



Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now

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**To:** Allies and interested parties  
**From:** Steve Kest, ACORN Executive Director  
**Date:** December 8, 2008  
**Re:** ACORN's Voter Registration Drive—Myths and Realities

ACORN's non-partisan 2008 voter registration program was a tremendous success that contributed to a surge in voter turnout among young people, people of color, and low-income citizens. Surpassing our goals for 2008, **ACORN submitted more than 1.3 million voter registration applications**, helping hundreds of thousands of citizens register for the first time, and hundreds of thousands of others update their voter registrations for a change of address.

Based on what we know about results of other voter registration drives, we estimate that 70% of our registrants—more than 900,000 people—made it on the rolls and that most of those registered voted.<sup>1</sup> Adding this year's registrants to voters remaining on the rolls from our 2004 and 2006 drives and the likely effects of our Get Out the Vote work, our best estimates are that ACORN helped approximately **900,000 to one million** additional citizens vote in 2008. Unfortunately, just as we've seen before, the more success we have, the louder the partisan attacks and unfounded accusations about "voter fraud." Below, we have separated the myths from the facts about ACORN's historic voter registration drive.

#### **How ACORN conducted its voter registration work**

- **ACORN implemented the most sophisticated quality-control system in the voter engagement field.** Every application collected was examined by independent staff, tagged to the crew member who gathered it, and entered into a database by an outside vendor. Our quality control staff made several attempts to contact every registrant to verify information and, where possible, "cure" incomplete registrations.
- **State laws or other legal policies require ACORN to turn in all completed voter registration applications**, even those known to be incomplete or fake. Election officials were given three stacks of applications, each with detailed cover sheets: those believed to be complete, those that required additional information, and those that seemed suspicious.
- ACORN's registration workers were paid an hourly wage unrelated to the number of registrations collected. **ACORN has a zero-tolerance policy for deliberately falsifying voter registration applications.** If our internal quality controls identified this happening, the workers involved were fired and turned in to election officials and law-enforcement.

#### **Partisan attacks**

- The partisan attacks on ACORN furthered the myth of "voter fraud", though numerous studies demonstrate that fraudulent voting is close to non-existent in the United States.<sup>2</sup>
- Similar attacks about "voter fraud" made against ACORN and other voter registration organizations in 2004 and 2006 were groundless and have since been exposed as the partisan conspiracy of voter

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<sup>1</sup> Others who do not make it on the rolls may be missing information or mistakes, illegible, duplicates completed by voters who were not sure they were already registered, or not match government databases at the board of elections for a variety of reasons.

<sup>2</sup> One of the more comprehensive studies on the topic is "The Politics of Voter Fraud" by Barnard professor Lori Minnite. [projectvote.org/fileadmin/ProjectVote/Publications/Politics\\_of\\_Voter\\_Fraud\\_](http://projectvote.org/fileadmin/ProjectVote/Publications/Politics_of_Voter_Fraud_)

suppression at the heart of the U.S. Attorney-gate scandal.

- **In truth no criminal charges related to voter registration have ever been brought against ACORN or partner organizations.** Convictions against former ACORN workers have been accomplished with our full cooperation often using evidence obtained through our quality control processes. Nor has ACORN been informed by any law enforcement agency that the organization itself is under investigation anywhere in the country.

### The “Voter Fraud” Fraud

- **In order to help 1.3 million people apply to become registered voters, ACORN hired more than 12,000 registration assistance workers.** Almost all did an admirable job. But, as with any business or agency that operates at this scale, there are always some people who want to get paid without really doing the job, or who aim to defraud their employer. These problems affected less than two percent of the cards ACORN collected.
- Any large voter registration operation will have a small percentage of workers who turn in bogus registration forms. Their goal is not to cast a fraudulent vote, but to defraud their employer, ACORN, by getting a paycheck without earning it. **ACORN is the victim of this fraud – not the perpetrator.**
- **In most cases, ACORN’s own quality control program discovered the bad forms and called them to the attention of election authorities,** encouraging officials to investigate and offering to help with prosecutions.
- **This has nothing to do with “voter fraud” – nothing at all to do with anyone trying to cast an extra vote. There has never been a single reported instance in which bogus registration forms have led to anyone voting improperly.** The people who turned in these forms did so not because they wanted an extra vote, but because they didn’t care enough to make sure eligible people got to vote at all.
- When a department store calls the police to report a shoplifting employee, no one says the department store is guilty of consumer fraud. But, when ACORN turns voter registration workers over to the authorities for filling out bogus forms, it gets accused of “voter fraud.” **This is a classic case of blaming the victim; indeed, these charges are outrageous, libelous, and often politically motivated.**

### Fighting voter suppression

- In October the RNC and the McCain-Palin campaign began an orchestrated and expensive, daily campaign of attacks against ACORN’s voter registration drive.
- ACORN, Project Vote, and a range respected opinion leaders responded forcefully, and a **number of key national leaders took principled action to challenge the false charges and denounce efforts at voter suppression.** These leaders included: Bob Edgar (National Council of Churches), Miles Rapoport (Demos), Julian Bond (NAACP), Andy Stern (SEIU), Randy Weingarten (AFT), Katherine Kolbert (PFAW) elected officials including Rep. Jesse Jackson, Jr., and Rep. John Conyers, and organizations including MoveOn.org, and others.
- Attempts at voter suppression failed after attempts to block and intimidate new voters were exposed in the media and blocked in court in New Mexico, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Ohio.

### Going forward

- Hopefully, the greater public attention voter registration will add to the growing interest in legislation to create a **universal voter registration process**, administered by the government.