"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 [hybrid] partisan system than through shifting to a [purely traditional] nonpartisan system."

The report concluded: "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."

To continue to allow party activity, but to enhance participation and competitiveness, the report recommended that "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 competitiveness of the local political parties, while reducing the negative partisanship of the closed primary system."

The unitary election system addressed one of major problems identified by the report's authors: "Closed primary elections and weak political parties inhibit voting and running for office in local elections." At the same time, placing party labels on the ballot allowed them, according to Swain, "to reach consensus" with all involved, including party leaders.

The report's recommendation gained publicity and support following the 1991 citywide elections, when the winner of the Democratic primary ran in an uncontested general election in which only 21 percent of voters participated. News reports and editorials expressed voters' sense of frustration at being denied a choice (See attached: "Primary

system boxes many out of mayoral balloting;" "Some in GOP surprised that they couldn't vote;" "Tuesday's outcome has spurred interest in unitary primary vote;" "Now is the best time to end 2-party city vote;" "GOP, independent voters miffed at being excluded;" "'92 voters to rule on primaries"). Jeff Clements, Director of Research for the Jacksonville City Council, said of the uncontested general election, "Voters felt that that's just not the way it ought to be." Indeed, Councilman Harry Reagan, described in newspaper reports as a liberal Democrat, sponsored a proposal to put the issue of unitary elections to the voters in a referendum. In November 1992, voters passed the proposal 73 percent to 27 percent. The adoption of unitary elections did not change Jacksonville's election dates (April and May), but under the new system, a candidate winning 50 percent of the vote in the April election is elected to office and no second election occurs. Under the partisan system, three rounds of elections often occurred: if no candidate received 50 percent in a primary election, a primary runoff election was held, followed by a general election. A unitary system of elections reduced the number of elections from three to two, which was touted for reasons of cost savings and convenience.

ELECTORAL EXPERIENCE

Voter Participation

In 1991, prior to the uncontested mayoral general election, a fiercely competitive Democratic mayoral primary, decided by a vote of 50.9% to 49.1%, drew large numbers of Democrats to the polls. Republican primaries were held in only two council districts, however, and so the number of eligible voters was limited. Of eligible voters, almost all Democrats, 50% participated, but overall participation was only 35 percent, comparable to April elections in 1987 (34%), 1983 (35%), and 1979 (36%). In 1995, the first election held under the unitary system, voter participation increased in the April election to 51 percent – a small increase (1 point) in the rate of eligible voters participating, a large increase (16 points) in the rate of overall participation, a large increase in the raw number of voters participating, and *the highest rate of voter participation in any local election in at least twenty years*. The number of voters casting ballots (173,263) was more than 50 percent higher than in each of the three previous April elections (109,201 in 1991, 103,440 in 1987, and 95,260 in 1983).

The May 1995 election resulted in a participation rate of 46 percent, *the highest rate for any May election in at least 20 years* (21 percent in 1991, 41 percent in 1987, 28 percent in 1983, and 37 percent in 1979). In addition, the percent of the total population casting ballots, which includes both registered and unregistered voters, rose substantially in both elections: 24 percent in the April election (compared with 16 percent in the three elections previous) and 22 percent in the May election (compared with a previous high of 19 percent in 1987).

In 1999, Jacksonville's incumbent mayor ran in an uncontested primary election and voter participation was light: 23 percent in the April election. In May, with no mayoral candidates on the ballot, participation dipped further to 16 percent. (As a point of comparison, in New York City's 1991 citywide elections for the newly expanded city council, voter participation in the general election was less than 20 percent.) In the 2003

elections, however, which featured a competitive mayoral race, participation returned to 1995 levels: 41 percent of voters participated in the April election and 50 percent participated in the May election, in which, for the first time in at least twenty years, more than a quarter (29%) of all Jacksonville residents cast ballots.

Impact on the Black Community

Jacksonville's residents are predominantly White (66%), but there is a substantial Black minority (29%) and small Hispanic (4%) and Asian (3%) minorities. Jacksonville has more registered Democrats than Republicans, but increasingly, as in many Southern cities and states, voters have favored Republicans in local, state, and national elections. Nevertheless, *more Black candidates are being elected under unitary elections than under partisan elections: In 1991, White candidates won all five citywide offices; in the 1995 unitary elections, one of the offices, Sheriff, which is second only to the mayoralty, was won by a Black candidate. It was the first time in Jacksonville's history that a Black candidate was elected to one of its five constitutional offices, as well as the first time in Florida's post-Reconstruction history that a black candidate was elected to the office of Sheriff.* Similarly, at the Council level, Black candidates won 4 of the 19 seats on the City Council in 1991, while Whites won the 15 others. In the 1995 unitary elections, Blacks won 5 of the 19 seats, and in 2003, Blacks won six of the 19 seats. Of the six Blacks who won council seats in 2003, two were Republicans; one defeated a black Republican and one defeated a White Democrat – in an overwhelmingly White district. (See attached, "Black Republicans make voter inroads: Victories hint focus on issues, not race," *The Florida Times-Union*, April 21, 2003.)

In conversations with observers of Jacksonville's elections, including Professors Joan Carver and Stephen Baker of Jacksonville University, as well as Dr. Richard D. Danford, Jr., President of the Jacksonville Urban League, there has never been a suggestion that the switch to unitary elections has had any negative impact on the Black community, nor is there any evidence to suggest this is the case. Said Dr. Danford, who mentioned the success of black candidates in the 2003 elections, *"It hasn't had an adverse impact on the African-American community."* When asked how unitary elections have been received by Jacksonville residents, all responded that voters are generally satisfied with the way the new system has worked. It should be noted that the parties, too, have been generally, albeit passively, supportive of the system and did not fight against it in the 1992 referendum. (This information was confirmed in various conversations and can be found in the attached article, "Some in GOP surprised that they couldn't vote," *The Florida Times Union*, April 12, 1991.)

Election Competitiveness

In the April 2003 mayoral election, the three major Republican candidates (all White) split 66% of the vote, while the one major Democratic candidate (Black) won 28%. In a spirited runoff (general) election, the Republican defeated the Democrat 58 percent to 42 percent. In the six races for City Council that featured more than two candidates, five resulted in runoff (general) elections. Of the five, two were within 10 points, two within 15 points, and one was a landslide.

In the most hotly contested Council election, seven candidates ran in the April election, with the top two receiving 23.4% and 21.7% of the vote. In the runoff (general) election, the second place finisher won, 50.3% to 49.7%, and participation increased by nearly 2,000 voters.

All of the runoffs featured increased voter participation. All were held between a Democrat and a Republican, except one city council race, which pitted two Democrats against each other. That election saw the biggest jump in voter participation (34%) among the runoff elections.

CONCLUSION

The community-based Jacksonville Community Council and the voters of Jacksonville were dissatisfied with a partisan election system that was too uncompetitive, offered voters too few choices, and resulted in too little voter participation. The remedy recommended by JCCI eventually won bi-partisan support on the City Council, editorial support from the media, passive support from the parties, and overwhelmingly support at the polls.

In all municipal elections, the major factor that drives voter participation is competitiveness, particularly of mayoral elections. *Since switching to a unitary system, far more Jacksonville voters participate in both rounds of elections, voter choice has broadened, and Black candidates have made gains.* There are no doubt many factors that have contributed to these results; however, the data suggest, and observers confirm, that Jacksonville's change to unitary elections has worked well. Professor Carver expressed some concern for the livelihood of Jacksonville's political parties, but also said, after noting that voters are increasingly identifying themselves as independents, "People don't like parties as much as political scientists. It seems to me that it's worked well."
The current executive director of JCCI, Lois Chepenik, is also supportive: "It makes so much sense."

VOTER PARTICIPATION IN JACKSONVILLE'S PARTISAN AND UNITARY ELECTIONS

Partisan Election	# Voting	% Reg. Voting/ (% Eligible Voting)	% Pop. Voting
April 1979	85,614	35.7% (42.8%)	15.0%
May 1979	88,765	37.0%	15.5%
April 1983	95,260	35.3% (37.2%)	16.1%
May 1983	75,479	28.0%	12.7%
April 1987	103,440	34.4% (36.6%)	16.0%
May 1987	124,834	41.5%	19.3%
April 1991	109,201	34.7% (49.7%)	16.0%
May 1991*	64,957	20.6%	9.5%

Unitary Election	# Voting	% Reg. Voting	% Pop. Voting
April 1995	173,263	50.6%	24.1%
May 1995	160,760	46.2%	22.4%
April 1999*	95,433	22.8%	12.5%
May 1999**	65,965	15.8%	8.6%
April 2003	188,011	40.6%	23.3%
May 2003	230,954	49.6%	28.7%

* No contested mayoral campaign.
** No mayoral election.

The Jacksonville City Council

City Council Members
Public Notices
View City Council Email
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City Council Meetings Online
Agendas, Matters Pending & Minutes
Legislative Bill Search
Council Committees, Boards & Commissions
Headlines
Calendar
Yearly Schedule
Staff & Contact Information
Council Auditor
Reports & Studies
Rules of the Council
Ordinance Code
Blue Ribbon Commission on Cemeteries
Charter Revision Commission
Jacksonville Waterways Commission
Tourist Development Council
Value Adjustment Board
City Council Appointments
Charles D. Webb Award
Robert O. Johnson Good Government Award
Starr Bishop Award
Frequently Asked Questions
Current Issues
Budget Hearings
Sunshine Compliance
Gift Disclosure Registry
Lobbyist Information

City Council District Maps

In 2001, the Special Committee on Reapportionment completed the task of rewriting the boundaries of the Jacksonville City Council and Duval County School Board districts. The new Duval County School Board districts became effective with the November 5, 2002 election. The new Jacksonville City Council districts became effective as of July 1, 2003.

*Reading the pdf documents below requires the Adobe Acrobat Reader available free from **Adobe.***

OVERALL DISTRICT MAPS

City Council Districts.pdf (608k)	City Council At-Large Groups.pdf (907k)
City Council District Census Data (123k)	School Board Districts.pdf (916k)

DETAILED DISTRICT MAPS

District 1 Map.pdf (723k)	District 8 Map.pdf (392k)
District 2 Map.pdf (400k)	District 9 Map.pdf (348k)
District 3 Map.pdf (1,244k)	District 10 Map.pdf (472k)
District 4 Map.pdf (395k)	District 11 Map.pdf (1242k)
District 5 Map.pdf (489k)	District 12 Map.pdf (412k)
District 6 Map.pdf (360k)	District 13 Map.pdf (898k)
District 7 Map.pdf (538k)	District 14 Map.pdf (432k)

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