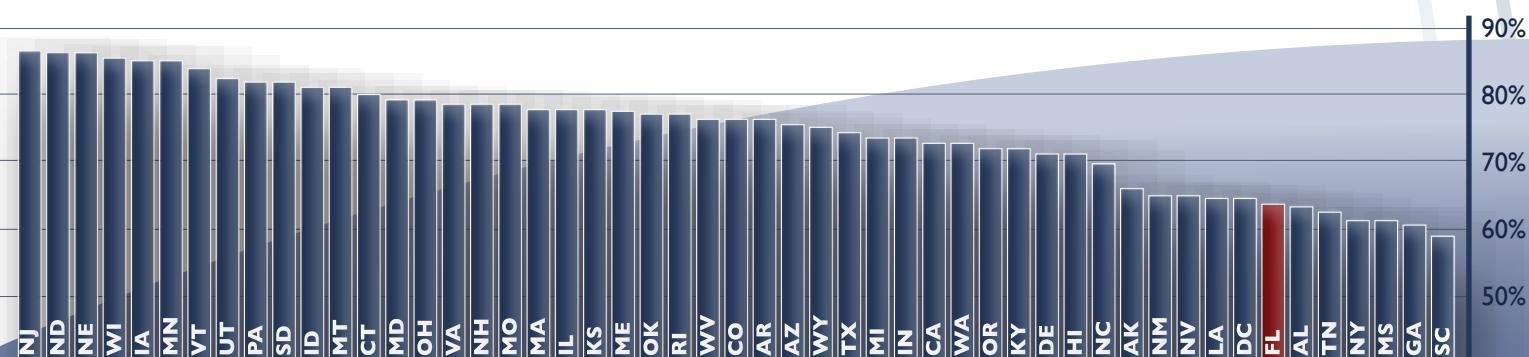


**FIGURE 10
ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATION**

with communities and voluntary organizations throughout the state. The challenge, of course, will be to find ways to encourage continued engagement beyond high school and college settings. In addition, it seems clear that service engagement and explicitly political engagement do not go hand in hand. Despite recent increases in youth voter turnout and palpable presidential campaign engagement on college campuses, there remains a disconnect between young people and traditional forms of political engagement.

Perhaps the most compelling and helpful findings in this brief exploration emerge from a confirmation of the importance of education – both explicitly civic education and education more generally – for citizen engagement.

Education is critical to Florida's civic health in at least two ways. Increased levels of education – especially intentional civic education – provides a pathway to engagement by offering opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are critical to responsible citizenship. At the same time, when the educational system fails, it creates barriers that doom some to a lifetime of second class citizenship. The underlying point is clear, of course. By addressing the overall quality of education in the state; by aggressively working to reduce dropouts; and – we believe – by strengthening intentional civic education, Florida can take important steps toward rebuilding its civic health.



**FIGURE 11
AVERAGE HIGH SCHOOL FRESHMAN GRADUATION RATE 2000-2005**

2008
AFTER

THE ELECTION

Florida voters have engaged in the 2008 presidential elections at levels that have not been seen for some time. Indeed, as [Figure 12 shows](#), the general trend for the state's electorate has been one of disengagement from the presidential primary process. From a relatively enthusiastic turnout high of 58 percent in 1972, presidential primary turnout has generally dropped at each election – with the exception of 1988 – bottoming out at a dismal 19 to 20 percent in the 2000 and 2004 elections. In sharp contrast, the 2008 primary brought Florida voters to the polls at levels not seen in the state for 20 years.

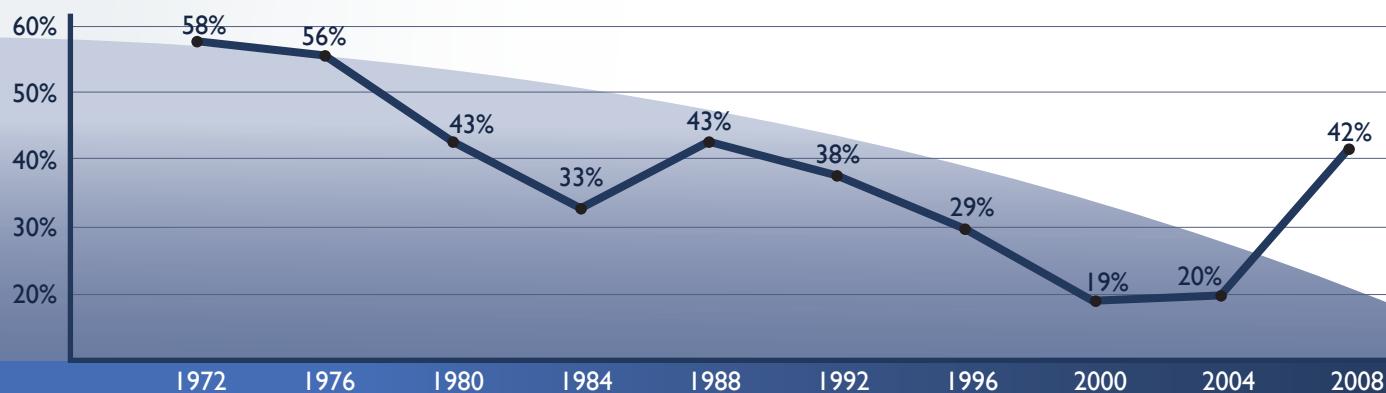


FIGURE 12
FLORIDA VOTER TURNOUT IN PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES 1972-2008

From the point of view of Florida's civic health, the question is whether it is possible to build on the enthusiasm and engagement surrounding the 2008 presidential election to raise the bar; to sustain higher than usual levels of citizen involvement after the election?

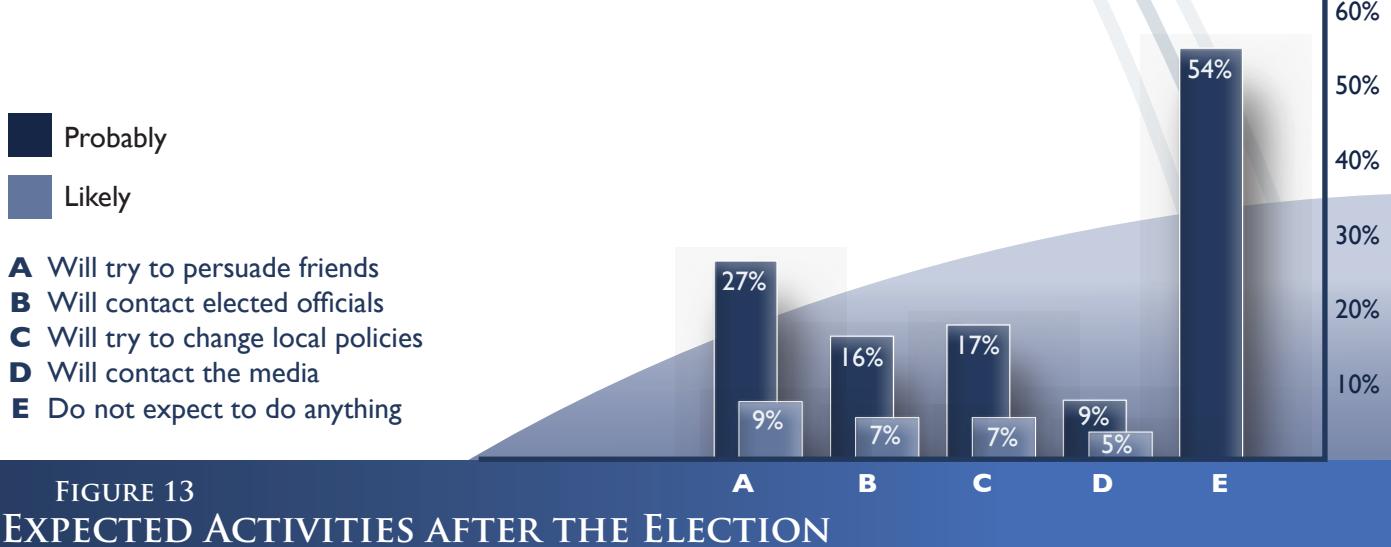
To explore that issue, we examined the question whether Americans will act voluntarily on issues that were specifically raised during the political campaign. We asked people whether they expect to engage after the election in any of four possible ways:

1 contacting elected officials about issues raised in the campaign,

2 contacting the media about such issues,

3 discussing such issues with friends, and

4 working to change local policies in schools, workplaces, etc.



We expected inflated results due to social desirability bias and unrealistic expectations. However, less than a majority – 46 percent -- said that they might do at least one of these things. Each specific action drew fairly low responses. Only just over a third said that they would try to “persuade friends” about issues and only 14 percent had any thought of contacting the media about issues. In fact, 54 percent of these respondents said that they are not likely to be involved in any of these activities.

These data provide little cause for optimism that the excitement surrounding the 2008 presidential election will provide a significant pathway to a higher level of engagement among Florida's citizens. We rather suspect that such a change is likely to be longer-term and require structural changes – such as improved K-12 civic education. For most, it seems, the excitement of a single electoral season does not necessarily provide a stepping stone to a new level of civic activity.

SUPPORT FOR POLICIES TO STRENGTHEN OUR CIVIC HEALTH

The 2008 Civic Health Survey asked respondents about seven potential policy reforms that have been proposed by "ServiceNation" and others as a "way to get citizens more involved." Those proposals included:

Offering young people a chance to earn tuition money for college in return for a year of community service;

Changing the way we discuss national policy choices by setting up a process for a national deliberation that might include as many as a million people;

Requiring high school students to do community service as a part of their course work (i.e., service-learning);

Requiring high school students to pass a new test on civics and government;

Providing federal support for non-profit, faith-based, and civic organizations that use volunteers;

Reducing the curriculum influence of NCLB testing by letting local citizens take the lead in setting standards and choosing tests for students in their local schools; and

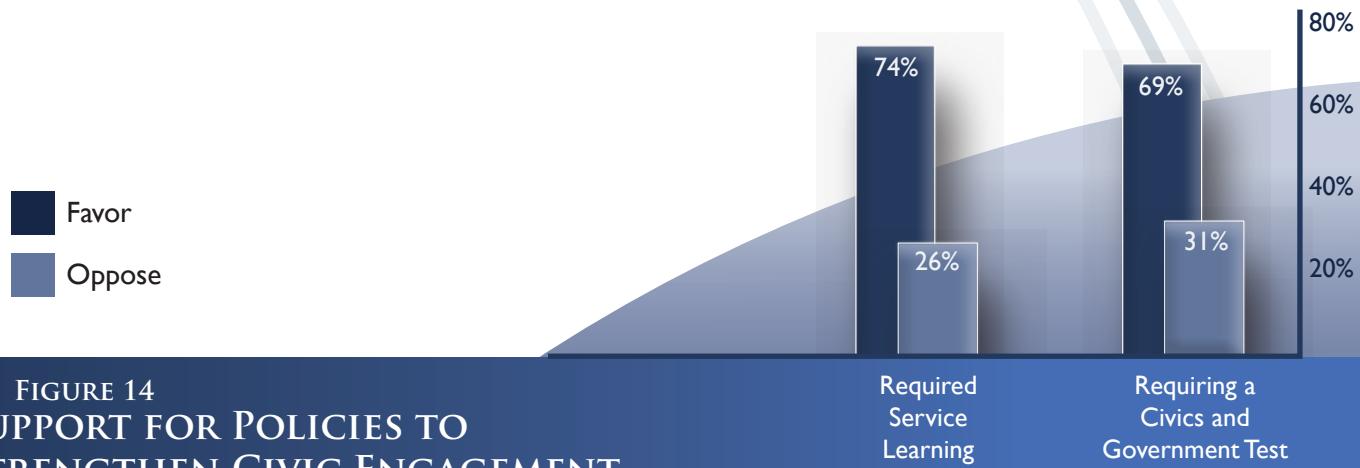
Expanding the Peace Corps and related programs.

Overall, the national 2008 Civic Health Index report concluded that there was strong support for four of the seven proposals: college tuition for service; establishing a national deliberation; required service-learning; and testing civics in schools.

Among these, two are of special interest in Florida: required service-learning and testing civics and government in schools. In 2006, the Florida Legislature considered – but did not pass – legislation that would have mandated service-learning in high schools as a requirement for graduation. In 2007, similar legislation was introduced that encouraged, rather than required, districts to implement service-learning as a part of the K-12 curriculum.

Also in 2006, the Florida Joint Center for Citizenship released *Enlisting a New Generation of Florida Citizens*, an assessment of the state of civic education in Florida. The report made several recommendations to improve civic education in the state. Finding that subjects not tested are often a low priority in the curriculum and thus not taught, a core recommendation was that civics should be added to Florida's assessment system. Under the umbrella of what has come to be known as the Graham-Frey Civics Initiative, bills were introduced in both 2006 and 2007 that would add social studies – with an emphasis on civics – to the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test at elementary, middle, and high school levels. Similar legislation is currently being drafted for introduction in the 2008 legislative session.

As **Figure 14 shows**, there is strong support for requiring service-learning as part of the K-12 curriculum and for developing a new test that would assess civic knowledge. About seven out of ten sample respondents indicated that they would favor these proposals as a “way to get citizens more involved.”



**FIGURE 14
SUPPORT FOR POLICIES TO
STRENGTHEN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

We found majority support for these ideas among all subgroups of the population when we examined gender, race, party, generational status, education, and length of residence in the state. Support was especially strong among Republicans (although 70+ percent of Democrats were supportive) and Baby Boomers and Matures. A majority of Millennials and Generation-Xers supported both proposals, though they were about 10 points lower than the older

generations. Those who are college-educated are especially supportive, with 88 percent in favor of both proposals. We also found generally higher levels of support among longer-term residents compared to those who have moved to the state within the past five years.

In sum, these results suggest that there is widespread support among many Floridians for laws or policies that would institutionalize pathways that would offer hope that our young people will reach higher levels of engaged citizenship than Florida now has. If there is a

prescription for the picture that has emerged in this report of Florida's ailing civic health, surely this, along with generally strengthening K-12 education and addressing the problem of dropouts, is it.

ENDNOTES

1 Several colleagues reviewed this report and offered numerous helpful suggestions. They include Dr. Peter Levine and Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg at CIRCLE, David Smith at the National Conference on Citizenship, Dr. Terri Fine at the University of Central Florida, and John Bridgeland at Civic Enterprises. We are deeply grateful for their help. Remaining errors of omission and commission are, of course, ours.

2 Putnam, Robert D., "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 6, Number 1, January 1995, pp. 65-78

3 It should be noted that other states are also working on efforts to measure the condition of their civic health. In addition to Ohio and California, which are part of this effort, New Hampshire and North Carolina have both released civic index reports based on survey data. The North Carolina report, released in 2003, surveyed young people and adults about their civic skills, behavior, knowledge, attitudes and opportunities (see http://www.sog.unc.edu/programs/civiced/publications/nc_civic_index.php). The New Hampshire Civic Index, based on a survey of almost 800 citizens, focuses on five key areas of civic life, including questions about civic activities, confidence in individual civic skills, trust in our civic and political institutions, civic knowledge, and most important sources for information about politics and civic life (see <http://www.nhcivicindex.org/pdf/nhcivicindex-web.pdf>).

4 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America : an annotated text backgrounds interpretations* edited by Isaac Kramnick, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007, Ch. 12.

5 The numbers produced by the CPS and those shown here are not directly comparable, of course. First, the survey results are from an online sample, which means that those who do not use the internet are not represented. Second, respondents may tend to overstate their rate of participation in socially desirable activities like voting. And third, because the sample size is small, resulting estimates have relatively large standard errors and thus may be unstable. Our interest in the online survey data is less in estimating population parameters than in understanding the patterns of difference between those who report being engaged versus those who are not.

6 See, for example, Lopez, Mark Hugo, Emily Kirby, and Jared Sagoff, *I, The Youth Vote 2004*, College Park, MD: Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, July 2005..

7 Pryor, J.H., Hurtado, S., Saenz, V.B., Santos, J. L., & Korn, W. S. (2007). *The American Freshman: Forty Year Trends*. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.

8 Keeter, Scott, Cliff Zukin, Molly Andolina and Krista Jenkins, *The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait* (College Park, Md: The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2002); National Conference on Citizenship, *America's Civic Health index 2007*, Washington, D. C., 2007

9 Verba, Sidney and Norman H. Nie. *Participation in America: political democracy and social equality* New York, Harper & Row, 1972; Verba, Sidney, Norman H. Nie, and Jae-on Kim *Participation and political equality: a seven-nation comparison*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978.

10 Because the Florida sample includes only 506 cases, the number of "dropouts" is quite small ($n=15$). To examine the relationship with additional data, we combined the Florida, California, and Ohio samples, yielding a combined sample size of 1612. In the combined samples, there were a total of 84 dropouts. Only four percent of those respondents reported a high level of either electoral or community service activity.

Almost two out of three (64 percent) reported having been engaged in no community service activity and over a third (35 percent) reported no electoral activity at all. Thus, while the estimates from the Florida sample clearly have large standard errors for this sub-population, we are convinced that the underlying point is accurate: high school dropouts are disproportionately disengaged from civic life.

2008 AMERICA'S CIVIC HEALTH INDEX

Civic Indicators Working Group

JOHN BRIDGELAND, CEO, Civic Enterprises; Chair, National Advisory Board Chairman, National Conference on Citizenship; and former Assistant to the President of the United States & Director, Domestic Policy Council & USA Freedom Corps;

JOHN DIULIO JR., Frederic Fox Leadership Professor of Politics, Religion, and Civil Society and Professor of Political Science, University of Pennsylvania; and former Assistant to the President of the United States and first Director, Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives;

WILLIAM GALSTON, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution; and former Deputy Assistant to the President of the United States for Domestic Policy;

STEPHEN GOLDSMITH, Daniel Paul Professor of Government, Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University; Director, Innovations in American Government; Chairman, Corporation for National & Community Service; and former Mayor of Indianapolis;

ROBERT GRIMM, JR., Director of Research and Policy Development, Corporation for National and Community Service;

LLOYD JOHNSTON, Research Professor and Distinguished Research Scientist at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research; and Principal Investigator of the Monitoring the Future study since its inception in 1975;

PETER LEVINE, Director of the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at the Jonathan M.Tisch College of Citizenship & Pubic Service at Tufts University;

MARK HUGO LOPEZ, Associate Director of the Pew Hispanic Center; Research Professor, University of Maryland's School of Public Affairs; and former Research Director of CIRCLE;

ROBERT PUTNAM, Peter and Isabel Malkin Professor of Public Policy, Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University; Founder, Saguaro Seminar: Civic Engagement in America; and author of *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*;

THOMAS SANDER, Executive Director, the Saguaro Seminar, Harvard University;

DAVID SMITH, Executive Director, National Conference on Citizenship; Founder, Mobilize.org; and

JONATHAN ZAFF, Vice President for Research, America's Promise Alliance; and Founder, 18to35.

State Partners

KATHLEEN KNIGHT ABOWITZ, Interim Director, Harry T.Wilks Leadership Institute, Miami University; and

DOUGLAS DOBSON, Executive Director, Lou Frey Institute of Politics and Government, University of Central Florida

Millennial Working Group

MAYA ENISTA, CEO of Mobilize.org;

THADDEUS FERBER, Founder of Democracy on Facebook; Co-founder and Chair of Youth Policy Action Center; VP of SplashLife; Program Director of Forum for Youth Investment;

CHRISTINA GAGNIER, Chief Information Officer of Mobilize.org;

STEFAN HANKIN, VP/Deputy Research Director of Widmeyer Communications; former Policy Director of 18to35,

MELISSA MARTIN, CEO of SplashLife; Founder of Champions of Hope,

SEAN PARKER, Co-Founder and Chairman of Causes of Facebook/Myspace; Founding President of Facebook; Co-Founder of Plaxo; and Co-Founder of Napster;

HEATHER SMITH, Executive Director of Rock the Vote; and

IAN STORRAR, Chief Operating Officer of Mobilize.org; former Director of Youth Programs of Common Cause.



NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CITIZENSHIP

Founded in 1946 and chartered by the U.S. Congress in 1953, the National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC) is a leader in promoting our nation's civic life. We track, measure and advocate civic participation and engagement in partnership with other organizations on a bipartisan, collaborative basis. We focus on ways to enhance history and civics education, encourage national and community service, and promote greater participation in the political process.

Many distinguished Americans have been involved with the growth and development of the NCoC over the years including Presidents Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower and Chief Justices Earl Warren and Warren Burger. The roster of board members, advisors and guest speakers at NCoC events represent a diverse spectrum of leaders from across government, industry, academia, community and nonprofit organizations and the media; people like Senators Robert Byrd and Lamar Alexander, philanthropists Ray Chambers and Eugene Lang, authors David McCullough and Walter Isaacson, scholars Robert Putnam and Stephen Goldsmith, MTV's Ian Rowe, ABC's Cokie Roberts, AOL's Jean Case, Facebook's Sean Parker, former Clinton Administration advisor William Galston and former Bush Administration advisor John Bridgeland.

The NCoC's accomplishments are many, ranging from fueling the civic energy of the Greatest Generation freshly home from WWII to leading the celebration of our nation's Bicentennial in 1976. The NCoC helped establish the observance of Citizenship Day, every September 17, the week in which we were chartered to hold our annual conference focusing on building an active and engaged citizenry. Most recently, the NCoC has produced *America's Civic Health Index*, the Nation's leading measure of citizen actions and attitudes.

To advance our mission to better understand the broad dimensions of citizenship today and to encourage greater civic participation, the NCoC has developed and sustained a network of over 250 like-minded institutions that seek a more comprehensive and collaborative approach to strengthening our system of self-government.



LOU
FREY
INSTITUTE
of Politics & Government
at the UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

UF | UNIVERSITY of
FLORIDA

College of Liberal Arts & Sciences
Bob Graham Center for Public Service



NATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON
CITIZENSHIP



The Florida Joint
Center for Citizenship
A Partnership for Florida's Civic Health

www.floridacitizen.org

www.loufrey.org

www.graham.centers.ufl.edu

www.NCOC.net

