



**Jacksonville  
Community  
Council Inc.**

# Local Election Process study

*A Report to the Citizens of Jacksonville • Summer 1988*

## SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The quality of government in a democratic society depends on the participation of citizens. Two important ways for citizens to participate are voting and running for elective office. Effective participation requires an active and informed electorate, as well as an ample supply of capable candidates.

Voter turnout in Duval County is low, especially in local elections. In addition, the number of candidates for local elective offices has decreased, and the number of unopposed incumbents has increased.

This study identifies a variety of factors which tend to inhibit voting or running for office. These include legal factors such as certain aspects of the voter registration procedures and of the financial disclosure law, and informational factors such as inadequate civic education and media information. In addition, no local organization is dedicated to developing and recruiting capable candidates. Finally, motivational factors make some people indifferent toward or disenchanted with the election process and government in general.

The study concludes with recommendations for reducing these inhibiting factors in order to increase the turnout of informed voters and the number of capable candidates offering themselves for elective office.

## HIGHLIGHTS

### MAJOR PROBLEMS

Certain provisions in election and voter registration laws inhibit voting.

Closed primary elections and weak political parties inhibit voting and running for office in local elections.

Citizens are inadequately informed.

Inadequate sources of information are available on election issues, candidates, and the election process.

Running for and holding part-time City Council offices has become too time consuming.

Financial disclosure requirements for candidates are

lack local organizations dedicated to developing capable candidates.

### RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS

Amend Florida and local election laws to make registration and voting more convenient

Establish a unitary primary system for local Jacksonville elections

Improve civic education in public and private schools

Establish an organization to research and disseminate impartial, accurate information on election issues, candidates, and the election process

Limit and stagger City Council's terms of office, review adequacy of its staff, and focus its efforts on legislative duties

Reduce the intrusiveness of reporting requirements in the Florida financial disclosure law

Encourage local organizations to develop and recruit capable candidates

# FINDINGS

Findings represent the data base of the committee. They are derived from the published materials, facts reported by the resource persons, or from a consensus of committee understanding of the opinions of resource persons.

## INTRODUCTION

Many citizens harbor feelings of indifference toward or active dislike of government and politics. Some have become disenchanted; others see hope for improvement. In some political systems, ordinary citizens can do little to control or improve the government under which they live. In the American democratic system, however, citizens may exert direct influence on government and politics in a number of ways, including **voting** and offering themselves as **candidates** for elective office. If improvement is indeed possible, it will occur only if "we, the people" grasp the opportunity to participate.

The members of this study committee believe that improvement is possible--improvement in the level of participation through voting and running for office. This in turn can generate a wide variety of improvements in the functioning of local government and politics. Specifically, we have pursued the question:

How can our local election process be improved to increase active participation of citizens as voters and as candidates?

## IMPROVING VOTER TURNOUT

### Opportunities to vote

Citizens of Duval County have the opportunity to vote in as many as 12 regularly scheduled elections in a four-year period. For some, the frequency of elections signals the vitality of the democratic process. Others worry that frequent voting may become a burden and may trivialize the meaning of each election, leading some citizens to decide not to vote.

Combined state and federal elections occur every two years in the fall; local Jacksonville elections are held every four years in the spring; the U.S. presidential preference primary occurs every four years in the spring. In addition, residents of the Beaches and Baldwin vote every two years in municipal elections held in the fall and winter, respectively.

Federal, state, and local Jacksonville elections (except for judicial and School Board positions) are partisan--candidates run and are identified on the ballot with a political party label. Each election offers voters up to three opportunities to cast ballots: A party primary election, a runoff primary if no candidate receives a majority of the votes, and a general election. The Beaches and Baldwin conduct nonpartisan elections with only a single primary and a general election. Candidates are not identified by party on the ballot.

Voters in all or part of Duval County will have the following opportunities to vote in regularly scheduled elections during the next four years.

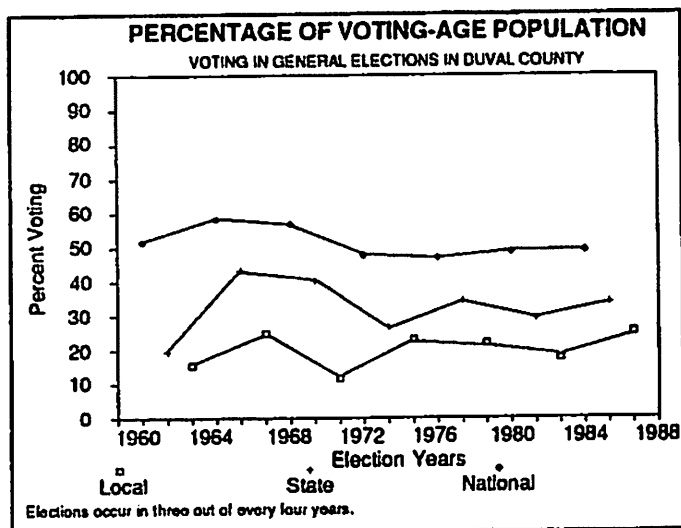
In addition to these, special elections may be called if elective offices become vacant during a term.

presidential, federal, state, and half the local School Board seats	fall 1988 (three elections)
Jacksonville Beach	fall 1989 (two elections)
Atlantic Beach	fall 1989 (two elections)
Neptune Beach	fall 1989 (two elections)
Baldwin	Jan. 1990 (two elections)
off-year federal, state, and half the local School Board seats	fall 1990 (three elections)
Jacksonville/Duval County	spr. 1991 (three elections)
federal presidential primary	spr. 1992 (one election)

### Eligibility and turnout

Although most citizens meet voting eligibility requirements, many do not register to vote, and even fewer actually vote. Low voter turnout allows as few as six percent of the voting-age population to form the majority necessary to decide a local election.

Most U.S. citizens 18 years old or older who have been a resident of Duval County for at least 30 days meet the eligibility requirements to vote in local elections. Exceptions include only a few people who



have not had their civil rights restored following a criminal conviction or who have been declared legally incompetent by the state.

In order to vote, each citizen must first make the personal effort to register with the Supervisor of Elections Office and then to vote in person or by absentee ballot. At the time of Jacksonville's most recent local election in the spring of 1987, approximately 500,000 Duval County residents were of voting age. However, only 300,831 were registered (60.2 percent of the voting-age population), and only 124,834 voted in the general election (25.0 percent of the voting-age population).

This level of turnout allows less than 13 percent of the voting-age population to decide countywide elections for mayor, City Council, and other local elected officials. Yet this turnout is the highest in a local Jacksonville election since consolidation. The lowest voting rate occurred in 1971, when only 11.5 percent turned out and about six percent determined the outcome.

Both nationally and in Duval County, turnout tends to be higher in federal and state elections. These include presidential elections held every four years and off-year elections held two years after each presidential election, during which Floridians elect national congressmen and state officials. In the fall 1986 off-year general election in Duval County, 33.7 percent of the voting-age population cast ballots; in the 1984 presidential election, an even higher 48.8 percent voted. Still, reelection of a popular president managed to attract less than half the voting-age population.

Voter turnouts in Duval County were somewhat higher during the 1960s. Major issues appear to have attracted additional voters during this period--Vietnam and the Great Society, nationally and consolidation, locally. In the 1966 off-year election 43.3 percent of the voting-age population cast ballots; in the 1964 presidential election 58.2 percent voted--a rate higher than in any election since. The 1967 special referendum on Jacksonville/Duval County consolidation attracted an unusually high turnout for a local election, but still a relatively low 29.0 percent.

In the early 1970s, voter turnouts declined abruptly in Duval County. The most visible explanation for this decline was expansion of the voting-age population in 1971 to include 18- to 20-year-olds. This

group has tended to register and vote in lower proportions than their elders. Since the mid 1970s, federal and state election turnouts have stabilized at current levels--about 48 percent and 31 percent, respectively. Meanwhile, local turnouts have fluctuated between 11 percent and 25 percent, remaining quite low.

The 1988 presidential preference primary election drew a 31 percent turnout, unusually large for such an election and the highest since 1972. The reason for this appears to have been not the candidates for president but the "tax-for-tolls" referendum issue. As with the consolidation vote in 1967, the opportunity to vote on controversial local issues seems to attract additional voters. Still, no election since 1964 has attracted even half the voting age population.

Several demographic factors may contribute to continuing low turnout rates. Most significantly, citizens with lower levels of income and education tend to vote less frequently. In Duval County, 88,600 people (15.6 percent of the population) lived in households with income below the official poverty level in 1979. Both the number and the percentage have increased during the 1980s. In 1980, 109,100 persons 25 years old and older (33.2 percent of the total number in this age group) had not completed high school. The number of adults who are functionally illiterate is estimated at about 73,000. In addition, the baby-boom generation has been going through the years of young adulthood, when voting appears to be a low priority. Also, the rapidly growing local population contains increasing numbers of newcomers who may not have developed attachments to the local area or incentives to participate, especially in local elections. Finally, the large number of military personnel in Duval County tend to vote in national elections, but, like other newcomers, seem less interested in the local political process.

Voter turnout rates in Duval County are similar to those for the state. Florida, however, ranks low among the states--43rd in 1984 and 47th in 1986. In 1984, 53 percent of the voting-age population nationwide voted in the presidential election; in Florida only 49 percent voted, and in Jacksonville only 48.4 percent voted. Rates range from 65 to 70 percent in Minnesota, South Dakota, Montana, and Maine to only 40 to 45 percent in Hawaii, Nevada, South Carolina, and Georgia. Trends in Duval County voter turnout also are similar to those nationally, except that national turnouts generally appear to be declining, while those in Duval County are not.

Voter turnout rates in the United States are quite low compared to those in other developed nations with democratic forms of government. Turnout in most western European countries runs between 80 and 95 percent of the voting-age population. In most of these countries, voter registration is automatic, and a strong tradition of political participation encourages high levels of voting. Australians regularly turn out at a 95 percent rate. There, voting is thought to be so important that it is mandatory; nonvoters are fined.

Three kinds of barriers impede voting-age citizens in Duval County from registering and voting:

- **legal barriers**--laws and regulations which make registration and voting more difficult,
- **knowledge barriers**--inadequate sources of awareness, information, and understanding about the election process, issues, and candidates, and
- **motivational barriers**--factors which encourage indifference toward or disenchantment with the election process.

## BARRIERS TO VOTER REGISTRATION AND VOTING (not in priority order)

### legal barriers:

#### registration:

- citizen-initiated voter registration
- registration deadline 30 days before election day
- requirement to declare party affiliation at registration
- requirement to register in person
- purge of registration rolls every two years
- use of voter registration rolls for jury duty selection

#### voting:

- elections scheduled on work days
- voting hours limited from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.
- requirement to vote at home precinct polling place
- large numbers of elective offices on the ballot

### knowledge barriers:

- low levels of education
- inadequate civic and political education in schools
- inadequate information from the media
- inadequate civic education targeted toward low-income citizens

### motivational barriers:

- indifference among young voters 18 to 25 years old
- indifference and disenchantment among low-income voters
- lack of a competitive two-party system
- disenchantment with electing officials in that partisan system
- restrictions on third parties and independents built in bias favoring incumbents
- media emphasis on negative aspects of politics and campaigning
- lack of responsiveness by some elected officials between elections
- inadequate sense of citizen responsibility

Although significant reductions in legal barriers may increase voter participation, really substantial increases in participation will require major improvements in voter knowledge and motivation.

## Legal barriers to voting

Historically, many legal barriers have been raised to inhibit voting in the United States. Changes in election laws at the turn of the century were designed in the North to decrease voting by urban immigrants loyal to big city political machines and in the South to reduce voting by blacks and poor whites. Requiring registration of voters prior to election day was the most widely used restrictive method, but others such as a poll tax, a literacy test, and a white primary also were used, especially in Deep South states. In Florida, imposition of these restrictions reduced voter turnout by over 60 percent within a few years in the 1890s. White turnout was reduced by 31 percent and black turnout by 83 percent.

Today all of these legal barriers except for voter registration are gone, and nonwhite registration in Duval County is approximately equal to its proportion in the total population (26 percent). Yet overall levels of registration and voting remain low, suggesting that this one remaining legal barrier still may be reducing turnout at the polls.

### Registration

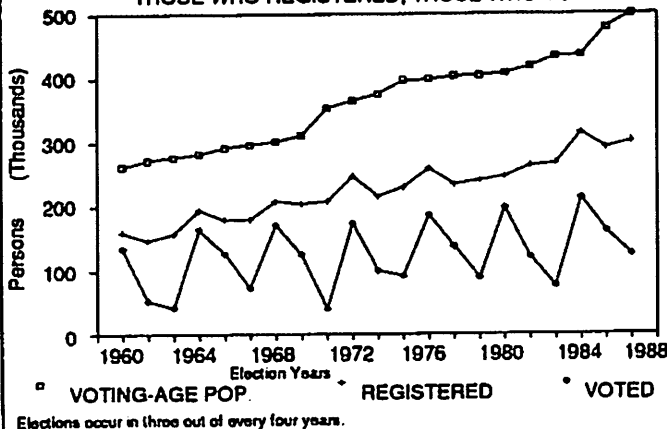
Across the nation, less restrictive registration provisions are associated with higher voter turnout rates. Although the purpose of registration requirements today is to prevent fraudulent voting, they may also reduce legitimate voting by restricting access to the vote. The degree to which registration requirements inhibit voting depends on the nature of registration procedures.

Among the industrialized democratic nations, only in the United States are citizens required to initiate their own voter registration. In many countries, voter registration is accomplished through universal enumeration similar to census procedures. Canada goes a step further by canvassing periodically from door to door in order to update voter rolls and register those not on the rolls. If the United States were to remove the obligation to register from citizens and initiate universal registration for eligible voters, all procedural barriers of the registration process would be removed.

Under the U.S. Constitution, each of the fifty states has its own election law. All forty-nine of the states which mandate voter registration require citizens to initiate their own registration.

Beyond this commonality, election laws regulate registration in a variety of more or less restrictive ways. In Florida, citizens must register to vote no later than 30 days prior to a first primary or general election in order to vote in that election. For politically aware and active persons, this presents no problem. Yet for many citizens, interest in an election may develop late, during the last-minute media blitz of campaigning, by which time it is too late to register and vote. As a result, some potential voters may effectively be disenfranchised. In many states registration rolls close 10 or 15 days before an election; a few states allow election day registration, apparently without significant voter fraud or impossible administrative burdens for election officials.

**DUVAL COUNTY VOTING-AGE POPULATION**  
THOSE WHO REGISTERED; THOSE WHO VOTED



If Florida citizens desire to vote in a primary election, they must declare their party affiliation when they register. This is called a closed primary system. Yet growing numbers of Americans consider themselves to be independent voters and do not wish to be identified with a particular political party. Such prospective voters may be less inclined to register if they perceive that most elections will be decided in party primaries with little two-party competition. Many states have open primaries, in which voters may select their party at the time of the primary election. This system dilutes the purpose of the primary election as a means for party members to nominate candidates, but it does provide voters more choice and flexibility.

Citizens must register in person, either at the Supervisor of Elections Office, at a satellite office, or at designated locations by volunteer deputy registrars. These locations may be permanent, in public or private offices, or they may be temporary locations for voter registration drives.

Permanent registration locations in Duval County include

- the Supervisor of Elections Office in downtown Jacksonville,
- city halls at the Beaches and Baldwin,
- about 70 private offices with volunteer deputy registrars, located throughout the county, many of which are realty offices, and
- about 50 Community Schools in the Duval County public school system, where the assistant principal is deputized to register voters.

Organizations such as the NAACP and the League of Women Voters make registration possible on specific dates, with approval of the Supervisor's office, in a wide variety of temporary locations. These include college campuses, places of employment, and shopping centers.

Many people are unaware of this large number of permanent and temporary locations or of the geographic convenience of registering. Registration is not generally available in government agency offices where many people congregate to receive public services, such as food stamp offices or driver's license offices.

Florida law allows registration by mail for anyone "unable to register in person." Supervisors of elections in the various counties appear to implement this provision in varying ways. In Duval County, registration by mail is permitted for people who certify that they are physically unable to come to a registration office, including handicapped persons, students away at college, and military personnel. Those desiring to register by mail must request it in writing. Florida law prohibits door-to-door canvassing for voter registration. A number of states allow registration by mail for all citizens, but few if any allow door-to-door canvassing for voter registration.

Registration is not permanent. Annually, the Supervisor of Elections Office sends letters to those registered who have not voted within two years. Persons who return the enclosed post card are retained on the registration rolls; those who do not are purged from it. In the fall of 1987 about 45,000 letters were sent in Duval County, and about 10,000 post cards were returned. Since about 301,000 persons were registered beforehand, about 12 percent were

purged. Supervisors of elections believe that most of those purged, rather than not caring, have moved or died.

In Florida, no means exists to transfer a registration from one county to another, or even from one precinct to another within a county. The citizen must reregister in the new location, after meeting the 30-day residency requirement. Several states have permanent registration, with no regular purging procedure. A number of others purge nonvoters only after four or eight years.

Florida's combined voter registration requirements are more restrictive than those of most states. North Dakota alone requires no registration. Of the 49 states requiring it, 23 allow all voters to register by mail; 29 close registration rolls less than 30 days before an election; 31 do not require voters to declare party affiliation at registration; and 35 have either permanent registration or purge less frequently than every two years. Based on these provisions, Florida ranks among the most restrictive states, along with several southwestern states, while Minnesota, Utah, and Iowa rank as the least restrictive. Research suggests that if all of the states were to adopt the registration practices of the least restrictive states (excluding North Dakota), average nationwide voter turnout would increase between 5 and 9 percent.

#### Jury duty selection using voter registration rolls

Another perceived barrier to voting is the practice of selecting citizens for jury duty at random from voter registration rolls. Many people apparently wish to avoid being bothered with jury duty, and some therefore decide not to register. No accurate documentation exists of the numbers involved, yet the perception is pervasive that this is a significant problem. Although some of those not registering for this reason may be indifferent toward voting and simply give this as a convenient excuse, others may truly find jury duty a difficult intrusion into their lives and work. This is especially true for small business people whose productivity and sales depend on their regular, personal work effort.

Separating jury selection from voter registration would solve this problem but would require judicial officials to tap another list or lists for prospective jury members. Driver's license lists or property owner lists have been suggested, but each alone presents questions of equity by excluding or exempting certain groups of people from jury duty. By combining several such lists into a single, fairly comprehensive listing, court officials could establish an equitable and neutral source for jury duty selection.

#### Day of elections

Other aspects of the legal election process also may have the effect of impeding active voting. One is the day of elections. All elections in Duval County are held on Tuesdays. It may be that some employed people find voting on workdays so inconvenient that they do not vote. However, even though Hawaii, Louisiana, and Texas have state and local elections on Saturdays, they do not appear to have higher turnouts as a result.

In state and national elections in the fall, the first primary is scheduled early in September. Occasionally election day falls the day after Labor Day. This timing appears to reduce voter turnout.

In addition, scheduling the second primary in early October appears to leave insufficient time between this election and the general election for absentee ballots to be requested and received by persons overseas, especially military personnel.

#### **Hours of voting; home precinct voting**

Two related barriers are the hours the polls are open and the requirement of voting at home-precinct polling places. In Florida the polls are open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. The large geographic size of Duval County and the increasing congestion on our transportation arteries make it difficult for working people to get to the polls before or after work without missing work time. Suggestions have been made that employers be encouraged to allow their employees time off to go to the polls. In some kinds of employment, however, this is not a viable option, and it still does not make voting convenient for those who work a fair distance from home.

Lengthening the voting day, perhaps from 6 a.m. to 9 or 10 p.m., would make voting in one's home precinct more feasible but would increase staff cost. Under federal law, beginning in November 1988, the polls in Florida will be open on presidential election days until 9 p.m. If this change increases turnout or reduces voter lines in national elections, it could have similar beneficial effects in state and local elections.

Use of on-line computer technology could allow citizens to vote at any polling place, at least within a county. In addition, new high-tech voting methods using electronically coded mail-in ballots, two-way television, or plastic cards have been used successfully in small experiments. These technological advances hold the promise for more convenient voting in the future. However, bringing them into general use will take time and will be expensive. In addition, safeguards will have to be developed to prevent electronic voter fraud.

#### **Many elective offices**

The length of the ballot is felt by some to be a barrier to voting. It may be that some voters become confused when many candidates are running for many positions. Or voters may lose interest when they cannot easily focus on a few major races.

Certain local elective offices in Duval County tend to attract fewer voters, partly because their functions are primarily administrative or quasi-judicial. For these offices, such as Supervisor of Elections, Tax Collector, Clerk of the Circuit Court, Property Appraiser, and Civil Service Board members, election may be neither appropriate nor desirable. Even without these positions, a large number of elective offices remain.

The barriers identified so far are legal or procedural impediments. Lowering these barriers requires legislative action. Federal law controls the dates and times of the national general elections held every two years in November. Florida's election law determines voter registration requirements, national primary election and state election dates and times, and election procedures. The municipal charters and ordinance codes of Jacksonville, the Beaches, and Baldwin contain provisions governing the dates and times of their local elections, as well as precinct boundaries and polling places. These can be changed through local legislative action.

Beyond the legal barriers, which make voting difficult or inconvenient, other kinds of barriers exist which make potential voters unaware of, indifferent toward, or disenchanted with voting. Some of these barriers also require legal action for reform. However, they may be imbedded deeply in the local community's political values about participation, making them more difficult to change.

## **Knowledge barriers to voting**

Many citizens are unaware of their role and the significance of voting in the political system. They may also be unaware of the issues and candidates in any particular election, or of how to go about registering and voting. People who vote tend consistently to be those with higher levels of education and income. Less well-educated and lower-income people tend to vote in lower proportions, partly because they have not been exposed to adequate civic and political education. In addition, publicly available information on issues, candidates, and voting procedures may not reach them. In Duval County, high levels of school dropout, functional illiteracy, and poverty inhibit development of a more informed electorate.

An informed electorate is as valuable in a democratic society as an expanded electorate--some say more so. Learning about the political system begins in the family. Children who are brought up to be knowledgeable and concerned about the political process are more likely as adults to participate in it. Beyond the family, our society relies heavily on the schools and the media to provide information necessary to make us informed citizens and voters.

#### **The schools**

Schools are an important factor in developing and nurturing active citizen participation. In an effective civic and political education curriculum, students learn regularly from about the sixth grade onward about the political system and its election process. During the last two years of high school, the curriculum is intensified and made more experiential as young people approach the age when they can register and vote. This kind of experiential learning can be enhanced through participation in an active student government process. In addition, some have suggested that making voter registration a regular part of the high school graduation process would encourage more eighteen-year-olds to become active voters. Since less than half of graduating seniors have turned eighteen, however, not all could benefit from this opportunity.

In Duval County, public and private schools offer a variety of civic and political education opportunities to their students. The public school social studies curriculum includes history and government in several grades, beginning with the study of Jacksonville in the third grade and concluding with recent American history in the eleventh grade. Social studies is optional in the twelfth grade. No unit or course focuses exclusively on voting and the election process, but concepts of responsible citizenship are included throughout.

Experiential learning is used in the public schools through special class projects and activities. Other organizations sometimes assist with such projects. In 1984, League of Women Voters volunteers conducted a special mock election project with sixth graders in two



public schools. Other schools wanted to participate, but the League could not accommodate them.

The public schools have student governments starting at about the sixth grade level. These, along with other school organizations and clubs, provide opportunities for many students to learn about and practice participation skills.

### **The media**

The media also play an important role in informing citizens of all ages. The broadcast and print media are the primary sources of information about issues and candidates in elections. This information is conveyed through news stories, editorial comment, paid advertising by the candidates, and occasional candidate forums and political analyses.

Recently, some have criticized the media, especially television, for focusing too much on candidates rather than issues in their election coverage. This is primarily the product of new approaches to campaigning which emulate slick marketing techniques. These tend to sell the image of a candidate rather than his or her qualifications or positions on election issues. Less information of substance is made available to voters to the extent that these approaches come to dominate election news, commentary, and advertising.

Suggestions have also been made that the media should begin in-depth coverage of issues and candidates immediately following the qualifying deadline, rather than waiting until near the end of the campaign period. By beginning in-depth coverage early, the media can offer more opportunities to greater numbers of citizens to become informed about both candidates and issues.

In addition, the media may be able to increase the range of information and opinion reaching the public during election campaigns. This could be accomplished by providing more time and space for individual citizens and private groups, including the political parties, to express their positions on issues and candidates. For the broadcast media, expanded use of editorial responses and talk show programming, especially during prime time, would be effective. For the print media, making space available on the op-ed page would help accomplish this purpose. The public access channel on cable TV provides another vehicle through which nonprofit, community-oriented organizations can sponsor expanded programming on political issues and campaigns.

The media could also do more to inform voters about how to register and vote. Large numbers of citizens are unaware of the many locations throughout the county, both permanent and temporary, where they may register to vote. Others do not know where their precinct polling places are located or even the hours for voting. Many also are unaware of the availability of transportation to the polls and babysitting services for voting parents. If the media were to publicize these kinds of information more widely and frequently, additional people would gain the knowledge needed to register and vote.

Citizens with lower levels of education and income in particular lack political awareness and knowledge. Yet efforts to inform through the schools and the media tend to bypass many of these people.

Reaching them requires a more intensive, sustained, directly targeted, neighborhood-level voter education strategy. Community-based organizations could most effectively initiate and maintain this kind of effort. Few such organizations exist in Duval County, and the few which do, such as the Jacksonville Urban League and the NAACP, have insufficient resources for the enormous task.

## **Motivational barriers to voting**

Improving the convenience of voting and the knowledge of voters alone will not solve the problem of low voter turnout. Prospective voters must also be sufficiently interested in and not disenchanted with the election process for them to choose to vote. Increasing the level of voting will require minimizing aspects of the election system which tend to make citizens indifferent or disenchanted. It also will require developing more broadly accepted, positive attitudes toward the importance and benefits of political participation.

### **Young voters; low-income voters**

Two groups of citizens in particular tend to vote less because of a lack of motivation. These are newly eligible voters, those between 18 and 25 years old, and those with low levels of education and income. Many younger citizens are indifferent toward voting because they have not yet developed a sense of identity with and a personal stake in the political system. In fact, this system makes decisions which directly affect their lives, such as the requirement to register for the draft.

Many low-income people also are indifferent toward the political system, because they must devote most of their energies toward securing the basic necessities of life. In addition, they may be disenchanted with a system which they feel does not deal with their needs. Yet many political decisions do in fact deal with their basic needs for income and human services.

Motivating more young people to vote will require substantial educational efforts by families, schools, and the media, while reaching low-income citizens will require intensive and continuous community-based efforts. To be effective, these efforts must not only inform but must also instill an understanding of each person's personal stake in the system and of the benefits which derive from participation.

### **Political parties**

Citizens in general may become indifferent toward or disenchanted with voting because they negatively perceive certain aspects of the election process. Political parties and their role in the election process may be one such aspect. With the exception of judges and School Board members, elected officials in Jacksonville government are chosen through a partisan election system in which candidates run and appear on the ballot with political party labels. Jacksonville is the only major municipality or charter county in Florida to have partisan elections for local officials, although about half the cities in the country with populations over 500,000 use partisan systems. Residents of the Beaches and Baldwin select their elected officials using a nonpartisan system.

Arguments made against partisan elections include the following: Political parties turn voters off, especially at the local level; people dislike having to declare party affiliation when they register; elections too often are decided by a minority of voters in primary elections; party politics makes little difference in the operation of local governments like the City of Jacksonville. On the other hand, nationwide research shows that voter turnout tends consistently to be higher in areas where a strong, competitive, two-party elective system is in operation; shifting to a nonpartisan system tends to reduce voter turnout.

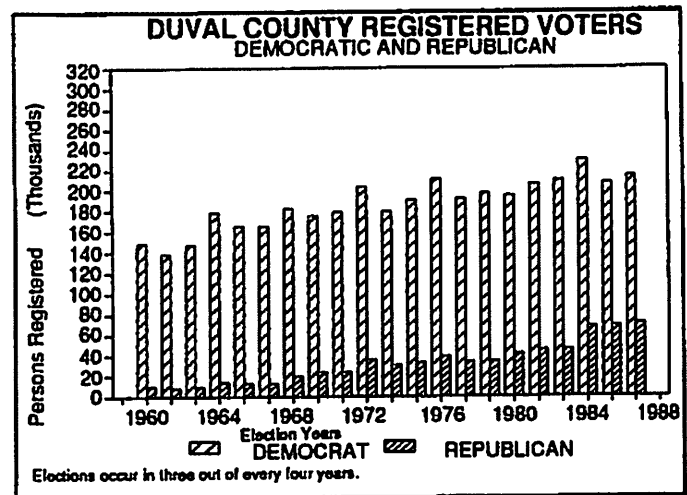
Historically, Duval County has not had a strong two-party system to bolster its partisan election process. A one-party, Democrat-dominated system emerged as a result of the voting restrictions imposed at the turn of the century. The same party still remains dominant in local politics. The lack of balance and competitiveness in this party system lends credence to the arguments of those favoring a nonpartisan system.

However, Democrat domination now is being eroded rapidly by increases in Republican registration and victories at the polls. Although in 1962 only 5.6 percent of registered voters in Duval County declared for the Republican Party, today 23.7 percent are registered as Republicans. Despite these increases, the feeling remains that many important local races, especially countywide contests, are decided in the Democratic primary elections. A truly competitive two-party system does not yet exist in Duval County, but current trends seem to indicate that such a system may be developing. Given this possibility, plus the evidence of national voting patterns, the potential may be greater for increasing voter turnout in Duval County through a more competitive partisan system than through shifting to a nonpartisan system.

Even if a partisan system is retained, some feel that changing from the current closed primary system to an open or a unitary primary system would increase voter interest and participation. These systems differ as follows:

- **closed primary**—Voters declare their party at registration and may vote in only that party's primary, unless they change their registration.
- **open primary**—Voters may choose which party's primary they will vote in when they go to the polls for each primary election.
- **unitary primary**—Voters receive a single ballot with all candidates of all parties and select one candidate for each office, regardless of party.

Currently, 24 states have closed primaries, 23 have open primaries, and 3 have unitary primaries. Voters have more choice and flexibility with open or unitary systems. In addition, they need not declare a party affiliation, although they must choose a party at the polls in an open primary election. On the other hand, the open and unitary primaries also erode party loyalty and discipline, making it more difficult for party members to control the nomination process and select their strongest candidate. One strategy used occasionally in open primaries is for members of party A to cross over and vote for party B's weakest candidate, in hopes that the latter will be nominated and then be defeated by party A's stronger candidate.



Others feel that the two-party bias of the election system tends to discourage voters who do not identify with either of the mainstream parties. Under Florida law, candidate qualifying requirements differ for major party candidates, minor party candidates, and independent candidates. Those from the two major parties may qualify in one of two ways: by payment of a filing fee of three percent of the annual salary of the office for which the candidate is running; or by obtaining petition signatures from three percent of the voters registered as members of the party in the district in which the candidate will run. Independent candidates and those running as minor party candidates must obtain signatures of three percent of all those registered to vote in the district; they cannot qualify by paying a filing fee.

The purpose of these differing requirements is to discourage frivolous candidates from running. Yet they may also restrict voter choice and reduce citizen interest in the election process, especially among those who do not identify with either mainstream party or their candidates. Loosening qualifying requirements for independent and minor party candidates would require state legislative action; however, since the members of the Legislature belong to the mainstream parties, they may be reluctant to consider such changes.

Despite these problems with the two-party system, strong arguments have been made for retaining it. The parties exist as vehicles for the organization of people around political issues and candidates. With a nonpartisan system, a system with multiple parties, or a system in which one party clearly dominates, the organization of politics is likely to become fragmented around many narrowly concerned, single-interest factions. Community consensus and majority rule can be accomplished in this kind of political environment only through the difficult and continuous process of coalition building.

It is possible for the two major parties to continue to act as organizing vehicles in a nonpartisan system. This is the case in Minneapolis, where the parties endorse and support candidates who nevertheless appear on a nonpartisan ballot. This hybrid approach is similar to a partisan system with wide open primary elections. It seems to work in Minneapolis, where voter turnout is quite high, although many factors contribute to the high level of political participation there.



## Incumbents

Another facet of the election system which tends to reduce motivation to vote is a built-in bias favoring incumbents. Those who already hold the office and are running for reelection benefit from both higher name recognition and a broader ability to raise campaign funds. In the 1987 election to fill 19 Jacksonville City Council seats, seven incumbents ran unopposed and were reelected without an election; one challenger also ran unopposed. Five additional incumbents won reelection over opponents, although two others were defeated. In all, 12 of 14 City Council incumbents who ran for reelection won. Two Civil Service Board seats and the positions of Tax Collector and Supervisor of Elections also were filled by unopposed incumbents. Given the many uncontested races and the evident advantage for incumbent candidates, some citizens may reasonably question the importance of making the effort to vote.

Providing some public financing for campaigns could improve the competitiveness of challenger candidates. This would allow challengers to reach more citizens during their campaigns, could make them more viable candidates, and could increase citizen interest in the election process. This improvement requires legislative approval, and legislators are, of course, incumbents. Perhaps for this reason, state governments have done little to experiment with public financing of elections. The Florida Legislature recently authorized a trust fund for public financing of campaigns for the governor and cabinet positions. However, the Legislature has not been appropriating the \$3 million per year necessary to fund it. No provisions exist for public financing of other state or local election campaigns.

## The media

Since most citizens rely heavily on the media for information about the election process, the tone or approach taken by the media may affect both the degree to which people feel positively or negatively about elections and the likelihood that they will decide to vote. The media have a responsibility to inform the public in an unbiased and balanced manner. The perception that they tend to emphasize the negative in their political and election coverage in order to increase ratings or circulation may disenchant some citizens or at least render them indifferent. Although this perception of a negative bias may be inaccurate, it does appear to be influencing the attitudes and actions of some citizens. If people were to perceive a more balanced view of politics coming from the media, some indifference and disenchantment might be reduced and some voting increased.

## Elected officials

Elected officials also have a responsibility to maintain citizen interest in politics and government. Some officials are criticized for going to the voters for support during an election campaign and then disappearing until reelection time. If public officials cultivate closer contact with their constituents between elections and encourage them to participate actively in governmental decision-making at the neighborhood level, citizens may tend to maintain a higher and more positive interest in government and vote more regularly. Several Jacksonville City Council members are taking positive steps in this direction by periodically convening neighborhood "town meetings."

Some resource persons to the study committee feel that the at-large City Council members are too far removed from the people to represent them effectively. The purpose for having at-large seats is to provide a vehicle for community-wide political leadership unencumbered by the more narrow interests of individual districts. Some feel, however, that these seats have become the stronghold of powerful special interest groups, not the public in general. Widespread attitudes of this nature may tend to discourage voter participation. Suggestions have been made to eliminate these five seats, redrawing district boundaries to create a City Council of 13 or 15 district members. Others feel that the solution is to elect at-large City Council members who are committed to representing the entire community.

## Sense of citizen responsibility

Although reducing various legal, knowledge, and motivational barriers may help to increase voter turnout, ultimately, the choice to vote rests with the individual. A person may decide to vote because he or she perceives an opportunity to promote self-interest, however defined. Alternatively, a person may choose to vote because he or she has a sense of responsibility as a citizen in a democratic society.

Ideally, all citizens would insist on voting in order to protect their individual and mutual interests. However, since indifference and disenchantment do exist, placing more emphasis on citizen responsibility may be a necessary and desirable means of increasing voter turnout. Although the schools and the media can help to reinforce values of citizen responsibility, only individual citizens can choose to apply them, by voting even when a self-interest benefit is not readily apparent.

# IMPROVING CANDIDATE RECRUITMENT

Citizens participate in a representative democracy not only as voters but as candidates, some of whom become elected officials. The level of participation, as well as the quality of government, can be improved by increasing the number and the quality of people who run for office. A high-quality candidate is one who has the capacity to campaign and serve in elective office with ability, talent, and integrity. Improving the number and quality of candidates may have the added benefit of increasing citizen interest and voter turnout.

## National trends in candidate recruitment

Political parties no longer dominate the recruitment of candidates, and no other broadly-based organizations have taken over this function. Today, candidates tend to offer themselves, yet they still are selected through the party primary nomination process.

During the nineteenth century American politics established a pattern of candidate recruitment and selection through political parties. Ambitious individuals made themselves available as candidates by participating actively in a party's organization and activities; parties groomed likely candidates by promoting them up the organizational ladder and by giving them increasingly responsible campaign work. Candidates were selected by party leaders behind the closed doors of party caucuses or in conventions dominated by the party regulars.

The turn-of-the-century reform movement worked to reduce the power of political party machines, including their control over candidate recruitment and selection. The primary election was promoted as a means of opening up the candidate selection process to rank-and-file party members. The open primary system went further, allowing voters to select their party at the polling place on primary election day.

As use of primary elections successfully reduced party machine control over candidate selection, the parties also lost their domination of candidate recruitment. New patterns developed which remain today. Especially at the local level, private interest groups of various kinds have become involved in recruiting, developing, and promoting potential candidates whom they perceive would be beneficial to their interests if elected. Some of these groups are formal bodies, such as the Jaycees. Others are informal groups of people who form local party factions or cadres of persons committed to individual potential candidates. The individualized nature of this process has increased the practice of self-recruitment by people interested in running.

## Candidate recruitment in Jacksonville

In Jacksonville, a weak, noncompetitive party system continues to be dominated by the Democrats. Yet increasing numbers of Republican candidates are running for office and winning.

In Florida and Jacksonville the pattern of candidate recruitment and selection reflects the southern reform movement's success in

establishing a one-party political system dominated by the Democratic Party. A one-party system in practice is a no-party system; candidates emerge through competition among opposing factions and through self-recruitment. In this political environment, candidate selection in the Democratic Party primary often is equivalent to election or predictably leads to it.

Historically, few Republican primary races have appeared on the ballot, and few Republican candidates have won elections in Duval County. Recent increases in Republican registration are beginning to translate into increased numbers of Republican candidates and elected officials. During the 1987 Jacksonville local election, Republicans voted in primary races for sheriff and two City Council district seats, while Democrats voted in races for mayor, sheriff, property appraiser, ten City Council seats (two at-large and eight district seats), and three Civil Service Board seats. Nine Democrats and two Republicans ran unopposed in this election. Still, Republican candidates won only four of 31 positions on the ballot, two of them unopposed and two in contested elections.

Republican victories have come in district races because those registering as Republicans tend to be concentrated in certain geographic areas. As more local residents identify themselves as Republicans, these districts may increasingly elect Republicans. At the present time, Republicans hold state and local district elective offices in Duval County as follows:

- 3 of 14 Jacksonville City Council seats
- 1 of 7 Jacksonville Civil Service Board seats
- 1 of 3 Florida Senate seats
- 4 of 8 Florida House of Representatives seats

In each case, the current level of Republican representation is higher than in recent years. Four Republicans were elected to City Council in the unique 1967 election which inaugurated consolidated Jacksonville government. Since that time, however, no more than one Republican has won in any election until 1987. Despite recent Republican gains in district seats, Democrats continue to hold all of the at-large, county-wide elective offices.

Participation of Republicans as candidates has been more pronounced and variable than their success in winning. Republican participation in City Council races since consolidation has been as follows:

year	at-large seats		district seats	
	running	elected	running	elected
1967	3	0	9	4
1971	1	0	4	1
1975	1	0	8	1
1979	0	0	3	0
1983	0	0	6	1
1987	0	0	6	3

Although Republican candidate participation has been evident, it is lagging behind the growth in Republican registration. In 1987 Republicans represented about 24 percent of the registered voters but only 15 percent of the candidates.

Meanwhile, the number of female and black candidates has been increasing, with the exception of the most recent election:

year	female candidates		black candidates	
	running	elected	running	elected
1967	3	2	6	4
1971	2	2	9	3
1975	3	2	9	3
1979	8	3	16	5
1983	12	2	20	3
1987	9	6	15	3

Increasing female and black participation as candidates has not regularly produced increasing numbers of female and black elected officials. The number of female City Council members increased significantly in the 1987 local election, although the number of candidates slightly decreased. On the other hand, substantial increases in the number of black candidates have not been translated into greater numbers of black City Council members. Most female and black candidates have run for district seats in City Council, the Civil Service Board, and the School Board. Few have run for county-wide office, and only two have won. From 1967 through 1979 a black person held one City Council at-large seat. A woman recently was elected Supervisor of Elections.

While Republican candidate participation has varied and female and black participation has increased, the overall number of candidates in local elections has been decreasing. The decrease has come mostly in the number of white, male, Democrat candidates.

In the initial consolidated government election in 1967, a high of 97 persons ran for City Council seats. Since then, between 55 and 69 candidates have run in each election until 1987, when only 48 persons ran.

## Barriers to candidate recruitment

Capable persons may not offer themselves as candidates for local elective office in Duval County because of several kinds of barriers. These include the following:

- the state financial disclosure law
- the time-consuming nature of campaigning and serving in public office
- the high cost of campaigning
- scrutiny from the media
- lack of broadly based organizational and grassroots efforts to seek out, develop, and support new political leadership
- weak civic values to encourage citizen involvement as candidates

## Financial disclosure law

Florida's financial disclosure law requires candidates and elected officials to disclose in itemized detail their income and assets. Its purpose is to expose potential conflicts between the public interest and the private financial gain of public officials.

Many agree that the purpose is valid but that the method used may be unnecessarily burdensome. The most objectionable aspects of the current law concern the requirements to itemize assets in detail and to report a dollar figure for total wealth. The first is perceived by some to be an invitation to theft; the second may be perceived to jeopardize certain business or professional relations; and both may be taken as an invasion of privacy. Several suggestions have been made to amend the law. One would require itemizing only major sources of income and wealth, without dollar figures. Another would require reporting total income and wealth within ranges rather than precisely. These approaches would alert the public to potentially significant sources of conflicts of interest without publicizing the details of an individual's personal finances.

## Time-consuming running and serving

Running for office and serving in public office are becoming increasingly time-consuming endeavors. Election campaign periods have been increasing for both state and local elective positions. In contested partisan races, candidates may campaign for as long as a year for three consecutive elections—two primaries and a general election—in order to win elective office. Suggestions have been made that the period of campaigning be shortened. Although legislating this directly would be an infringement of free speech, incentives for shorter campaigns could be initiated. These might include shortening the time between the qualifying deadline for candidates and the first primary election and shortening the period during which financial contributions may be raised and must be reported.

Some local elective offices, such as mayor, sheriff, and tax collector, are designed to be full-time positions and receive commensurate salaries. State Legislature and City Council positions are considered to be part-time and are paid accordingly. In reality, the demands of these positions increasingly are making them full-time responsibilities. Some legislative officials feel, however, that current salary levels are inadequate as a primary source of income. Therefore, time pressures remain to maintain a business or profession while also meeting the demands of public office, perhaps to the detriment of both.

Some suggest that the solution to this problem is to provide full-time salaries for state and local legislators and to expect them to perform their public duties full-time. According to this view, if both salaries and expectations were increased, additional numbers of capable people who aspire to careers in politics might offer themselves as candidates.

Others, however, stress the importance of maintaining the traditional value of representation by citizen-legislators, not professional politicians. According to this view, State Legislators and City Council members should be citizens living and working in the local community, close to the people they represent. Their representative duties should be part-time and limited to a few terms, and their compensation should be minimal, so that they will not come to depend on it for their livelihood.

As legislative duties become more complex and time-consuming, maintaining the tradition of the part-time citizen legislator is becoming difficult. Attracting capable citizens to run for and hold these elective offices may become impossible if means are not found to ease the time pressures.

One suggestion is to apply the "loaned executive" concept used by the United Way to serving in public office. Under this approach, corporate employers provide substantial release time to certain employees for public service activities. For example, the CSX corporation has practiced this approach locally by supporting a member of the Florida House of Representatives and a City Council member employed by them.

Another suggestion is to provide more staff assistance for state and local legislators. Florida State Legislators do have personal staff, but Jacksonville City Council members must share inadequate numbers of secretarial and research staff. Although more staff is available now than in the past, each secretary still must serve three City Council members, and little research assistance is available.

A third suggestion is to reduce the burden of work which City Council members do to assist individual constituents with city services problems. To accomplish this, City Council members would place responsibility for service delivery back on the city departments which provide the services by referring constituent calls to them. In addition, the public would be better informed about how to contact each department for resolution of problems.

Additional suggestions have been made to limit both the number of years in a term of office and the number of terms a state or local legislator may serve, and to stagger terms of office. State Senators and Jacksonville City Council members serve four-year terms, although the term for State Representatives is two years. A two-year term may be too short, since incumbents may spend over half their term involved in reelection campaigning. Yet given the time pressures of public office, four years may be too long a time commitment for many potential candidates who must maintain a business or professional practice.

Three-year terms have been suggested as a reasonable compromise. The greatest difficulty with this proposal is that it would increase the number of state and local elections, unless all state and local elective offices were assigned the same three-year terms. Even if this were done, national elections still must be conducted on two and four year cycles.

Florida governors and Jacksonville mayors already are limited to two consecutive terms in office, yet no such limit exists for state or local legislators. In order to maintain the citizen-legislator tradition and to make the time commitment more manageable, some suggest that the two-term limit be extended to cover state legislators and City Council members.

Staggering of terms may be combined with a limit on terms in order to maintain continuity of representation as well as the citizen-legislator tradition. With only some members facing election at any one time, fewer new members must learn their new responsibilities simultaneously, and those with continuing terms are available to assist and guide the newcomers.

Finally, some persons may be deterred from running because of a

perception of how difficult and time-consuming public decision-making is under Florida's government-in-the-sunshine law. Frustration with the restrictions imposed by the sunshine law may especially deter some incumbents from running for reelection.

### Cost of campaigning

The cost of campaigning for state and local elective offices continues to rise rapidly. A major reason for the increase is expanding use of paid advertising on television, as candidates strive to create pleasing images for the voters. In the "free market" of election campaigning, these costs may continue to escalate.

Fund raising is a time-consuming and, for many candidates, onerous necessity. Incumbents have great advantages because of higher name recognition and easier access to contributions from private interest groups and political action committees. Potential challengers may be reticent even to enter a race unless they have access to substantial sources of financial support. Many capable persons may choose not to become candidates because of perceived difficulties in raising money or because they do not wish to become obligated to interest groups making large contributions.

Some potential candidates also may perceive Florida's laws limiting the size of campaign contributions and requiring detailed reporting of contributions to be deterrents to running. These laws exist to limit the ability of wealthy individuals or groups to "buy" elections and to expose the sources and amounts of each candidate's financial support. Although most agree with the need for this legislation, some suggest that the reporting requirements should be simplified.

If the cost of campaigning is to be stabilized or reduced, the only means may be a legislative cap. Where this has been attempted, constitutional questions have arisen and remain unresolved. Even if it were to be enacted, many people believe that a cap could not be enforced; many ways would be found to circumvent it through indirect financing mechanisms.

Public funding of campaigns has been suggested, both to limit spending and to help equalize the chance for challengers to raise funds. As long as acceptance of public funding is voluntary, use of public funds for campaigning could be tied to a limit on campaign spending. A public campaign finance law could include other beneficial requirements: Public funding could be made available only to match privately raised funds received during a certain, limited campaigning period; public funding also could be limited to matching only small contributions from private individuals.

The Florida Legislature has established a Campaign Finance Trust Fund to make public funding available to campaigns for governor and Cabinet positions, beginning in 1990. However, no significant level of funding has yet been appropriated for it. No public funding currently is authorized for other state or local election campaigns.

Shifting to a nonpartisan or unitary primary election system could reduce campaign and election costs. Since only two elections would be required, candidates might campaign for a shorter period and spend less than under a partisan system, where a runoff primary may be required. In addition, taxpayers would be saved the governmental expense of conducting runoff elections, which cost about \$100,000 in Duval County.

## Scrutiny by the media

Increasingly, the media are scrutinizing the personal lives of candidates, as well as their families. Although candidates work hard to create a positive image through paid advertising and other media exposure, news and editorial coverage by the media may present a different, perhaps more negative image. The degree of personal exposure and public scrutiny to which candidates, as well as public officials, must now submit may deter many people from entering the fishbowl of politics.

Neither censoring nor controlling the media is a viable option in a society which values freedom of expression. Yet with freedom comes responsibility, and many feel that the media have an obligation to inform the public on political issues and personalities in ways which will tend to maintain or improve the integrity of the democratic political process. Unfortunately, no agreement exists as to where the boundary should be drawn between legitimate election coverage of candidates and undue exposure of personal lives.

## Organizations to develop political leadership

In Duval County, no broadly based organizations actively seek out persons interested in politics, develop them into capable candidates, and support their election. The political parties are performing this function of political leadership development only minimally. The locally-dominant Democratic Party is large and diverse. The county executive committee does not actively attempt to seek out specific persons and develop them into candidates. Instead, candidates usually are self-recruited. They may have been involved in politics and the local Party organization over a period of time, or they may simply be registered Democrats. All they must do to get on the ballot is to meet the legal qualifying requirements for the position they are seeking.

The Republican Party has chosen a more organized approach, since it has fewer members from which to develop candidates. A candidate recruitment committee within the county executive committee is making some effort to identify potential candidates and to indoctrinate them in the principles of the Party, so as to develop what the Party considers well qualified candidates.

The parties cannot endorse candidates or provide them financial assistance until the primary elections determine the single party candidates for each race. Even then, the local party organizations do not always formally support candidates running under their party's label, and the level of campaign and financial support available from the parties is not great. Candidates must build their own campaign organizations and their own financial bases.

No other organization has emerged locally to encourage and develop new political leadership. At one time the local Jaycee organizations were considered to be important sources of new candidates, but that seems to be less true today. Most aspiring candidates have had to take the initiative themselves, starting with cadres of personal supporters and building campaign organizations based on ad-hoc coalitions of individuals and groups. Others might

offer themselves as candidates if a recognized vehicle were available to guide them toward developing a viable candidacy.

In other cities, various kinds of organizations are involved in developing new political leadership and recruiting candidates for elective office. Some organizations are "blue-ribbon" groups of leaders seeking to develop new leaders. Locally, the consolidation movement spawned such group efforts in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Later in the 1970s the Chamber of Commerce sponsored a series of seminars for aspiring candidates on how to run a successful campaign. None of these efforts has survived.

Other political leadership development organizations are coalitions of neighborhood-based groups, which seek to develop grassroots leaders and get them elected to local elective offices. Especially in electoral districts where one political party tends to dominate, neighborhood organizations can be an important alternative source of candidates who do not identify with the dominant party.

A number of neighborhood-based groups exist in Jacksonville but few are politically oriented or active, nor is there a citywide coalition of neighborhood organizations. One local organization which has been effective politically at the neighborhood level is the Greater Arlington Civic Council, which is a coalition of about forty neighborhood associations in the Arlington area.

Maintaining an organization devoted to developing political leadership may be extremely difficult. Candidates for office need more than education and encouragement; they need direct organizational and financial support. However, providing this level of support turns a leadership development organization into a campaign organization for particular candidates. If these candidates lose, the organization may lose credibility. If they win, the organization might prosper, but it would be identified henceforth with particular political leaders, not the entire community.

## Civic involvement values

Offering oneself as a candidate is a significant commitment to political participation—much more so than deciding to vote. The civic values of a community toward political involvement may encourage or discourage capable persons from deciding to take the plunge and run for office. Civic values differ among states and urban areas. Political involvement is held in higher esteem in some areas, such as Minneapolis. In many parts of the country, including Jacksonville, government has a more negative reputation. In this political environment, those seeking and gaining public office may be viewed as mere "politicians," with all the negative connotations people attach to that term.

Changing local civic values is not easy and cannot be accomplished by specific reforms. Yet, if some of the more tangible reforms do succeed in reducing barriers to voter and candidate participation, it is likely that the attitudes people have toward government and elected officials may become more positive. If this happens, a continuing chain reaction of increased participation may become possible, leading to an overall strengthening of values concerning civic involvement.

# CONCLUSIONS

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Conclusions express the value judgments of the committee, based on the findings.

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## Voter Participation

1. Voter turnouts in Duval County are too low to provide adequate popular influence in local government and meaningful participation in the election of state and national officials.
2. Reducing registration and voting barriers and better informing the electorate will increase voting participation to a limited extent. Only by reducing pervasive indifference toward and disenchantment with government and politics will most citizens choose to participate. More intensive efforts will be required to motivate young adults and less educated, low-income persons to become informed voters, since they appear to be preoccupied with other concerns and lack awareness of the impact of government on their lives.
3. Restrictive voter registration procedures in Florida law reduce voter participation. These include
  - closing registration rolls 30 days before an election,
  - purging from the registration rolls those who have not voted during the past two years,
  - limiting registration by mail to those physically unable to register in person, and
  - requiring party identification at registration in order to vote in primary elections.
4. Because some people do not register to vote in order to avoid jury duty, the requirement in Florida law to select names for jury duty from voter registration rolls reduces voter participation.
5. Certain provisions in the Florida and Jacksonville election laws create barriers which make voting inconvenient and reduce participation. These include
  - holding the first fall primary election immediately following Labor Day and the runoff in early October,
  - limiting election hours from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.,
  - requiring voting in one's home precinct, and
  - restricting the use of absentee ballots.
6. The large number of elective positions in Jacksonville government reduces voting, especially for certain offices. Some of these, which have primarily administrative or quasi-judicial functions, would more appropriately be appointive.
7. Limited competition among candidates in many races reduces voter participation. This results from significant campaigning and fund-raising advantages enjoyed by incumbents, legal restrictions on third-party and independent candidates, and the unlimited number of terms legislative officials may serve if elected.
8. Lack of an effective and competitive party system in Jacksonville, as well as a negative opinion of political parties held by many citizens, reduces voter participation. Vigorous party competition is lacking, because the parties do not take clearly different positions on public issues in state and local affairs.
9. An informed electorate is more important in a democratic society than widespread voter participation. Simply increasing the number of voters without concern for their being informed voters is undesirable.
10. In Duval County, many citizens are nonparticipants in voting because of insufficient knowledge about government and politics, election issues and candidates, and how and where to register and vote. Others participate despite being inadequately informed.
11. The schools play an important role in educating young people for citizenship. An adequate civic education curriculum must include required courses to inform students of the part which voting plays in our society, why it is important for the citizen to vote, and how each citizen should prepare to vote intelligently in an election.
12. The media play an important role by informing citizens about issues and candidates in an election. It is important for the citizens that such information be adequate in quantity and high in quality.

## Candidate Recruitment

13. The quality of government and its accountability to the people depend heavily on the number and quality of citizens who run as candidates for elective office. In Duval County the number of candidates has decreased in recent years, and insufficient numbers of capable individuals are offering themselves as candidates. Many potential candidates choose not to run because of a variety of disincentives built into the election process.
14. Despite some recent improvement, the number of women and blacks in local elective offices remains disproportionately low.
15. The time commitments necessary for campaigning and serving in the Florida Legislature and the Jacksonville City Council are becoming too burdensome to maintain the valuable tradition of temporary, citizen-legislators in frequent, close contact with their constituents. Factors which contribute to this time burden include



- long campaigning periods,
  - no limit on terms in office,
  - lack of adequate staff support for City Council members, and
  - overinvolvement by City Council members in addressing service delivery problems of constituents.
16. The financial requirements of campaigning for office discourage some potential candidates from running. In particular
- the fund-raising requirements for a successful campaign have become too high and continue to grow rapidly, and
  - challengers to incumbent candidates are at a financial disadvantage.

No solution is apparent, however, since capping campaign spending has been declared unconstitutional, and public financing of local campaigns appears to be politically and financially unfeasible.

17.

Although the Florida financial disclosure law is desirable for public accountability, its reporting requirements are overly intrusive.

18.

No generally recognized organizations in Duval County are dedicated to developing political leadership and recruiting capable candidates for local elective office. In their absence, many candidates are self-recruited or promoted by small groups, which has not resulted in sufficient numbers of capable candidates.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are the committee's specific suggestions for change, based on the findings and conclusions.

Voting is an individual responsibility of citizenship. The citizens of Duval County should take this responsibility seriously, should inform themselves on the issues and the candidates, and should vote at each opportunity. Running for office also is an important civic responsibility for those able to become candidates and serve capably in elective positions.

### Voter Participation

1. To minimize barriers to voter registration, the Florida Legislature should amend the state election law to
  - allow registration as close as possible, but not more than seven days prior, to election day, while still ensuring accurate voter rolls,
  - provide that every four years, following each national presidential election, registration rolls be purged of those who have not voted since the last presidential election,
  - allow any citizen who is eligible to vote to register by mail, and
  - designate a list other than the voter registration roll, such as the driver's license list, for use in jury duty selection.
2. To minimize barriers to voting, the Florida Legislature should amend the state election law to
  - set voting hours for all elections to run from 7 a.m. until 9 p.m. (City Council should establish these hours for Jacksonville elections if the Legislature does not act), and
  - authorize county supervisors of elections, as affordable technology allows, to permit voting in any county polling place rather than only in the voter's home precinct.
3. State and local government chief executives should encourage administrative offices serving large numbers of persons to make available information about registration and voting.

Once approved by the Florida Legislature, these offices should make available forms for registration by mail.

4. The Jacksonville Charter Revision Commission, when next convened, should study whether elective offices which are primarily administrative or quasi-judicial, such as the county constitutional officers and the Civil Service Board, should be made appointive. This study should consider all relevant factors, including the lower voter turnout which these offices attract.
5. The City Council should amend the local election law to replace the existing closed primary system with a unitary primary system for City of Jacksonville elections. Under this system, a single primary election would be held with a single ballot for all voters within each electoral district. Candidates would appear on the ballot with party labels and campaign as party candidates. Any candidate winning a majority of votes in the primary would be elected; if no candidate for a position wins a majority, the general election serves as a runoff between the top two vote-getters, regardless of party. The unitary primary system holds the greatest promise for expanding participation by increasing the competitiveness of the political parties, while reducing the negative partisanship of the closed primary system.
6. All schools, public and private, should offer required courses to inform students of the part which voting plays in our society, why it is important for citizens to vote, and how each citizen should prepare to vote intelligently in an election. The Community School Program in the public schools and local

colleges and universities should make similar courses available to the general public.

7. Local organizations such as the Jaycees, the League of Women Voters, the NAACP, and the Jacksonville Urban League should cooperate in convening and facilitating a new organization devoted to informing the electorate comprehensively and intensively about election issues, candidates, and the election process. Funding should be sought for clerical and research support.

During each election campaign period, the organization should develop accurate, complete, and impartial information on election issues, the positions of candidates, and relevant personal information about the candidates. This information should be disseminated in a timely manner through participating organizations and through the media, including cable television public access channels.

The organization should disseminate accurate, up-to-date information, through community organizations, schools, and the media, on the procedures for registration and voting.

#### **Candidate Recruitment**

8. To reduce the time burden of serving in office and to maintain the valuable tradition of temporary, citizen-legislators
  - The City of Jacksonville Charter should be amended to limit City Council members to two consecutive four-year terms, excluding partial terms,

- The City of Jacksonville Charter should be amended to elect City Council members on a staggered basis, one-half every two years, rather than all at once every four years, to help maintain continuity of representation even with limited terms,

- The mayor and City Council jointly should develop and publicize a mechanism to route citizen complaints concerning service delivery to the proper departments and agencies, freeing City Council members to perform their legislative duties, and

- The Jacksonville City Council should evaluate their secretarial and research staffing to ensure that it is adequate to support their legislative duties.

9. The Florida Legislature should amend the state financial disclosure law by limiting reporting requirements to total annual income and net worth plus major sources of income, identified within ranges.

10. Community associations and other organizations in Duval County should be encouraged to recruit capable persons as candidates for local elective office.

11. Local colleges and universities should offer seminars and workshops for potential candidates on the legal, financial, and political aspects of running a successful election campaign. The organization recommended in #7 above should be involved in planning and offering these seminars and workshops.

## RESOURCE PEOPLE

The JCCI study process relies upon information supplied by knowledgeable resource people in addition to published reference materials. We wish to thank the following persons for their contributions to this study:

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Bill Bankhead, member of the Florida House of Representatives  
Tommie Bell, Duval County Supervisor of Elections  
Bill Birchfield, former member of the Florida House of Representatives  
Terrie Brady, Duval County Executive Committee chairman, Democratic Party  
Don Brewer, former Jacksonville City Council member; member of Fifty-One Percent  
Lloyd Brown, editorial writer, Florida Publishing Company  
Joan Carver, dean, College of Arts and Sciences, Jacksonville University  
Corine Cole, League of Women Voters  
Sandra Darling, Jacksonville City Council member  
Willie Dennis, president, Jacksonville Branch, NAACP  
Michael Dillon, reporter, WJXT-TV, Channel 4  
Nick Dunbar, Libertarian Party  
Emmet Ferguson, Democratic Party  
Tillie Fowler, Jacksonville City Council member  
Frank Hampton, political activist

Bill Jones, executive director, Florida Common Cause  
Bob Kerstein, assistant professor of political science, University of Tampa  
Sharon Laird, political activist  
Ron Littlepage, assistant managing editor, Florida Publishing Company  
Ernie Mastrolanni, Duval County Property Appraiser  
Fred Matthews, reporter, WOKV-AM radio station  
Deitra Micks, Jacksonville City Council member  
Jack Newsom, political activist  
Steve Pajcic, former member of the Florida House of Representatives  
Harry Reagan, editorial director, WJXT-TV, Channel 4  
Rex Rhea, Republican Party  
Bob Schellenberg, publisher, Jacksonville Business Journal  
Phyllis Slater, attorney, Florida Division of Elections  
Norma Smith, Duval County executive committee chairman, Republican Party  
I. M. Sulzbacher, former Jacksonville City Council member  
Arnold Tritt, executive director, Northeast Florida Builders Association  
Mike Walker, director of academic programs, Duval County School Board

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In addition to these printed references, the committee benefited from data made available by resource persons, including Lloyd Brown, Joan Carver, and Tommie Bell, Duval County Supervisor of Elections.

# COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP AND WORK

Committee members met together on 24 Tuesday mornings from October through April. In addition, the Management Team met several times to provide guidance and direction for the study. The committee received information from 34 knowledgeable resource persons and additional written materials researched by JCCI staff.

Chairman: James C. Rinaman

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Ronnie Ferguson  
Sandra Sheppard

Edna Alexander  
Charlotte Arinson  
Richard Averett  
Steve Baker  
J. Shepard Bryan Jr.  
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Tom Schneider  
Bob Schellenberg  
David Senkowski  
Julia Taylor  
Philip Twogood  
Darlene Tye  
David Williams  
Claude Yates

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Donnelly Rembert  
\*David Swain  
Katrinka Walter

### SUPPORT

\*Sherrie Barwick  
Starr Revisky

\*Responsible for this study

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# THE JACKSONVILLE COMMUNITY COUNCIL, INC.

The Jacksonville Community Council, Inc. (JCCI) was formed to anticipate, identify, and address the complex issues of urban life. JCCI is a community-based nonpartisan, nonprofit organization providing the vehicle for in-depth, objective, citizen analysis of community problems and issues. It seeks broader community awareness and understanding of the issues and provides Jacksonville a diverse citizen forum reaching across the traditional dividing lines of a complex and diverse urban community.

The primary goal of JCCI is a better quality of life in Jacksonville through positive change. It has an impressive record for the quality, objectivity, clarity, and practicality of its studies of community problems, and its advocacy for the solutions it develops. Jacksonville has experienced the benefits of numerous improvements growing from these citizen studies. Through its support of the Human Services Coalition and work for the United Way, JCCI promotes the planning and coordination of human services.

JCCI is founded on a deep faith in the ability of citizens to set aside their differences and join together to learn and reason about problems of mutual concern. Its growth and success offer renewed hope for this basic democratic concept as a means of addressing the complex issues of modern urban communities.

JCCI receives funding from the United Way of Northeast Florida, the City of Jacksonville, corporations, and individual members.

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- \*Housing (1977)
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- \*Public Authorities (1978)
- \*Strengthening the Family (1978)
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\*These studies are out of print.