

# FLORIDA



## CIVIC HEALTH INDEX

Communities and the State's Civic Destiny

2009



# 2009 FLORIDA CIVIC HEALTH INDEX

## COMMUNITIES AND THE STATE'S CIVIC DESTINY

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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

#### The Florida Joint Center for Citizenship

A Partnership of 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

And

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## The Knowledge Networks Sample

In April 2009, Knowledge Networks surveyed a total of 3,889 nationally-representative participants, aged 15 or older, for the National Conference on Citizenship. These participants were part of Knowledge Networks' survey panel. Knowledge Networks' national panel is selected using random-digit sampling, address-based sampling, and cell-phone based sampling to minimize potential biases. Knowledge Networks also includes households that do not have Internet connection by providing connection and necessary equipment to those who do not have Internet at home (13.8% of the Florida sample). The national sample included 1,518 respondents. In addition, 2,371 respondents were surveyed as oversamples in California, Florida, Illinois, Minnesota, New Hampshire, and Ohio. The Florida survey yielded a representative sample of 510 respondents. Post-stratification weighting was based on population characteristics estimated by the Current Population Survey and, for Hispanic language usage, by the Pew Hispanic Center Survey. The overall completion rate was 63.4%. The sampling error for the Florida sample is  $\pm 4.3\%$ .

## PREFACE

The National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC) was founded in 1946 to sustain the spirit of cooperation that marked 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 effort 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, Civic Enterprises, and a wide range of distinguished scholars and practitioners. The *Civic Health Index* is intended to help the nation chart its progress toward building and maintaining engaged, effective, and responsible citizens.

In 2008, The Florida Joint Center for Citizenship – 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 – joined with NCoC and organizations in Ohio and California to begin the development of state-level civic monitoring systems. The first result of that partnership was *Florida's Civic Health Index 2008*, released in October 2008. This report is the second in what will be a continuing series intended to inform Florida citizens and policy-makers about the condition of our civic health.

The results reported here arise from an analysis of several data sets. The core measures of Florida's Civic Health Index are derived from the September and November Supplements to the U. S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey for the years 2006 through 2008. Additional results are taken from a probability sample of the U.S. population aged-15 and older. The survey was designed and executed by Knowledge Networks in April 2009. Knowledge Networks employs probability

sampling methods to construct an online panel that is representative of the U. S. population.

In future years, we anticipate that the monitoring of Florida's civic health will rely almost exclusively on the Current Population Survey. The CPS has been collecting data on voter turnout for more than 20 years and, in collaboration with the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), began collecting annual data on volunteering in America in 2002. Working with CNCS, NCoC, Civic Enterprises, and others, items were added in 2006 to gauge the extent to which citizens attend public meetings in their communities and work in cooperation with others to help solve community problems. The 2008 CPS added an indicator of charitable giving.

Using the CPS as the nation's primary tool for collecting information on the state of our civic health was codified in the 2009 Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act. The Act calls for NCoC, CNCS, and others to work with the Census Bureau to define the range of data to be collected and to report to the nation on the state of America's civic condition every year. It is anticipated that additional information will begin to be available through the CPS by December 2009.

We wish to express our deep appreciation to the National Conference on Citizenship, CIRCLE, Civic Enterprises, 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 Current Population Survey (CPS)

The monthly CPS collects primarily labor force data about the civilian non-institutional population living in the United States. The CPS uses a multistage probability sample based on the results of the decennial census, with coverage in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The sample is continually updated to account for new residential construction. Interviews are generally obtained from more than 50,000 households producing an unweighted sample size in excess of 100,000 respondents. Volunteer Supplement questions are asked in September of each year and Voting Supplement questions are asked in November. The sample universe includes persons age 15 years old or older.

Data reported here for the state of Florida is based on a sample of more than 4,000 respondents. CPS weights the data to match estimated population totals. Unless otherwise noted, CPS data reported here have been averaged across three years (2006-2008) to improve the accuracy and stability of the estimate.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Florida's Civic Health Index is intended to permit us to annually chart the condition of the state's civic life. The Index has been developed in partnership with the National Conference on Citizenship and with the support of the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at Tufts University.**

This year's report considers indicators of the state's overall civic health and, for the first time, explores the civic condition of Florida's major metropolitan areas. It also examines the effects of the collapse of the housing market and the subsequent recession on civic life in Florida. Finally, it explores key factors that shape citizen engagement in communities where they live, work, and play. Results reported here are based on data provided by the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey and on a random sample of 510 Florida citizens aged 15 and older.

Key findings are as follows:

**Florida has a weak civic culture. It is, in fact, one of the worst in the nation. For 2008, Florida ranked**

**34th** in average voter turnout;

**49th** in the percentage of its citizens who volunteered;

**48th** in the percentage of its citizens who attended a public meeting; and

**37th** in the percentage of its citizens who worked with others to address a community issue.

A preliminary estimate puts Florida at 44th in the nation in the percentage of its citizens who contributed at least \$25 to charity in 2008.

Florida's overall Civic Health Index for 2008 put the state at 46th in the nation. These results indicate no substantial change between 2007 and 2008.

The weakness of Florida's civic health derives from weaknesses in the civic culture of its communities. Examining nine of the state's largest metropolitan areas, this report found that:

- The civic health of most of Florida's communities falls well below national averages and is far from benchmarks set by communities like Minneapolis, Minnesota, Seattle, Washington, and Provo, Utah.

- The Miami–Ft. Lauderdale and the Sarasota–Bradenton areas have the distinction of exhibiting the weakest civic health in a state whose overall civic health is one of the worst in the nation. Miami–Ft. Lauderdale ranked 50th among the nation's 50 largest metropolitan areas on three key civic indicators – volunteering, attending public meetings, and working with others in the community. Among 75 medium-sized metropolitan areas, Sarasota–Bradenton ranked 70th or lower on voter turnout, volunteering, and working with others.
- Some Florida communities – notably Palm Bay-Melbourne and Tampa-St. Petersburg – have developed stronger civic cultures than others in the state. These communities demonstrate that it is possible – even with all of the challenges wrought by rapid growth and high levels of diversity – to do better and, in some cases, even excel in the goal of fostering more engaged communities.

Our 2009 survey data indicates that the double hit of a collapsing housing market and a world-wide recession may be having negative effects on citizens' engagement in their communities.

- 70 percent say that they have cut back on civic activities in the past year.

Not only do citizens report that they have reduced their levels of civic activity as a result of economic pressures, they believe that others in their communities are doing so as well.

- Only 17 percent told us that people in their community were responding to the economic situation by helping one another and serving the community more; and
- 70 percent believe that others in their communities are turning inward, looking out for themselves and their families.

There are some bright spots in this otherwise gloomy picture of the civic health of Florida and its communities.

- Many of those who are already engaged in their communities are doing more; 46 percent of those who were highly engaged in their communities over the past year reported that they are expanding their civic involvement rather than contracting.
- Institutions like churches that facilitate the development and maintenance of social networks are helping to soften the effect of the state's economic challenges; 40 percent of those who attend religious services regularly are increasing their civic involvement.
- To help meet basic needs like food and shelter, many Floridians are reaching out to relatives and others with support in this time of economic difficulty.:

**15%** allowed a relative to live in their home because they needed a place to live;

**13%** allowed a non-relative to live in their home because they needed a place to live;

**42%** gave food or money to a relative who needed it; and

**50%** gave food or money to a non-relative who needed it.

Despite some bright spots and evidence of personal compassion among some of the state's citizens, it is clear that Florida's communities face a significant challenge to not only improve the state of their civic health, but to find ways to avoid further deterioration of citizen engagement.

In this era of economic readjustment, it is particularly important that communities throughout the state begin a dialog about concrete strategies to shape their civic destiny. The strength, vitality, and robustness of Florida's civic infrastructure is not just a theoretical matter that pertains to an abstract, idealized view of what democracy should be. In myriad ways, the vitality of the civic networks in our cities, towns, and villages shapes the lives of our citizens – from food lines that serve the homeless to board rooms that drive community and economic development.

As communities across the state begin to consider their civic future, it is important to remember that there are several important factors that shape citizen engagement. Consideration of these factors may provide communities with strategic opportunities to strengthen their civic cultures.

**Education makes a difference.** Well educated citizens are more engaged in their in their communities. They are more likely to volunteer; they are more likely to be involved in governance; and they are more likely to work with their neighbors to help find solutions to community issues. In the

long-term, strengthening the quality of our state's education system and increasing rates of graduation and college attendance will pay great dividends to our civic infrastructure.

**Florida's seniors are an important resource.** Over three million strong and already highly engaged, Florida's seniors already have a significant impact on the quality of civic life in the state. At the same time, there is room for reaching out to seniors who are not yet involved. In addition, strategies for cross-generational initiatives that allow seniors to model engagement for younger citizens may be important.

**Finding ways to facilitate and support social networks can make a difference.** Churches, synagogues, and mosques are centers of social networks that give sustenance to the civic life of communities. Citizens who have bonds with their neighbors and who interact with them frequently, whether in religious settings or in other venues, are more likely to heed the call to civic action. Expanding opportunities for citizens to form networks and to build the bonds of shared interest will, like improved education, pay future dividends.

**Internet technology may help level the civic engagement playing field.** Social technologies that offer citizens new and innovative ways to connect with each other are a rapidly growing part of the internet. Preliminary analysis suggests that citizens who make use of those social technologies are more engaged in their communities than those who do not. Moreover, internet technologies may provide a pathway to community engagement for those with lower levels of education who are often not a part of civic processes. Creative and strategic use of these technologies thus may strengthen the fabric of civic culture in Florida's communities and provide opportunities for new voices to be heard.

Reshaping Florida's civic destiny will require that cities, towns, and villages take action. It will require that communities be conscious of their civic health and set explicit, intentional goals that will foster citizen collaboration and engagement through a variety of mechanisms. Those goals will no doubt reflect the unique characteristics and settings of Florida's diverse communities; but, if we are to improve the condition of the state's civic health, the common thread must be to encourage Florida's citizens to join hands and take responsibility for our collective future.

# INTRODUCTION

If there had to be one word to describe Florida, it would surely be “diverse” – for the state is diverse in geography, diverse in people and cultures, and diverse in values. That diversity, reflecting the experiences of 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.

## Consider the sketch illustrated by the following statistics.

- **Florida is the 4th largest state in the U.S. and will shortly surpass New York to become the 3rd.**
- **It ranks 49th in the percentage of its native population born in the state, with only about 34 percent of its 2006 native population born here.**
- **It ranks 5th in the percentage of population that is foreign born—18.9% in 2006—and more than a quarter of Floridians speak a language other than English in their home. Further, at 11.6 percent, the state ranks 4th in the proportion of its population who speak English “less than very well”**
- **Florida is below average in household income, ranking 28th in 2006. At the same time, it ranks 2nd in the number of its citizens per thousand who have net assets in excess of \$1.5 million.**
- **At 18.9 percent, the state is 2nd in the percentage of its children who are not covered by health insurance.**
- **Almost one out of five—17 percent—of the state’s citizens move to a new location within the state each year.**
- **It ranks substantially below the national average in per capita newspaper circulation.<sup>2</sup>**

From the rolling, mossy oak-covered hills of the Panhandle to the tourist driven, theme park-dominated central region to the palm tree and estate lined beaches of South Florida, the state is a study in contrasts. Driving across the northern tier of Florida's counties looks, feels, and sounds, more than anything else, like a journey through south Alabama or south Georgia. Driving south on U.S. 1 and making a stop in the central and southern coastal regions of the state is as likely as not to result in an encounter

with a New York or New Jersey accent and a promise of New York style pizza or sandwiches. Taking the other coastal path, down U.S. 19, brings encounters with transplanted mid-western farmers or auto workers who have come searching for easy living, good fishing, and warm winters; and a drive through Miami often feels like being transported to a large Spanish speaking Caribbean island. Added to this picture is the highest proportion of citizens over age 65 in the country; a large “snow bird” population that migrates south around Thanksgiving and back home around the ides of March; and the challenge of accommodating enough new citizens to populate Peoria, Roanoke, or Savannah each year. As someone recently remarked in a Miami meeting, “The only thing we have in common is that everyone is from someplace else.” This is the complex and multi-faceted context within which Florida's civic culture must be understood, for the state is truly a melting pot of people, ideas, and cultural traditions that are almost always in the process of being woven into a whole cloth.

Last year's report—*Florida's Civic Health 2008*—concluded that there is cause for concern about the condition of the state's civic health and pointed to the importance of education, especially explicit civic education, as a vehicle for addressing our civic health. In this report, we revisit key indicators of Florida's civic health while adding new data from 2008. In addition, to the extent permitted by our data, we explore the civic health of some of our state's principal communities. Our goal will be to provide community leaders and citizens with a tool that will allow them to take note of their civic condition and to encourage reflection about the civic destinies of Florida's cities, towns, and villages – for it is the sum of those destinies that will shape the civic character of Florida's future. Finally, drawing on recent survey data, we consider some of the factors that are shaping engagement in the state's communities. In that, we especially try to understand the effects that the collapse of Florida's housing market and current recession are having on the civic fabric of our communities. Our hope for this report is that it will contribute to reasoned discussion about strategies to reach the long-term goal of a fully engaged and responsible citizenry.

# CIVIC HEALTH IN FLORIDA

**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 a Civic Index in 1990 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; (2) community leadership; (3) government performance; (4) volunteerism and philanthropy; (5) intergroup relations; (6) civic education; (7) community information sharing; (8) capacity for cooperation and consensus building; (9) community vision and pride; and (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.<sup>3</sup> 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 health 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 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.

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 developed by NCoC and its partners is based on some 40 measures across nine 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. 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.

## Florida’s Civic Health Index

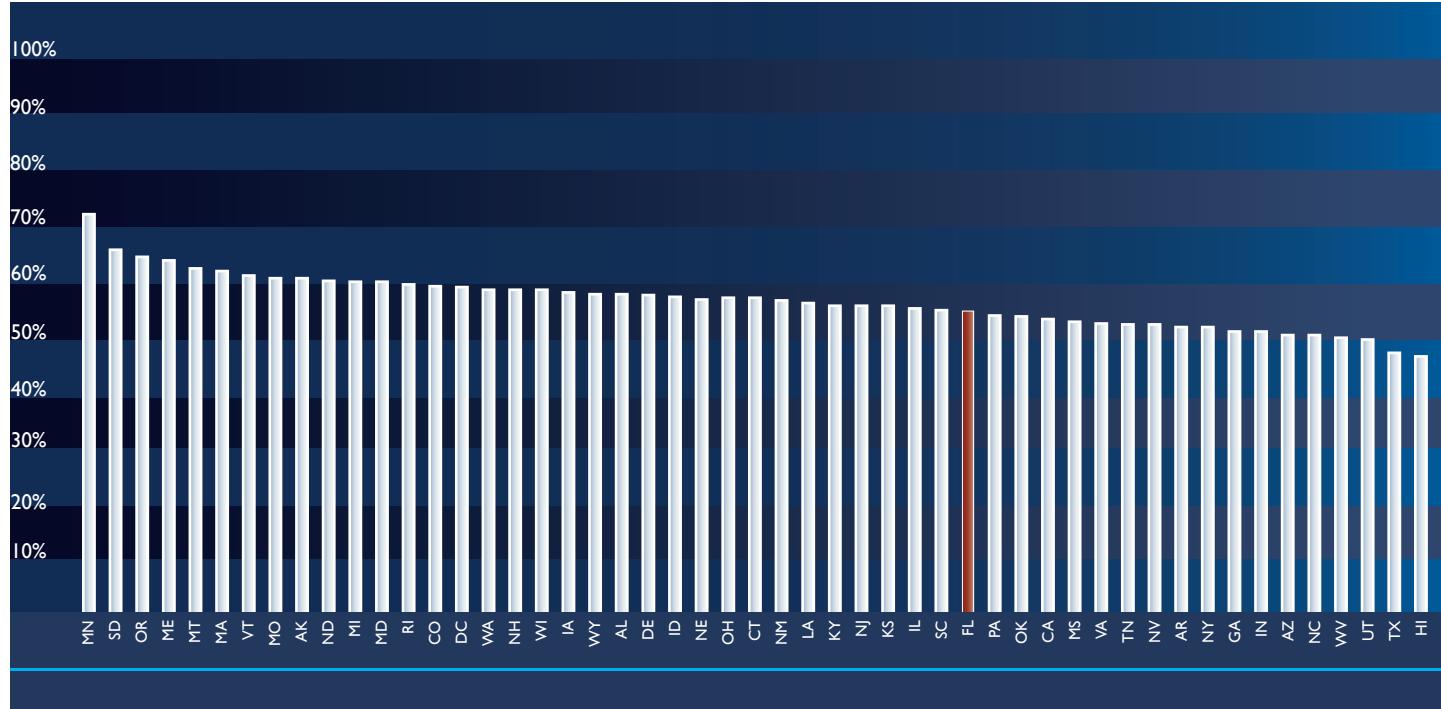
In assessing the condition of Florida’s civic health, we will consider four key indicators – the same indicators examined in the 2008 Index. They include voting, volunteering to serve in community organizations, attending public meetings such as school board or city council meetings, and working with others to address a community issue. These indicators are drawn from the Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey. The most recent data on voting turnout was collected in November, 2008, just after the presidential election. The most recent data for the remaining indicators was collected in September 2008. To improve the reliability of our estimates, we report a three year average for each indicator – 2004, 2006, and 2008 for voter turnout and 2006, 2007 and 2008 for the remainder.

In 2008, the CPS began collecting data on a new indicator of charitable giving. Respondents were asked if they had donated "money, assets, or property with a combined value of more than \$25 to charitable or religious organizations" during the preceding year. We report those data for Florida the first time this year. Since data are available for only a single year; however, charitable giving will not be incorporated as a component of the overall Civic Health Index for 2009. As they are released by CPS, new indicators such as charitable giving will add richness to our understanding of Florida's civic health. They will be incorporated into Florida's Civic Health Index as estimates for multiple years become available. While the addition of new indicators will help us understand various aspects of Florida's civic health, we do not expect that they will change the fundamental picture suggested by the results presented here.

We begin consideration of Florida's civic health with the simple act of voting. A bare minimum of civic engagement in democratic systems requires that citizens participate in the opportunity to exercise choice in selecting those who will govern. Indeed, citizen participation in free elections is arguably the *sine qua non* of representative democracy. Without it, a critical link in the chain of accountability is broken and citizens relinquish control

over the choices made by their leaders. **Figure 1** shows the average turnout across the past three elections (2004-2008) by state. Setting a standard for the nation, an average of over 71 percent of Minnesota's registered citizens turned out to vote in the last three elections. In another 13 states, an average of more than 60 percent of registered citizens voted. At the other end of the spectrum, there were two states – Hawaii and Texas – in which fewer than half of the registered voters went to the polls. Ranked at number 34, Florida fell closer to the bottom of the list than to the top, with an average of slightly more than half (55.1 percent) of registered Floridians voting. The measure of turnout increased slightly this year compared to last year's report, with the three-election average moving from 52.3 percent to 55.1 percent. This is no doubt due to the increased interest in the 2008 presidential election. Increased turnout in 2008 was, however, a national phenomenon affecting virtually all of the states. Thus, while turnout increased in Florida, it did not increase as much as many other states and the state's ranking fell from 32 to 34. It should also be noted that only about 56 percent of adults over 18 are registered to vote; 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: VOTER TURNOUT 2004-2008**



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.”<sup>4</sup> 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, provide recreation for our children, 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 the willingness of citizens to contribute their time and other resources to associational goals.

**Figure 2** shows, averaged by state for 2006 through 2008, the second indicator of Florida's civic health. It is the percentage of citizens who reported that they had undertaken any volunteer activity during the preceding year. Utah tops the list with more than 43 percent of its citizens volunteering. That voluntary action would be so widespread in Utah is undoubtedly attributable in large measure to the strength and vitality of Mormon churches. Putnam and others have pointed to the important role that churches play in facilitating and supporting social networks

that are essential to the development of social capital and civic engagement and we shall have more to say on that point later in this report.<sup>5</sup> Several other states are within striking distance of Utah's impressive rate. Nebraska, Minnesota and Alaska stand out with more than 38 percent of their citizens volunteering. In fact, the top 13 states show strong cultures of voluntary action with more than one out of three of their citizens engaged in some sort of voluntary activity. At the other extreme are three states – Florida, New York, and Nevada – where the voluntarism rate is less than half the rate of the top-tier states. With fewer than one out of five Florida citizens – 19 percent – engaged in any form of volunteering, the state ranks 49th in the nation. There was essentially no difference in the state's rate of volunteering compared to last year's report. As we concluded then, something is amiss in this aspect of the state's civic health, and we see no evidence of movement in a positive direction.

The third indicator of Florida's civic health considers the extent to which citizens choose to involve themselves directly in the process of governing. **Figure 3** shows the percentage of citizens who reported that they had attended a public meeting during the past year – averaged for 2006 through 2008. With historically strong traditions of participatory local governance, Vermont tops

**FIGURE 2**  
**CIVIC HEALTH INDICATOR 2: VOLUNTEERING 2006-2008**

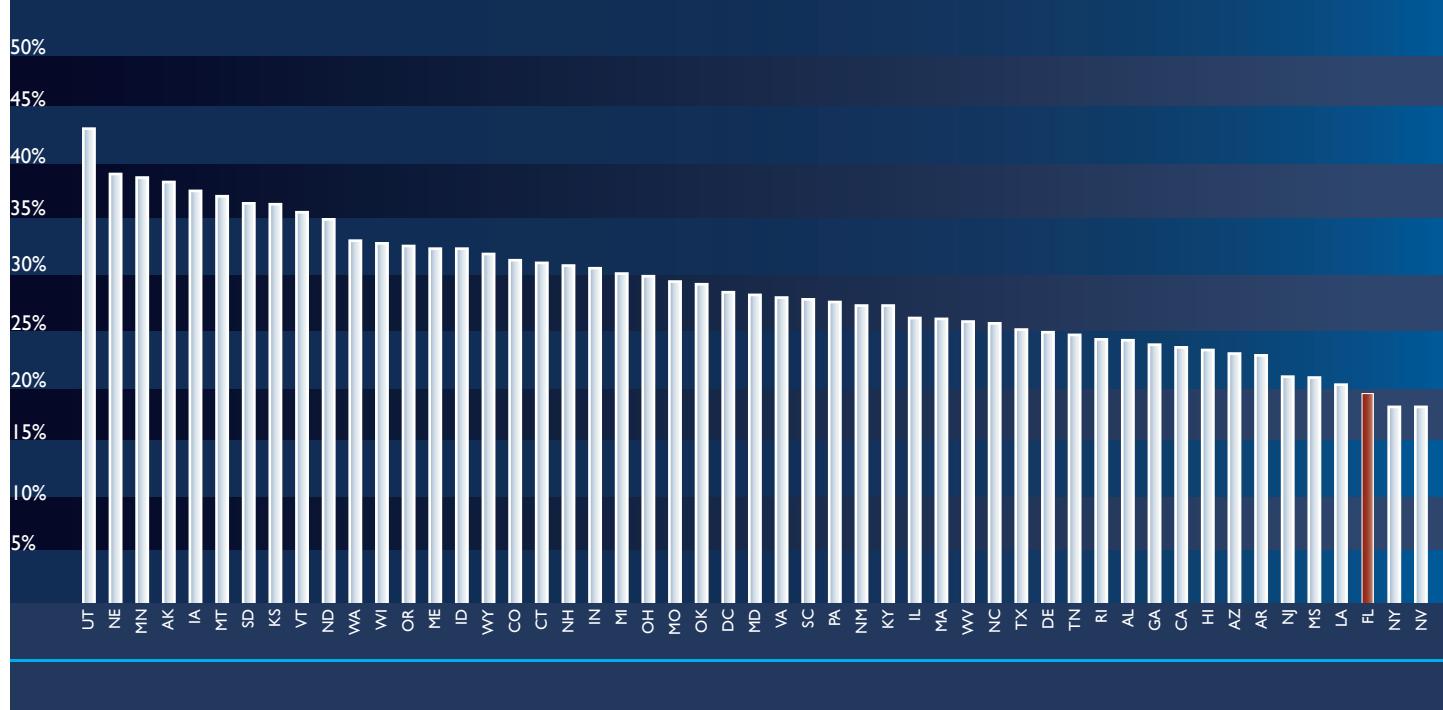
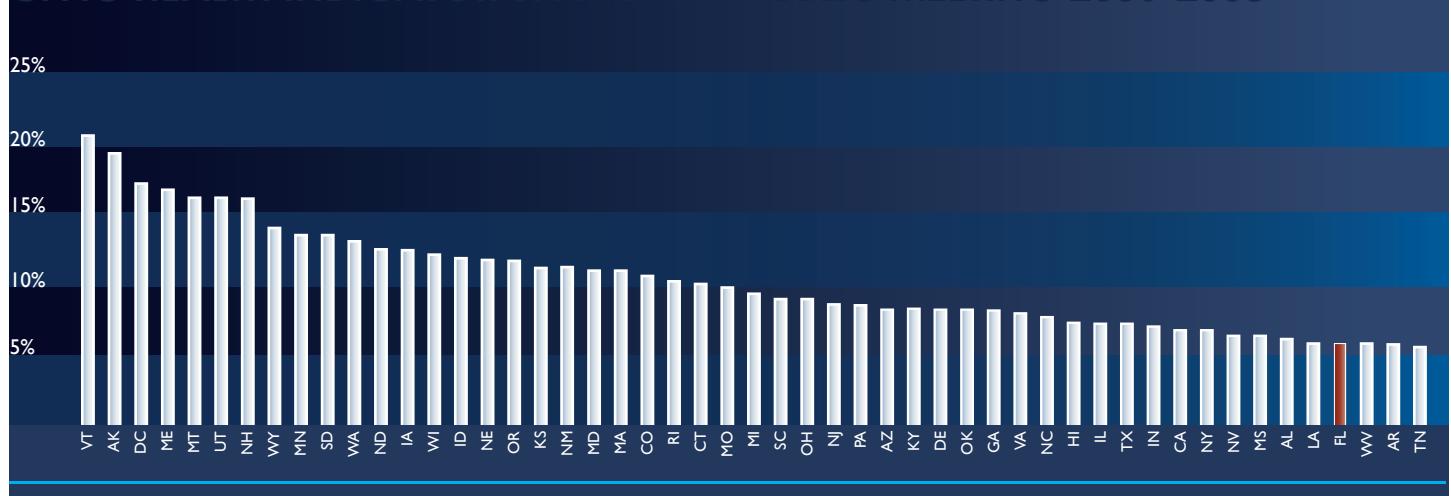


FIGURE 3

### CIVIC HEALTH INDICATOR 3: ATTEND A PUBLIC MEETING 2006-2008

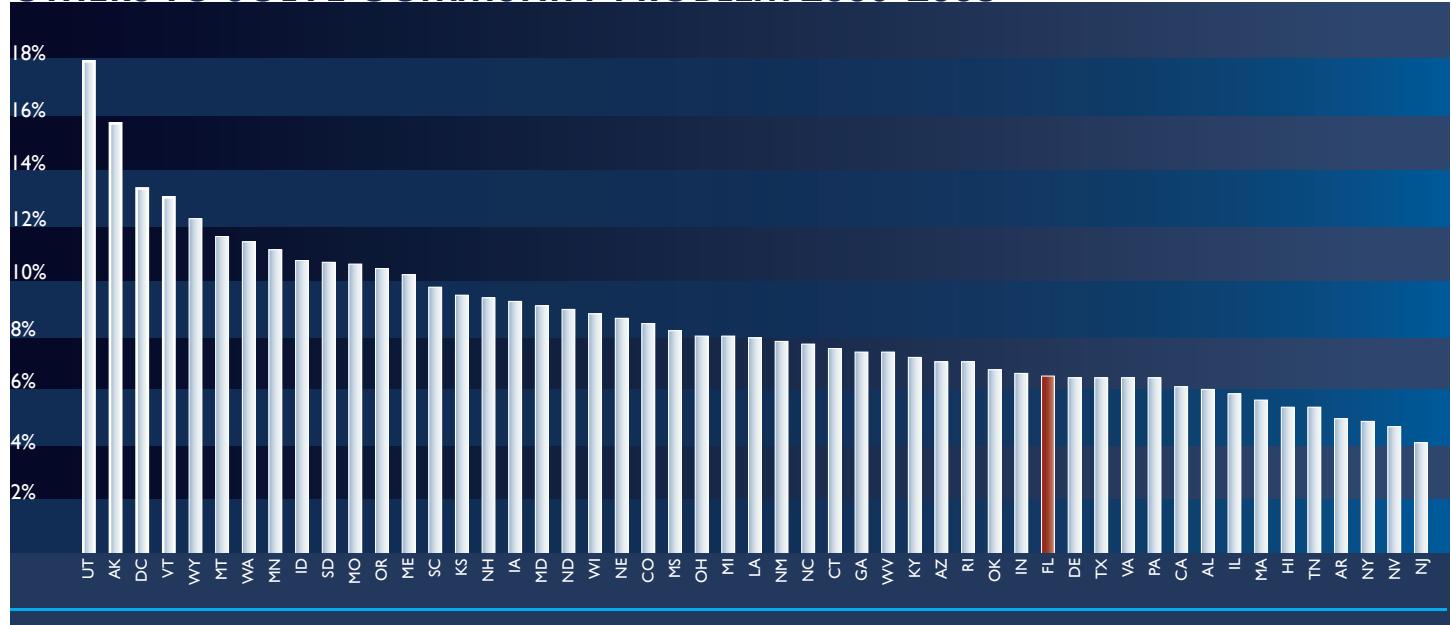


the list with more than one out of five – 20.2 percent – of its citizens reporting that they attended a public meeting. Alaska falls only slightly behind with over 19.7 percent of its citizens joining in public meetings. In fact, at least one out of every 10 citizens reported that they had been involved in a public meeting during the preceding year in fully half of the states. At the bottom of the list, Florida joins a group of states – Alabama, Louisiana, West Virginia, Arkansas, and Tennessee – where only about one of every fifteen citizens participated in a public meeting. Ranked at 48th, Florida's culture of citizen engagement with public officials in public meetings appears to be less than robust. Indeed, the state's rate of public participation in public meetings is less than one-third of the top two states and is half or less of the rates of another dozen states.

The final indicator of Florida's civic health considers collaborative problem solving. Arguably, communities with strong civic cultures are those in which citizens have the networks, skills, and inclination to join together to address issues of common concern and to improve the community. **Figure 4** shows the average percentage – for 2006 through 2008 – 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 collaboratively to address community issues.

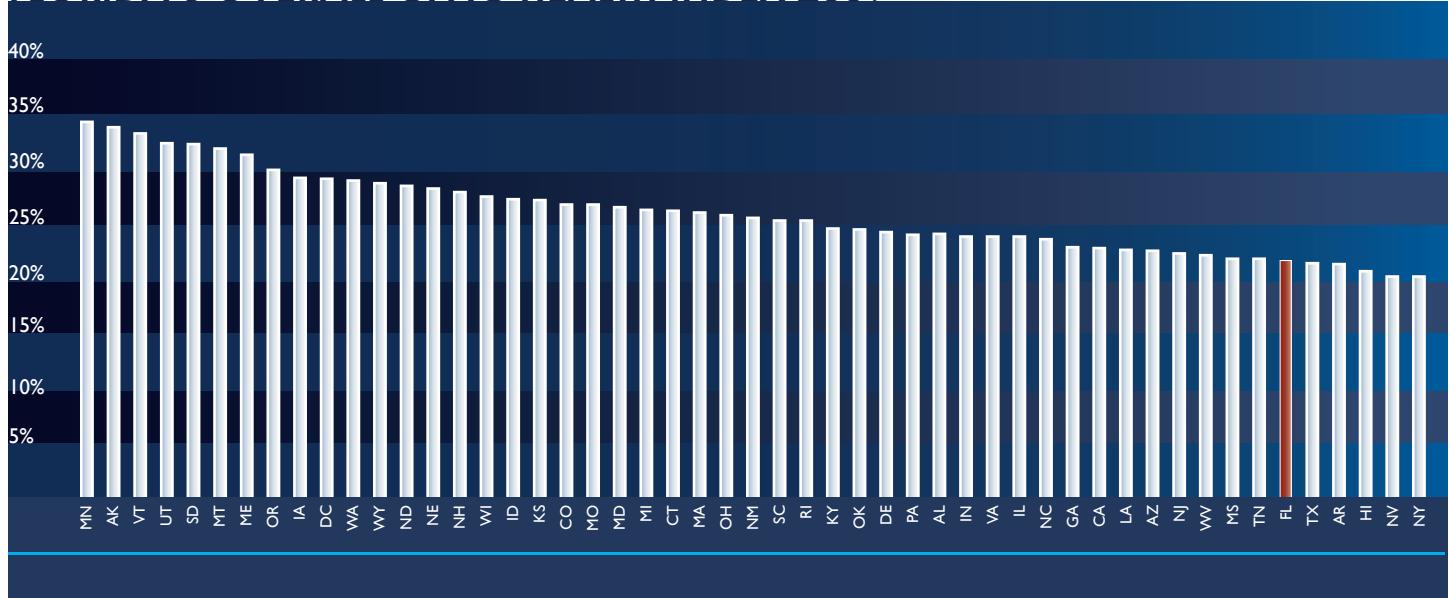
FIGURE 4

### CIVIC HEALTH INDICATOR 4: WORKING WITH OTHERS TO SOLVE COMMUNITY PROBLEM 2006-2008



At the bottom of the list, such collaborative community problem solving appears to be almost non-existent. Only about four percent – fewer than one out of twenty – of New Jersey's citizens reported that they have worked with others in their neighborhood to address community issues. Florida ranks better on this indicator than others and, at 34th in the nation, shows rates of citizen engagement similar to several other states, including Delaware, Texas, Virginia, and Pennsylvania. In all of these states slightly more than six percent of citizens reported that they collaborated with others to address community problems. Florida's score on this indicator is slightly higher than last year – 6.3 percent in 2008 vs. 5.3 percent in 2007. Thus, the state's ranking increased from 40th to 37th. Since several states are clustered close together and the differences are quite small, it would probably be unwise to take much comfort in the apparent improvement in ranking. The key point is that the top ranked states show citizen engagement rates that are two and a half to three times higher than in Florida.

**FIGURE 5**  
**FLORIDA'S OVERALL CIVIC HEALTH INDEX 2009**

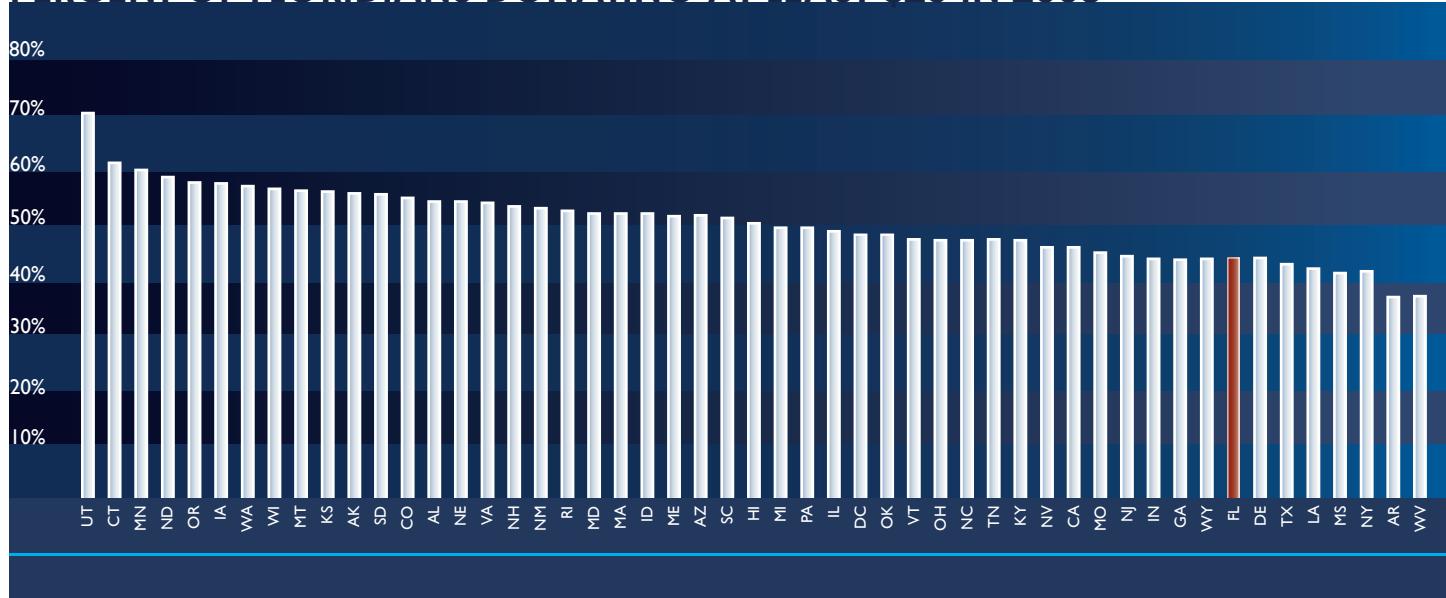


**Figure 5** shows Florida's Civic Health Index for 2009. It reflects the average of the four measures described above. Ranked 46th in the nation, Florida earns a civic engagement score of 21.9 and it is only 1.1 points from the bottom ranked state – New York. It is 11.8 points from the top ranked state, Minnesota. In fact, the top three ranked states – Minnesota, Alaska, and Vermont – all earned civic engagement scores that are over one and a half times that earned by Florida. Once again, these results underscore the point that there are substantial differences in civic cultures across the states. They also reinforce the conclusion of last year's report: **Florida's civic health is among the worst in the nation.**

It was noted earlier that the CPS included charitable contributions as a new measure of citizen engagement in 2008. Although we believed that a single year of data was insufficient to include in our overall measure of Florida's civic health, **Figure 6** shows the 2008 result, which should be taken as a preliminary estimate. Utah again stands out as the nation's leader with almost 70 percent of citizens reporting that they made charitable contributions of at least \$25 during the preceding 12 months. Connecticut and Minnesota follow closely with more than 60 percent of their citizens donating. Florida, once again, was near the bottom. At 44th in the nation, only 46.1 percent of citizens reported contributing at least \$25 to charity. Thus, even though charitable contributions were not used in calculating this year's index, the results are consistent with the conclusion that in virtually all respects, Florida's civic health needs a great deal of attention.

FIGURE 6

## PERCENT OF FLORIDIANS DONATING AT LEAST \$25 IN 2008



### Civic Health in Florida's Communities

Civic engagement does not occur in a vacuum. It happens in places and times where we and those around us care about outcomes. It happens in places where we raise and educate our children, where “soccer moms” get together to discuss common concerns, in garden clubs, in churches and synagogues, in the neighborhood tavern, on the street where we are met by volunteers campaigning for presidents, governors, or city council members, and in the myriad other places where people connect with one another and undertake public work. In short, much of what we understand as civic engagement takes place within the context of the communities where we live, work, and play. This means that communities play a critical role in the development and implementation of strategies to address shortcomings in Florida’s civic health. Ultimately, it is the civic destiny of Sopchopy, Miami Lakes, Madison, Tampa, Winter Garden, Jacksonville, and of all the other 400 plus places that Floridians call home that will shape the future of the state.

To focus on the contribution that communities make to the state’s civic condition, we will this year take the first steps toward measuring their civic health. It would, of course, be desirable to be able to measure and compare the civic health of each of Florida’s communities. Empowered with such information, communities could understand the nature of the civic challenges that they each face and work toward the goal of developing local strategies to meet them. This is exactly the idea that underlies the National Civic League’s Civic Index. It was intended to measure

key aspects of civic infrastructure and to help community leaders and organizations understand what aspects of that infrastructure were deficient and in need of community attention.

Unfortunately, there is no database that will sustain civic engagement measures for all of Florida’s communities and, as desirable as it might be, the cost of developing one would be prohibitively expensive. However, the CPS has samples that are sufficiently large to support reliable estimates for the state’s nine larger “Metropolitan Statistical Areas” (MSAs) – particularly when results are averaged over a three-year time frame.<sup>6</sup> Examination of even this limited set of communities helps us understand where our communities fit within the national picture and to begin to understand the roles that local communities play in determining the state’s civic culture. Thus, even though it is not possible to measure the condition of all of Florida’s communities, we are hopeful that the measurements that we can make will encourage community leaders and citizens alike to reflect on their civic condition and the steps that might be needed to improve it.

The same civic health indicators used to compare states were used to examine the condition of the state’s communities. Table I shows results for the first indicator – voting – for each of the nine selected communities. Since previous work on volunteering has shown that engagement rates are generally quite different in smaller cities compared to large urban areas, we have reported

large and medium-sized communities as distinct groups.<sup>7</sup> For each group, we have also provided a national benchmark – the community ranked first – for each measure. To complete the comparison, national rankings of Florida communities are provided. For large cities, ranks reflect a comparison of Florida's communities to the 50 largest metropolitan areas in the nation. For medium-sized communities, ranks reflect a comparison of Florida's communities to the 75 medium-sized metropolitan areas included in the CPS sample.<sup>8</sup>

**TABLE 1  
2008 CIVIC HEALTH INDICATORS  
FOR LARGE AND MEDIUM-SIZED  
FLORIDA COMMUNITIES**

VOTING 2004 - 2008			
	RANK	MSA	%
<b>LARGE COMMUNITIES</b>	BENCHMARK	1 Minneapolis, MN	74.0
	31	Jacksonville	58.7
	36	Miami-Fort Lauderdale	56.6
	40	Tampa-St. Petersburg	55.9
	46	Orlando	51.1
<b>MEDIUM-SIZED COMMUNITIES</b>	BENCHMARK	1 Madison, WI	73.8
	17	Lakeland-Winter Haven	65.0
	27	Cape Coral-Fort Myers	62.4
	28	Palm Bay-Melbourne	62.4
	45	Deltona-Daytona Beach	59.2
	71	Sarasota-Bradenton	48.1

Reflecting Minnesota's generally strong and vibrant civic culture, Minneapolis tops the national voter turnout list for large metro areas. An average of almost three out of four registered Minneapolis citizens participate in the electoral process. Jacksonville tops the list of large Florida communities with an average voter turnout rate of 58.7 percent, putting it at 31st in the nation. Thus, more than 60 percent of the nation's large urban areas exceed Jacksonville in turnout rates. Jacksonville is followed by Miami-Ft. Lauderdale – at 56.6 percent and ranked 36th – and Tampa-St. Petersburg – at 55.9 percent and ranked 40th. The Orlando region, with an average turnout rate of 51.1 percent is at the bottom of Florida's large metro area list. It also ranks 46th among metropolitan areas nationally, which means that 90 percent of the nation's metro regions have higher rates of electoral engagement.

Among medium-sized communities, Madison, Wisconsin is at the top of the national list with almost three out of four (73.5 percent) of its registered voters going to the polls. On the whole, Florida's medium-sized communities have higher turnout rates than its large metro areas. In addition, they compare more favorably to the national benchmark than do Florida's larger communities. The Lakeland area ranks 17th in the country, with an average turnout rate of 65 percent. It is in the top one-quarter of similarly-sized communities. Similarly, Cape Coral-Ft. Myers and Palm Bay-Melbourne, with identical turnout rates of 62.4 percent, are ranked 27th and 28th respectively, and are within striking distance of the top one-third of similar communities in the nation. Results are less positive in the Deltona-Daytona Beach and Sarasota-Bradenton areas. At 59.2 percent, the voting rate in Deltona-Daytona Beach results in a national ranking of 45th. This means that about 60 percent of similarly-sized communities have electoral engagement levels that exceed those found in the Deltona region. Sarasota-Bradenton, with less than a majority voter turnout, ranks 70th out of 75 communities examined.

**TABLE 2  
2008 CIVIC HEALTH INDICATORS  
FOR LARGE AND MEDIUM-SIZED  
FLORIDA COMMUNITIES**

VOLUNTEERING 2006 - 2008			
	RANK	MSA	%
<b>LARGE COMMUNITIES</b>	BENCHMARK	1 Minneapolis, MN	35.0
	41	Tampa-St. Petersburg	21.4
	43	Jacksonville	20.9
	47	Orlando	17.0
	50	Miami-Fort Lauderdale	13.2
<b>MEDIUM-SIZED COMMUNITIES</b>	BENCHMARK	1 Provo-Orem, UT	55.0
	27	Palm Bay-Melbourne	29.4
	39	Cape Coral-Fort Myers	26.6
	62	Lakeland-Winter Haven	21.9
	70	Sarasota-Bradenton	19.1
	73	Deltona-Daytona Beach	18.1

**Table 2** shows results for our second civic health indicator – volunteering. Once again, Minneapolis sets the standard for large cities in the nation with 35 percent of its citizens engaged in some form of voluntary action. Among Florida's large communities, the Tampa-St. Petersburg area ranks at the top with 21.4 percent

of its citizens volunteering. Tampa-St. Petersburg is followed by Jacksonville, at 20.9 percent, Orlando, at 17 percent, and Miami-Ft. Lauderdale, at 13.2 percent. These volunteerism rates put all of Florida's major cities at or very near the bottom of the national rankings. In fact, more than 80 percent of the nation's large urban areas show higher rates of citizen volunteering than did any of Florida's large cities. Recalling that Florida ranks 49th among the states in voluntary action, it should be noted that the state's largest metro area – Miami-Ft. Lauderdale – anchors the bottom of the national list among sister metropolitan regions. It is thus – with respect to voluntary action – the least engaged community in one of the least engaged states in the nation.

No doubt due to the social networks that are sustained by the Mormon community in Utah, the Provo area leads the nation's medium-sized communities in volunteering with fully 55 percent of its citizens engaged. Though not meeting Provo's high standard, the Palm Bay-Melbourne area, with 29.4 percent of its citizens volunteering, ranks 27th nationally and is at least close to the top third of medium-sized cities across the nation. All of the remaining medium-sized cities in Florida fall in the bottom half in comparison to sister communities. With fewer than one out of five citizens volunteering, the Sarasota and Deltona areas are at the bottom of the Florida list. They rank 70th and 73rd, respectively, out of 75 mid-sized metro communities across the nation.

With the exception of the Palm Bay-Melbourne area, Florida's communities appear to be quite weak in this aspect of their civic health. That said, there are differences within the state that deserve further exploration. About one of five Tampa-St. Petersburg residents volunteer, which is over one and one-half times the rate found in Miami. Similarly, the Deltona area and the Palm Bay area are in neighboring Volusia and Brevard counties, yet their rate of citizen engagement in volunteering differs quite sharply. Understanding whether differential opportunity, differential demand, or differing citizen orientations account for those differences would be an important first step toward helping communities shape their own civic destiny.

**Table 3** provides data on citizen engagement through participation in public meetings. Among large metropolitan areas, the Seattle area sets the national standard with 14.3 percent of its citizens attending public meetings. As is the case with volunteering, all of Florida's large communities, except for Tampa-St. Petersburg,

are near the bottom of the list. With only 4.5 percent of its citizens attending public meetings, Miami-Ft. Lauderdale anchors the Florida rankings and is next to last among large metro areas across the nation. Seattle's rate of public participation is over three times larger than Miami's. In fact, once again reflecting within state differences, the rate of public participation in Tampa-St. Petersburg is about double that found in Miami.

**TABLE 3  
2008 CIVIC HEALTH INDICATORS  
FOR LARGE AND MEDIUM-SIZED  
FLORIDA COMMUNITIES**

ATTENDED PUBLIC MEETINGS 2006 - 2008		
RANK	MSA	%
<b>LARGE COMMUNITIES</b>	BENCHMARK 1 Seattle-Tacoma, WA	14.3
	30 Tampa-St. Petersburg	8.4
	42 Jacksonville	6.5
	44 Orlando	6.3
	49 Miami-Fort Lauderdale	4.5
<b>MEDIUM-SIZED COMMUNITIES</b>	BENCHMARK 1 Provo-Orem, UT	26.4
	13 Palm Bay- Melbourne	13.6
	26 Deltona - Daytona Beach	11.0
	55 Sarasota-Bradenton	7.4
	65 Lakeland-Winter Haven	5.8
	70 Cape Coral-Ft. Myers	4.6

Provo-Orem sets the national standard on this indicator among medium-sized communities with over one out of every four of its citizens reporting involvement in public meetings. In Florida, the Palm Bay-Melbourne region stands out with a citizen participation rate of 13.6 percent. Although it achieves only half of the standard set by Provo, Palm Bay-Melbourne's participation rate exceeds that of the lowest ranked Florida community – Cape Coral-Ft. Myers – by a factor of about three and, at 13th in the nation, the Palm Bay community is easily in the top 20 percent of similarly-sized metro areas. Deltona-Daytona Beach, at 11 percent and ranked 26th, shows a relatively higher level of citizen engagement on this indicator than on volunteering. The remainder of Florida's middle-sized communities fall well into the lower half when compared to others across the nation. Ranked 70th in the nation, Cape Coral-Ft. Myers has one of the lowest levels of citizen participation in public meetings in the nation.

Finally, **Table 4** provides data on the extent to which community residents work with others to improve the community and address community issues. Undoubtedly reflecting the herculean tasks involved in bringing the city back after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans sets the national standard for large metro areas with more than 12 percent of its citizens reporting working with others on community issues. In a now familiar pattern, Tampa-St. Petersburg occupies the top of the Florida list (with 8.2 percent of its citizens working together) and Miami-Ft. Lauderdale anchors the bottom (with 4.1 percent of its citizens working together).

Interestingly, Florida's large communities rate a little better on this civic health dimension than on others. At 15th in the nation, Tampa-St. Petersburg is easily in the top third and Orlando – at 22nd – is in the top half. Miami-Ft. Lauderdale, with only 4.1 percent of citizens working together is, once again, in the lower reaches of collaborative citizen engagement.

Among middle-sized communities, Provo-Orem continues to establish the standard with over a third of its citizens working together to address community issues. Here in Florida, Palm Bay-Melbourne citizens stand out once again, with about 13.4 percent of them working together on community issues. In fact, the Palm Bay area ranks seventh in the nation on this civic health measure.

**TABLE 4**  
**2008 CIVIC HEALTH INDICATORS FOR LARGE AND MEDIUM-SIZED FLORIDA COMMUNITIES**

WORKING WITH OTHERS ON COMMUNITY ISSUES 2006 - 2008		
RANK	MSA	%
<b>LARGE COMMUNITIES</b>	BENCHMARK	1 New Orleans, LA 12.2
		15 Tampa-St. Petersburg 8.2
		22 Orlando 7.6
		26 Jacksonville 6.8
		48 Miami-Fort Lauderdale 4.1
<b>MEDIUM-SIZED COMMUNITIES</b>	BENCHMARK	1 Provo-Orem, UT 33.6
		7 Palm Bay- Melbourne 13.4
		45 Deltona-Daytona Beach 6.9
		53 Lakeland-Winter Haven 5.7
		70 Sarasota-Bradenton 4.3
		73 Cape Coral-Fort Myers 3.0

In sharp contrast, Sarasota-Bradenton and Cape Coral-Ft. Myers both have very low levels of citizen engagement in community problem solving. Ranked 70th and 73rd, respectively, more than 90 percent of similarly sized communities have higher citizen engagement levels on this measure of civic health. Comparing communities within the state, it is worth noting that citizens in Palm Bay-Melbourne are more than four times more likely to work collaboratively on community issues than are citizens from Cape Coral-Ft. Myers. Similarly, among the state's large metro areas, Tampa-St. Petersburg citizens are twice as likely to engage as are citizens from Miami-Ft. Lauderdale.

**Figure 7** shows the average of the four civic health indicators – our overall civic health index – for each of the eight Florida communities. Also shown are the national benchmarks – communities rated number one overall – for middle-sized (Provo, Utah) and large (Minneapolis, Minnesota) metro areas. There are several points worth noting.

**First, all of Florida's communities – large and small – are far below the benchmarks of the most engaged communities in the nation.**

**Second, with the notable exception of Sarasota-Bradenton, the civic health of Florida's larger communities is generally somewhat worse than in smaller communities.**

**Third, even though the overall condition of Florida's civic health is weak, there are indications that some communities have been able to rise above the statewide norm. Among mid-sized metro areas, the Palm Bay-Melbourne area stands out as one of Florida's more engaged communities. Among larger metro areas, Tampa-St. Petersburg shows evidence of a healthier civic culture than other large communities in the state. Sarasota-Bradenton and Miami-Ft. Lauderdale, in sharp contrast, stand out as models of weak civic cultures in a state whose overall civic health is among the worst in the nation.**

Work by the Corporation for National and Community Service suggests several factors that may be important in understanding differences in citizen engagement among communities in Florida as well as differences between Florida and other parts of the nation. Reporting on an extensive analysis of volunteering rates – one of our principal measures of civic health – *Volunteering in Cities* offered four key findings. They found, first, that greater

FIGURE 7

## CIVIC HEALTH INDEX: BENCHMARKS & FLORIDA COMMUNITIES 2008



attachment to the community encourages volunteering. As the report suggests, it is likely to be "...more challenging to build citizen engagement in communities where residents do not have a long-term commitment to the community, where densely populated communities create a sense of anonymity making it difficult to know one's neighbors, and where there is an influx of newly arrived residents."<sup>9</sup> Second, the study found that *long commutes can curtail opportunities to volunteer*. Building and maintaining the networks that are at the core of civic action requires that citizens spend time with one another. Activities, such as commuting for long periods, "...are more likely to reduce social capital and reduce volunteer rates."<sup>10</sup> The third major finding indicates that *volunteering rises with education and is less common in high poverty areas*. As we emphasized in Florida's Civic Health 2008 and will echo in results presented below, education is a key component of civic engagement. In the Corporation's words, "Education fosters organizational and communication skills necessary for successful civic engagement and leadership. Because more educated individuals also tend to have higher incomes, they often have more opportunities to practice and hone their skills in a variety of settings, including their place of employment."<sup>11</sup> A high incidence of poverty, on the other hand, is associated with lower rates of engagement. Finally, the

report argues that *the capacity of a community's associations and organizations expands or limits volunteering opportunities*. Simply put, for individuals to volunteer in their communities, "...there must be an infrastructure that can recruit, place, and manage prospective volunteers."<sup>12</sup> Communities that are relatively lacking in such an infrastructure are likely to show lower rates of citizen engagement.

Each of these findings is important to consider as we seek ways to strengthen Florida's civic health. The condition of our state is rooted in our communities and meeting the goal of an improved civic culture must be met in those communities, one-by-one. Attending to that challenge requires that local citizens and their leaders work together to shape their civic destiny in much the same way that local economic development commissions seek to realize a vision for economic prosperity and community self-reliance.

There is clearly much to be done. The civic health of most of Florida's communities falls well below national averages and is far from benchmarks set by communities like Minneapolis, Seattle, and Provo. At the same time, there is evidence that some Florida communities have developed stronger civic cultures than

others. Palm Bay-Melbourne and Tampa-St. Petersburg both demonstrate that it is possible – even with all of the challenges wrought by rapid growth and high levels of diversity – to do better and, in some cases, even excel in the goal of fostering more engaged communities. Moving Florida forward will require communities to be conscious of their civic health and to set explicit, intentional goals that will foster citizen collaboration and engagement through a variety of mechanisms. Community goals will no doubt reflect the unique characteristics and settings of Florida's varied communities. But, if we are to improve the condition of the state's civic health, the common thread must be to encourage Florida's citizens to join hands and take responsibility for our collective future.

## Civic Health in Hard Times

Since at least 1896, when Henry Flagler completed the Florida East Coast Railroad terminus at Biscayne Bay, Florida's economy has been driven by tourism and growth. The magnitude of that growth, especially in the last 50 years, has been nothing short of staggering. In 1960, Florida's population stood at just under 5 million. By the turn of the century, that number had more than tripled to just under 16 million.<sup>13</sup> By the 2010 census, the state is expected to become the third largest state in the Union, with more than 19 million residents. Growth has fueled employment, personal income, state revenues, and – particularly – housing. Indeed, for much of Florida's recent past, the mantra of a thousand new residents a day literally defined everything.

In 2006, cracks began to appear in the bulwark of growth. In 2007, the number of new residents dropped to about 127,000, barely a quarter of the 2003-04 increase. This followed a 2005 peak in housing prices. By the middle of that year, housing prices began a decline driven by "extraordinarily high prices and increasing mortgage rates."<sup>14</sup> By 2007, foreclosures became common, construction slowed, and unemployment rates began to climb. In the fall of 2008, Florida's early problems with the housing market began to give way to a national and international credit crisis that threatened to spawn a world-wide economic depression.

The consequences of these economic pressures have been devastating for many of the state's citizens. By 2008, the state had the second highest foreclosure rate in the nation. In that year, foreclosures were filed for more than 385,000 properties.<sup>15</sup> From second in the nation in 2005, Florida's Gross Domestic Product plunged to 48th by 2008. By June 2009, almost a million Floridians were unemployed and 40 of the state's 67 counties were experiencing double-digit unemployment rates.

Unemployment is projected to continue to climb to a statewide average of 11 percent in the spring of 2010. Personal income growth has been negative since 2008 and, in the first quarter of 2009, the state's income growth ranked 43rd in the nation. The number of families receiving assistance through Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) in 2009 is expected to be 13.5 percent higher than in 2008, more than double previous state estimates. A similar increase is forecast for the next twelve months. For at least the time being Florida's growth machine has essentially come to a halt.

The consequences of the recession for state spending have been considerable. Florida's FY2007-08 budget was just under \$72 billion. With declining state revenues the budget has shrunk by about \$5.5 billion. The FY2009-10 budget was only \$66.5 billion and that included about \$5.3 billion in federal stimulus funds that are slated to disappear in two years. Without the stimulus funds, Florida's budget would have declined by almost 15% relative to 2007-08 levels. What this means, of course, is that many public services have sustained substantial cuts. The Florida Center for Fiscal and Economic Policy reports that cuts have included community care for the elderly, nursing homes, food banks, hospital inpatient and outpatient services, guardian ad litem services, independent living for children in foster care, pre-paid health plans, county health departments and community corrections probation services. In addition, K-12 per pupil spending dropped from \$7,143 per student in FY2007-08 to \$6,873 for the current year; a decline exceeding 10 percent—and that figure includes \$348 per pupil in stimulus funding.<sup>16</sup>

The shocks from Florida's dual housing and economic crises have been felt throughout the state. Our sample indicates that the past year has brought deep financial struggles for many of Florida's citizens:

**11% said that they or someone in their household has been laid off or lost a job;**

**6% said that they or someone in their household has fallen behind with mortgage payments or suffered foreclosure; and**

**19% – one in five Floridians – said that they or someone in their household have had difficulty affording food or medicine.**

The fact that so many of our citizens are struggling to meet the basic prerequisites of day-to-day life surely has consequences for civic life in neighborhoods and communities across the state. A

hopeful view might be that those struggles would bring people together to serve and take care of one another in a time of profound need. Alternately, increasing financial pressures might prevent citizens from participating in civil society, if they feel they must turn inward and look after their own families, or if the infrastructure that recruits and supports volunteers and other active citizens shrinks because of financial cuts.<sup>17</sup>

Firm data on the extent of change in civic participation during this past year will be available when the Census Bureau completes and releases new data scheduled to be collected in September 2009. In the meantime, our survey data leads to the conclusion that the recession in Florida is having negative effects on civic engagement. In fact,

**70% say that they have cut back on civic activities in the past year.**

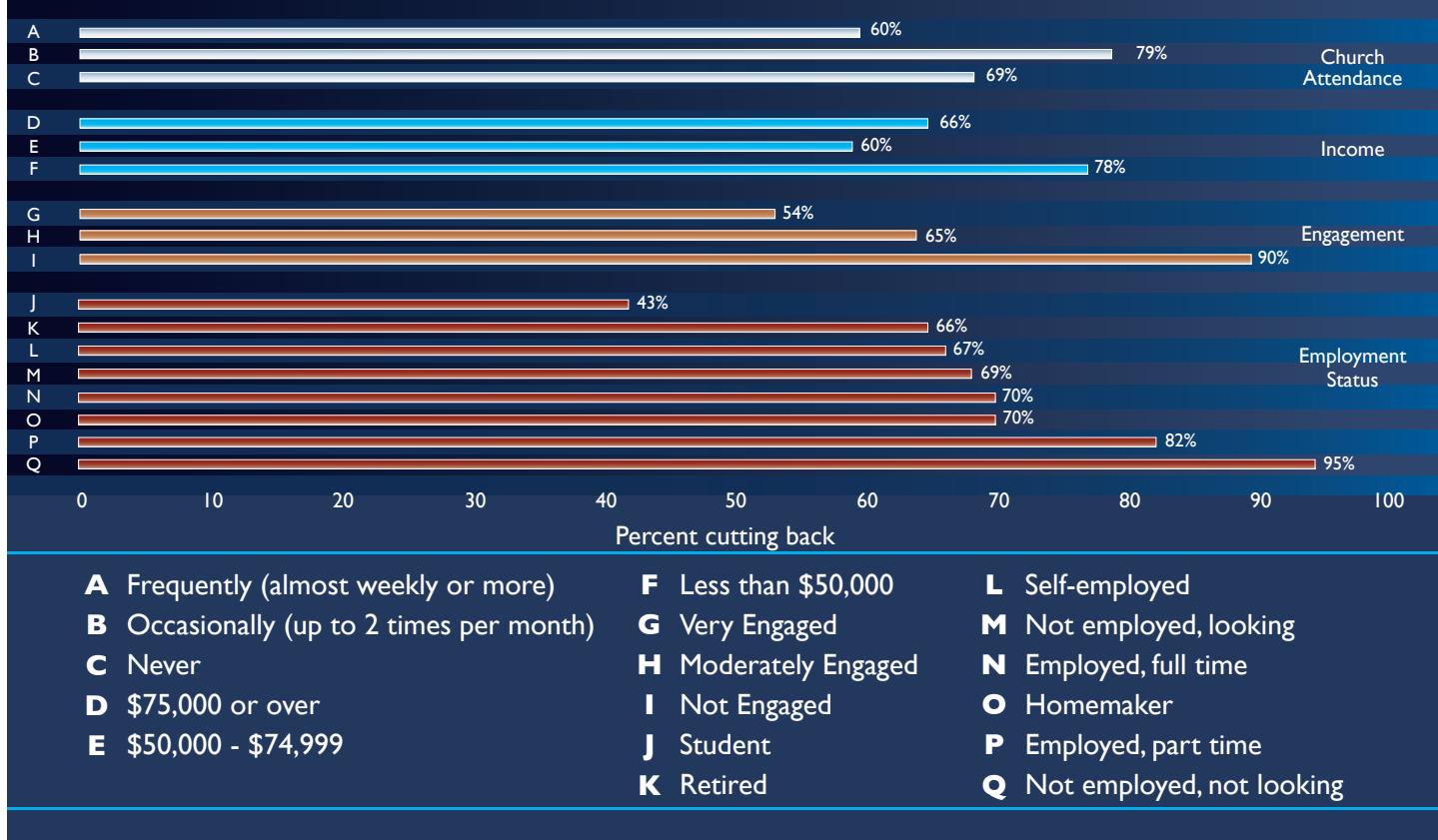
Not only do citizens report that they reduced their levels of civic activity as a result of economic pressures, they believe that others in their communities are doing so as well.

**Only 17% told us that people in their community were responding to the economic situation by helping one another and serving the community more; and**

**70% believe that others in their communities are turning inward, looking out for themselves and their families.**

In general, the report of a lessening of engagement in the face of the economic crisis was consistent across all population subgroups. We did not, for example, find significant differences between college graduates and those with only a high school degree; both told us they were cutting back. Similarly, we found no differences across generations; Millennials were as likely as senior citizens to say that they had cut back. In fact, as **Figure 8** shows, at least half of every subgroup examined reported that they had decreased their level of civic activity – save one – students. Driven at least in some measure by service learning and volunteer opportunities associated with both K-12 and college curricula, a majority – 57 percent – of students reported that they had actually increased their level of civic activity. In this context, it is important to remember that these data were collected in April, around the end of the school year and before the impact of the latest round of legislative funding cuts were felt in district offices, school boards, and college campuses. Again, we won't know until census data are released next year, but certainly a potential effect of those cuts may be to reduce the opportunity for students to lead the way in volunteering and service learning.

**FIGURE 8**  
**WHO IS CUTTING BACK ON ENGAGEMENT?**



Students are not the only bright spots in the results shown in Figure 8. Though less than a majority, 40 percent of those who regularly attend religious services report that they have increased their level of civic activity over the past year. We shall return to this point below, but it is worth underscoring that the social networks that derive from regular participation in religious institutions – of whatever ilk – make important contributions to the civic fabric of our communities. It is likely that regular interaction increases awareness of community issues and provides a framework through which citizens can more easily join together to take action on matters of common concern. It is also likely that regular participation in a network – religious or not – makes it difficult to say no when asked to contribute time, money, or other resources.

It is also worth noting that many of those who are already highly engaged are responding to the economic crisis by taking on more. Some 46 percent of our sample who have been highly engaged in their communities over the past year reported that they are expanding their involvement rather than contracting.<sup>18</sup> Virtually all – 90 percent – of those who have previously been uninvolved have no plans for increasing their level of civic involvement. Similarly, large majorities of those who are in the least favorable financial position report that they are reducing their level of activity. This includes more than eight out of ten citizens who make less than \$50,000 per year and over nine out of ten discouraged workers who have no job and have given up looking.

The fact that Floridians report that they have cut back their civic engagement levels does not necessarily imply that they do not care about others. Rather, it may be that in times of significant economic stress, other forms of engaging may be important. To examine that possibility we asked Floridians to tell us about supporting relatives and others by letting them stay in their homes and by donating food and money. We learned that:

**15% allowed a relative to live in their home because they needed a place to live;**

**13% allowed a non-relative to live in their home because they needed a place to live;**

**42% gave food or money to a relative who needed it; and**

**50% gave food or money to a non-relative who needed it.**

As a general matter, engaging in these forms of support is most likely among those who are already engaged in their communities in other ways. It is a little like the old adage, "If you need something done, ask someone who is busy." Those who were most engaged in their communities were far and away more likely to support relatives and others through these types of support mechanisms.

For some, however, providing this sort of direct, one-on-one support represents an alternative to what we generally think of as civic engagement. Among those who were *not at all* engaged in their communities by our measure of engagement:

**9% allowed a relative to live in their home or on their property because they needed it;**

**13% allowed a non-relative to live in their home or on their property because they needed it;**

**30% gave food or money to a relative who needed it; and**

**26% gave money to a non-relative who needed it**

Although differences are not large and not consistent across all measures, there is some evidence that engaging in personal giving of these types may be a vehicle for civic action among those who, because of lower education or income, are not likely to engage in the usual forms of civic action. For example, 43 percent of respondents with incomes less than \$20,000 reported that they gave food or money to a relative who needed it. This compares to only 29 percent of those with incomes in excess of \$100,000. Similarly, those with incomes of less than \$20,000 were almost as likely (45 percent) to give food or money to a non-relative as were those with incomes in excess of \$100,000 (49 percent). And again, those with no college were as likely to donate to a relative as were those who attended college, and the no-college group was only slightly less likely (47 percent) to donate to a non-relative than those with college experience (54 percent).

It is clear that the double hit of a collapsing housing market and a world-wide recession has had significant and long lasting effects on the state. The evidence here suggests that one of those effects may be further decline of an already weak civic health in many of Florida's communities. There are bright spots, to be sure. Those who have been doing are doing more, and institutions like churches that facilitate the development and maintenance of social networks are helping to soften the blow. Reaching out

to friends and neighbors in times of crisis to meet basic needs is, for some, a way to express civic compassion when other ways may not be feasible. Despite the bright spots and other evidence of personal compassion among some, it is clear that Florida's communities face a significant challenge to not only improve the state of their civic health, but to find ways to avoid further deterioration of citizen engagement.

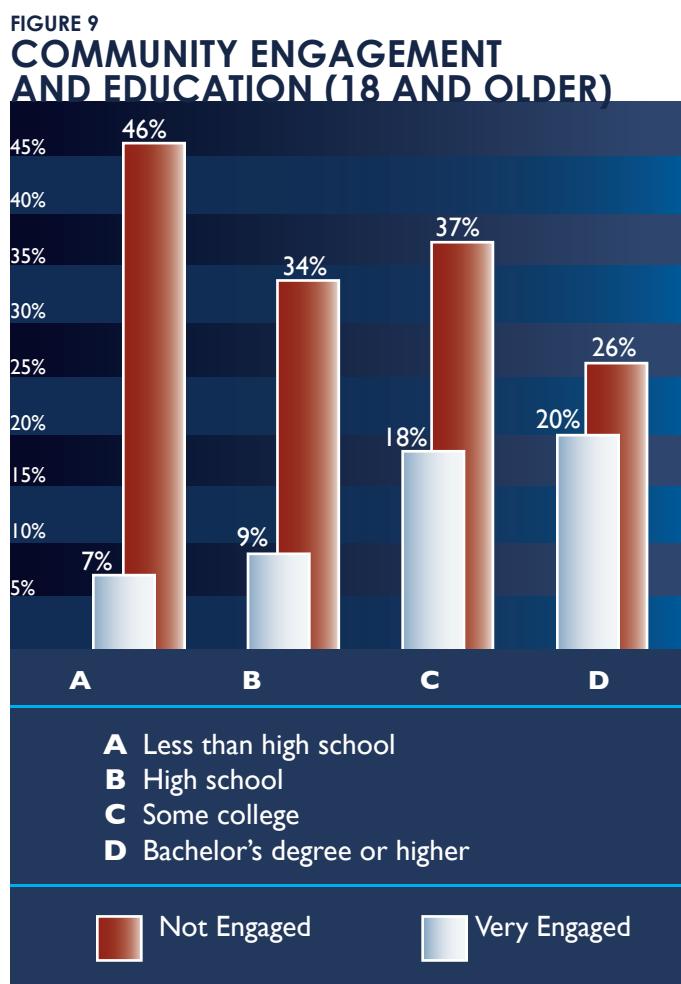
## Shaping Community Engagement in Florida

Finally, we turn to a consideration of some of the key factors that appear to affect the level of individual civic engagement in Florida's communities. In so doing, our goal is not necessarily to further an analytical understanding of civic engagement in the state. Rather, it is to identify strategic opportunities that may help citizens and community leaders consider ways to improve the civic condition of their communities. In this era of economic readjustment, it is particularly important that communities begin a dialog about concrete strategies to improve their civic health. In part, such a dialog is important because the strength of our systems of governing and community support are at stake. More than that, recent research suggests that when communities ignore the strength and robustness of their civic infrastructure, their economic future may be in jeopardy.

In *Why the Garden Club Couldn't Save Youngstown*, Sean Safford examined the divergent pathways followed by Allentown and Youngstown, Pennsylvania as they acclimated to the manufacturing transformation that resulted in Allentown taking the "high road" while Youngstown "...emerged as the poster child for post-industrial decline and hollowing out."<sup>19</sup> In his words,

*"The crisis that struck Allentown, Youngstown and mature industrial cities throughout the American Rust Belt in the late 1970s had traumatic human consequences including massive unemployment and dislocation. But the significance of these events went beyond the immediate suffering that they caused; the period of the late 1970s and early 1980s was a critical moment in which core assumptions about the operation of the economy were fundamentally undermined and new possibilities unfastened. The possible trajectories fell, generally, into two categories. One relied on creation – of skills, new products and smart approaches to achieving growth that builds strong communities; the other on extraction – of individuals' skills and abilities as well as of the resources which reside within communities."*<sup>20</sup>

Safford argued that "...the path on which communities find themselves with respect to this dichotomy can be traced to the qualities of their underlying social structures. Some structures allow effective forms of civic engagement to emerge in the face of uncertainty and are robust enough to adapt over time in light of changing circumstances. Others present barriers to collective action and freeze in the face of adversity."<sup>21</sup> The key difference between the post-industrial trajectories of Allentown and Youngstown is, Safford concluded, a function of who participated in the two cities' civic networks. In Allentown, robust civic networks included "key economic actors" as well as those responsible for community governance. In Youngstown, "...these leaders' counterparts were shown to be largely absent."<sup>22</sup> The point here is that concern about the strength, vitality, and robustness of civic health in Florida's communities is not just a theoretical matter that pertains to an abstract, idealized view of



what democracy should be. In myriad ways, the vitality of our civic networks shapes the lives of our citizens – from food lines that serve the homeless to board rooms that drive community and economic development.

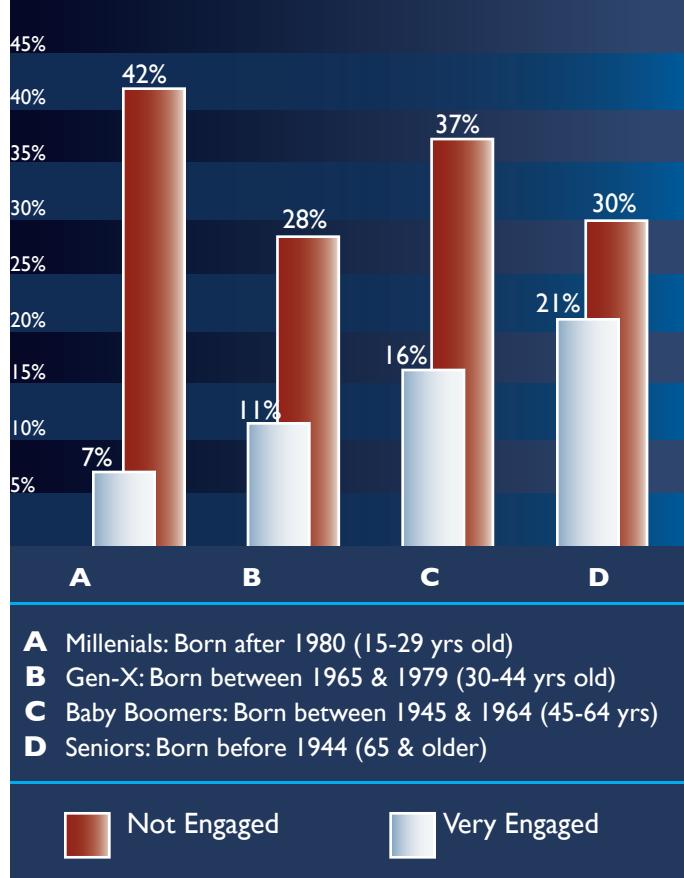
**Education makes a difference.** We begin by echoing a theme that we emphasized in the 2008 report and throughout this report. Education is central to civic health. In our analysis of state-level civic health indicators reported above, Minnesota ranked first and set the benchmark for the nation. In reflecting on the exalted standing of Minnesota's civic health, Harry Boyte and Nan Skelton of the Hubert Humphrey Institute observed that "While many factors have nourished Minnesota's civic culture, none has been more important than the strong commitment of the state's citizens to education, both formal and informal. Education is at the heart of what has been called 'the Minnesota Miracle'."<sup>23</sup> Indeed, there is probably no more robust finding in research on participation in America. Education – and income which derives, in part, from that education – is a fundamental driver of citizen engagement.

Those findings are reinforced here in [Figure 9](#) which shows the relationship between our measure of community engagement and education. The results are clear and compelling. Among those who did not complete high school, almost one out of two (48 percent) are completely uninvolved in the civic life of their community and only seven percent were highly engaged. At the other end of the education spectrum, college graduates were only about half as likely to be uninvolved (26 percent) and were almost three times as likely to be counted among the highly engaged.

These data, as well as other data presented throughout this report leave no doubt that addressing deficiencies in community civic health will require addressing deficiencies in education.

**Florida's Seniors are an Important Resource for Strengthening the State's Civic Health.** More than three million strong, Florida's seniors – aged 65 and older – make up 17 percent of the state's population. In fact, Florida has the largest concentration of seniors in the nation. They are

**FIGURE 10  
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATION GENERATIONS**



an important part of the picture of community engagement in the state. As [Figure 10](#) shows, one out of five (21 percent) are already highly engaged in their community and less than a third (30 percent) are completely unengaged. Because many of them are retired or working only part-time, seniors comprise a significant human resource pool that might be further engaged in civic activities in their communities. The relatively high levels of disengagement (41 percent) among Millennials also suggests that there are opportunities for intergenerational initiatives which offer young people concrete models of civic engagement. Since students were the only group that reported that they increased their level of civic activity (see Figure 8), capitalizing on such opportunities may be especially important in this time of economic challenge.

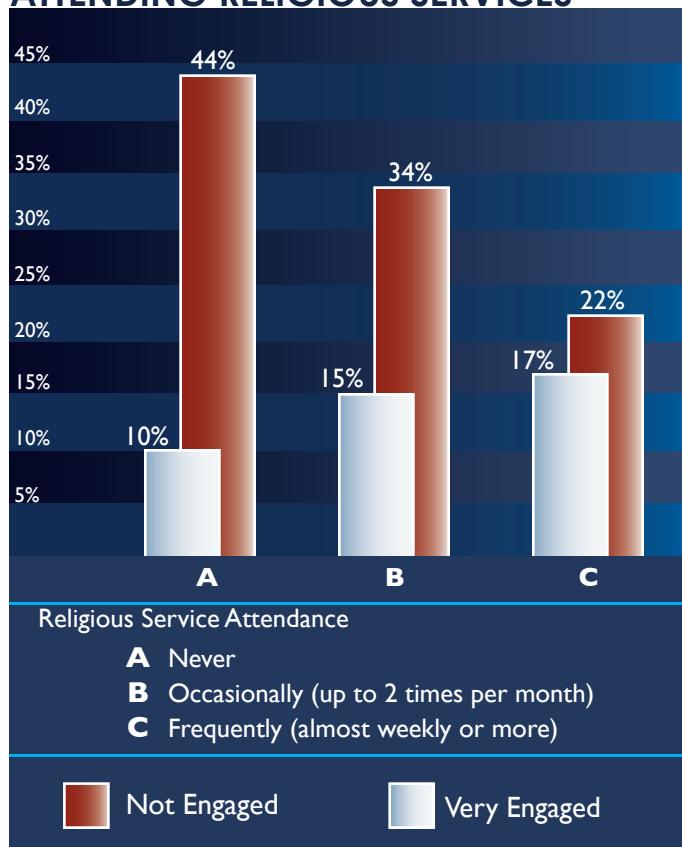
**Finding Ways to Facilitate and Support Social Networks Can Make a Difference.** We have earlier alluded to the importance of social networks and the role that regular attendance at religious services makes in facilitating those networks. Those findings are echoed in [Figures 11 and 12](#) which show levels of community engagement by frequency of attendance at religious services and by whether respondents reported that they spend a lot of time communicating with friends via electronic devices. Results are consistent in both cases. People who are more connected to others are more engaged in their communities. These findings persisted despite controls for level of education.

Results shown here are consistent with on-going research by Robert Putnam and David Campbell, who outlined their preliminary findings at a recent conference hosted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life.<sup>24</sup> Putnam and Campbell's work underscores the importance of participation in religious institutions. They find, as a general matter, that those who are involved in religious communities are "...three to four times more likely to be involved in their community. They are more apt than nonreligious Americans to work on community projects, belong to voluntary associations, attend public meetings, vote in local elections, attend protest demonstrations and political rallies, and donate time and money to causes...." They also say that their data shows "...that religious people are just "nicer": they carry packages for people, don't mind folks cutting ahead in line and give money to panhandlers."<sup>25</sup>

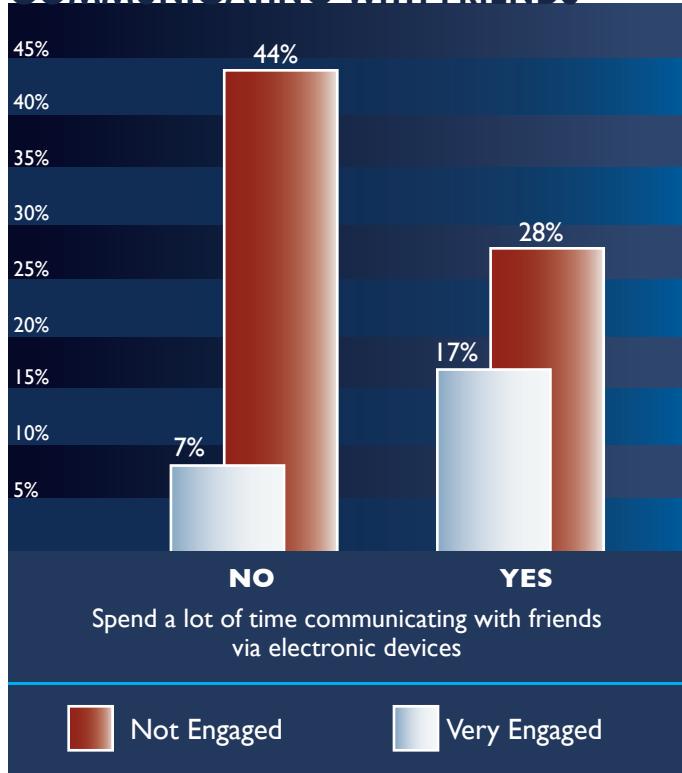
Putnam and Campbell argue that it is not theology, per se, that drives engagement. It is, instead, "...the relationships people make in their churches, mosques, synagogues and temples that draw them into community activism." As Putnam was quoted as observing, "It is not faith that accounts for this; it's faith communities."<sup>26</sup> The data shown in [Figure 11](#) is certainly consistent with the notion that faith communities comprise an important part of the picture of civic engagement in Florida's communities. The data in [Figure 12](#) suggests, more generally, that when citizens find ways or settings to connect to one another in meaningful ways, one end result is a higher level of engagement in the community.

**Internet Technology may help Level the Civic Engagement Playing Field.** From e-mail, to Facebook, to MySpace and on to Second Life and Twitter, internet technologies are providing new and evolving ways for citizens to connect with one another and to act. Following the masterful use of

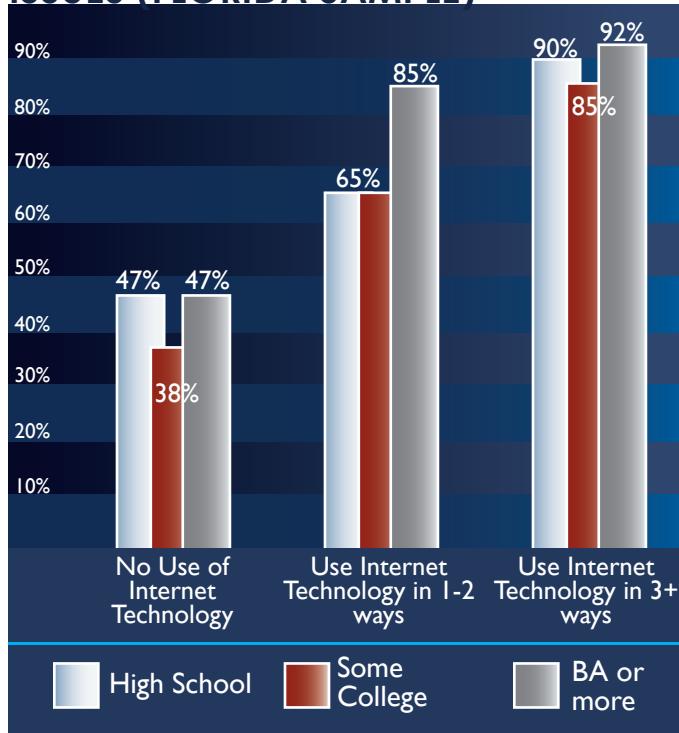
**FIGURE 11  
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONNECTEDNESS:  
ATTENDING RELIGIOUS SERVICES**



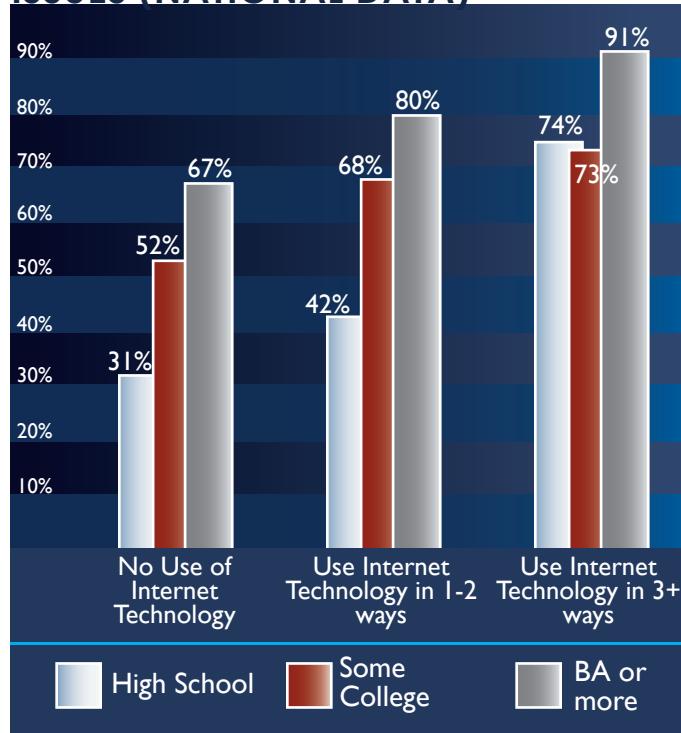
**FIGURE 12  
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONNECTEDNESS:  
COMMUNICATING WITH FRIENDS**



**FIGURE 14**  
**PERCENT “ENGAGED” BY EDUCATION AND USE OF INTERNET TECHNOLOGY ON COMMUNITY ISSUES (FLORIDA SAMPLE)**



**FIGURE 15**  
**PERCENT “ENGAGED” BY EDUCATION AND USE OF INTERNET TECHNOLOGY ON COMMUNITY ISSUES (NATIONAL DATA)**



those technologies for fund-raising and for communication with supporters by the Obama campaign, there can be little doubt that they have significant potential for engaging citizens in their neighborhoods, their communities and the nation. To examine the use of these technologies among Florida citizens, respondents were asked whether they had used a variety of different internet technologies to “express your opinions about political or social or community issues within the last 12 months.”<sup>27</sup> Results were summed and grouped into three categories reflecting the extent of internet utilization to express opinions on community and other civic issues: (1) those who made no use of the internet; (2) those who use 1 or 2 internet technologies and (3) those who use 3 or more technologies. The effect of internet technology use on community engagement in Florida is shown in Figures 14 and 15.<sup>28</sup>

Because we know that education has a substantial effect on community engagement, we have shown results for each of three educational groups: those with a high school degree or less; those who attended college; and those who have a Bachelor’s degree or more. The results in Figure 14 are compelling. Increasing use of internet technologies is associated with increasing levels of community engagement across all educational levels. Moreover,

the difference in community engagement between those with less educational attainment and those with more decreases as use of internet technologies increases.

Because of the relatively small size of the Florida sample, we replicated the results shown in Figure 14 for the national sample, which includes more than 3,800 respondents. Those data are shown in Table 15. Once again, at each level of education, increased use of internet technologies is associated with increased community involvement. Importantly, the engagement level of those with a high school degree or less who exhibit relatively intense internet use is higher than college graduates who make no use of internet technologies. In fact their level of engagement is almost as high as that of college graduates who make less intense use of the internet.

The civic hope for the internet, of course, is that it will serve to empower those who, by reason of birth, social status, geography, or myriad other reasons are disconnected from the civic world around them. The fact that we find increasing levels of engagement associated with use of internet technologies is encouraging on that front. The fact that we find that internet savvy citizens, with limited educational backgrounds, participating

## ENDNOTES

at levels approximating what we would expect from citizens with more extensive education is even more encouraging. These are, of course, cross-sectional data and questions of causality are not readily addressable. That said, however, these results are consistent with what one might expect to see if access to and extensive use of the internet paved new pathways to participation for Florida's citizens.

**1** Several colleagues reviewed this report and offered numerous helpful suggestions. They include Dr. Peter Levine and Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg at CIRCLE, David B. 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** U. S. Census Bureau, The 2009 Statistical Abstract available at <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/rankings.html>.

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

**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** See <http://www.americangrace.org/>.

**6** The United States Office of Management and Budget (OMB) defines metropolitan statistical areas according to published standards that are applied to Census Bureau data. The general concept of a metropolitan statistical area is that of a core area containing a substantial population nucleus, together with adjacent communities having a high degree of economic and social integration with that core. Currently defined metropolitan statistical areas are based on application of 2000 standards to 2000 decennial census data. Current metropolitan statistical area definitions were announced by OMB effective June 6, 2003. Each metropolitan statistical area must have at least one urbanized area of 50,000 or more inhabitants.

**7** See *Volunteering in America* at <http://www.volunteeringinamerica.gov/>.

**8** This analytical strategy draws on work done by the Corporation for Community and National Service in their annual report, *Volunteering in America*. The current, as well as previous reports may be found at <http://www.volunteeringinamerica.gov/>.

**9** Corporation for National and Community Service, Office of Research and Policy development, *Volunteering in America: 2007 City Trends and Rankings*, Washington, DC 2007, p. 5.

**10** Ibid., p. 6.

**11** Ibid., p. 7.

**12** Ibid., p. 8.

**13** U. S. Census Bureau, The 2009 Statistical Abstract, Table 12. Resident Population—States, available at [http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/population/estimates\\_and\\_projections--states\\_metropolitan\\_areas\\_cities.html](http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/population/estimates_and_projections--states_metropolitan_areas_cities.html).

**14** Florida Economic Estimating Conference, Florida Economic Outlook, Tallahassee: Office of Economic & Demographic Research, July 7, 2009. Accessed at [http://edr.state.fl.us/conferences/fleconomic/FEEC0907\\_execsumm.pdf](http://edr.state.fl.us/conferences/fleconomic/FEEC0907_execsumm.pdf).

**15** Office of Economic & Demographic Research, Florida: An Economic Overview – August 4, 2009, accessed at [http://edr.state.fl.us/presentations/recentpresentations/Fl%20Economic%20Overview\\_8-4-09.pdf](http://edr.state.fl.us/presentations/recentpresentations/Fl%20Economic%20Overview_8-4-09.pdf).

**16** The Florida Center for Fiscal and Economic Policy, "State Budget Bolstered by Temporary Federal Stimulus Funds and Still Fails to Meet Needs," accessed at [http://www.fcfep.org/newversion/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=84:recent-article-4-&catid=34:fcfep-publications&Itemid=207](http://www.fcfep.org/newversion/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=84:recent-article-4-&catid=34:fcfep-publications&Itemid=207)

**17** This is drawn from the central argument made in the National Conference on Citizenship's, America's Civic Health 2009.

**18** Our measure of community engagement was constructed based on respondent's answers to five questions. They included whether in the past year they 1) belonged to or donated money to a group or association; 2) volunteered; 3) went to a club or community meeting; 4) attended a public meeting where there was a discussion of community affairs; and 5) worked with others in the neighborhood to solve a community problem. A community engagement score was computed by summing the number of activities in which the respondent had participated. Respondents scoring zero were designated "unengaged." Respondents who participated in one to three activities were designated "moderately engaged." Respondents who participated in four or five activities were designated "highly engaged."

**19** Sean C. Stafford, *Why the Garden Club Couldn't Save Youngstown: Social Embeddedness and the Transformation of the Rust Belt*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Boston: Sloan School of Management, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, June, 2004, p22.

**20** Ibid., p. 174.

**21** Ibid,

**22** Ibid., p. 178.

**23** Harry Boyte and Nan Skelton, *Minnesota's Civic Health Index 2009: A State with a Vibrant Civic Culture Navigates the Rapids of Change*, Minneapolis: The Hubert H. Humphrey Institute, University of Minnesota, 2009.

**24** Robert Putnam and David Campbell outlined major findings of work that will be published as *American Grace: How Religion is Reshaping our Civic and Political Lives*. The Pew Conference held in Key West, Florida. A summary of the presentation may be found in Daniel Burke "Religious people make better citizens, study says" Religion News Service, <http://pewforum.org/news/display.php?NewsID=18088>, May 13, 2009

**25** Burke, op. cit.

**26** Ibid.

**27** Respondents were asked whether they had made use of each of the following: email; my own blog; commenting or writing on someone else's blog; a social networking site like MySpace or Facebook; Facebook's "Causes" application; by making a photo, video, or audio and sharing it online; commenting on someone else's photo, video, or audio; chat room; instant messaging; text messaging; voting in favor of or against a video or a news story on a site like YouTube or Digg; watching a speech by a presidential candidate online; watching a video that supports or opposes a presidential candidate; and going to a website to give money to a candidate. To create a measure of internet technology use, the number of activities were summed. The resulting scale was recoded into three groups: those who did not use internet technology at all, those who used the internet in 1 or 2 ways, and those who use the internet in 3 or more ways.

**28** Because of the limited number of cases in the sample and the need to control for educational attainment, we have categorized community engagement here as "any level of engagement." Thus, for this analysis, respondents were grouped into those who were completely uninvolved in their communities and those who undertook at least one civic activity in the past 12 months.

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