



ACORN and voter registration fraud

ACORN, a community-based advocacy organization that was founded in 1970 and that shut down in 2010, faced allegations of vote fraud related to voter registration drives conducted by the organization. ACORN conducted large-scale voter registration drives, and the organization said it helped register more than 1.3 million new voters in 21 states in 2007 and 2008.^[1]

ACORN became part of the story of the 2008 presidential election as news reports and allegations surfaced about ACORN in a number of states relating to alleged irregularities with voter registration drives conducted by the organization. Criticisms came from conservative groups and prominent Republicans including the Employment Policies Institute and Republican presidential candidate John McCain. ACORN's defenders included the organization itself and liberal group Media Matters for America.^{[2][3][4]}

Allegations included the following related to voter registration drives:^{[5][6]}

- Failing to adequately monitor and supervise its employees
- Turning in duplicate registration cards
- Turning in registration cards for fictional characters
- Turning in registration cards filled out by children

ACORN responded to allegations in a conference call with reporters on October 16, 2008, saying the following:^[7]

- "In most states, ACORN is required by law to turn in every voter registration card — even in cases where the cards are not valid."
- "Invalid voter registration cards do NOT constitute voter fraud. Even RNC General Counsel Sean Cairncross has recently acknowledged he is not aware of a single improper vote cast as a result of bad cards submitted in the course of an organized voter registration effort."
- "ACORN hired 13,000 field workers to register people to vote. In any endeavor of this size, some people will engaged in inappropriate conduct. ACORN has a zero tolerance policy and terminated any field workers caught engaging in questionable activity."

ACORN



Basic facts

Founder(s): Wade Rathke

Year founded: 1970

Case studies

Below is a sampling of cases in which ACORN or its employees were convicted of crimes related to voter registration.

- Between 2009 and 2011, a former field director, a former regional director, and ACORN itself were convicted of conspiracy to commit the crime of compensation for registration of voters in Nevada. It was illegal for registration canvassers to receive compensation based on the number of voters registered. Charges stated that ACORN paid a \$5 bonus to canvassers who turned in 21 registration forms.^{[8][9][10]}
- In 2009, Latoya Lewis pleaded guilty to repeatedly registering individuals when she worked for ACORN in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.^[11]
- In 2008, eight former ACORN employees pleaded guilty to registration fraud during a registration drive in St. Louis, Missouri, in 2006.^[12]
- In 2007, five people in Washington pleaded guilty to registration fraud charges related to work they did as ACORN employees and were sentenced to jail time.^[13] ACORN agreed to pay King County \$25,000 for investigative costs. The group also signed an agreement to "beef up its training and procedures for detecting and reporting fraud," according to *The Seattle Times*.^{[14][15]}
- In 2007, three former ACORN workers in Kansas City, Missouri, pleaded guilty to charges of voter registration fraud.^[16] Claudia Harris, chairperson of Kansas City ACORN, said in a statement released after the former employees were indicted, "When we caught this misconduct, we reporter [sic] it to the authorities. Now we want to see these folks prosecuted to the full extent of the law, because they have defrauded our organization, and, worse, detracted from our mission of ensuring that citizens in our community participate in the democratic process."^[17]
- In Colorado in January 2005, two people were sentenced to community service for submitting false voter registrations while working for ACORN.^[18] ACORN's regional director said after the two were charged, "We find it abhorrent and do everything we can to prevent it from happening."^[19]

ACORN response: 2008 press release

In an October 2008 press release, ACORN stated the following:^[20]

“ Fact: ACORN has implemented the most sophisticated quality-control system in the voter engagement field but in almost every state we are required to turn in ALL completed applications, even the ones we know to be problematic.

Fact: ACORN flags in writing incomplete, problem, or suspicious cards when we turn them in,. Unfortunately, some of these same officials then come back weeks or months later and accuse us of deliberately turning in phony cards. In many cases, we can actually prove that these are the same cards we called to their attention.

Fact: Our canvassers are paid by the hour, not by the card . ACORN has a zero-tolerance policy for deliberately falsifying registrations, and in the cases where our internal quality controls have identified this happening we have fired the workers involved and turned them in to election officials and law-enforcement.

Fact: No criminal charges related to voter registration have ever been brought against ACORN or partner organizations. Convictions against individual former ACORN workers have been accomplished with our full cooperation, using the evidence obtained through our quality control and verification processes — evidence which in most cases WE called to the attention of authorities.

Fact: Most election officials have recognized ACORN's good work and praised our quality control systems. Even in the cities where election officials have complained about ACORN, the applications in question represent less than 1% of the thousands and thousands of registrations ACORN has collected.

Fact: Our accusers not only fail to provide any evidence, they fail to suggest a motive: there is virtually no chance anyone would be able to vote fraudulently, so there is no reason to deliberately submit phony registrations. ACORN is committed to ensuring that the greatest possible numbers of people are registered.^[21] ”



Footnotes

1. *Project Vote*, "Project Vote and ACORN Announce Completion of Historic Voter Registration Drive," October 8, 2008

2. *The American Prospect*, "Are the Republicans Right About Acorn?" October 30, 2008

3. *ProPublica*, "'Rotten' ACORN Ad
Funded by Anti-Minimum Wage Group,"

October 29, 2008

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