



A Judicial Watch Special Report

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# The Rebranding of ACORN

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August 22, 2011



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## Introduction

Over the years, the left-wing activist group, Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (commonly known as ACORN), has been linked to serious scandals involving misuse of taxpayer funds, embezzlement, intimidation tactics, employee abuse, questionable hiring tactics, and fraudulent voter registrations.

Officially, ACORN made a show of closing the doors of its national headquarters and regional offices, brought down by the corruption of its leaders and its arrogant, nefarious flaunting of state and federal laws.

Despite the Obama administration's best efforts to ignore ACORN corruption and to sweep ACORN scandals under the rug, the steady drumbeat of reports documenting ACORN's corrupt activities finally took its toll on ACORN in 2009, when explosive journalist videos were released documenting ACORN employees advising undercover reporters on how to evade taxes, as well as immigration, housing, and child prostitution laws.

After these videos "went viral," Congress voted to end all funding to the organization, and on October 1, 2009, President Obama signed into law legislation known as the Defund ACORN Act that effectively prohibits the federal government from granting taxpayer dollars to "ACORN and any ACORN-related affiliate."<sup>1</sup>

With their primary source of funding cut off and growing furor over ACORN's flaunting of the law, Bertha Lewis, former chief executive officer of ACORN, announced in April 2010 that the organization would be filing for bankruptcy. The formal filing of the bankruptcy papers occurred on November 2, 2010.

But was this the end of ACORN? Definitely not.

As this report documents, evidence clearly suggests the following:

- New and existing ACORN "spin-offs" are alive and well and will surely continue to flaunt state and federal laws in a blatantly partisan effort to register people — eligible or otherwise — who will vote for the reelection of Barack Obama and other liberal candidates across the country in 2012. In the words of Bertha Lewis, "*these new entities are carrying on ACORN's work of organizing low- and moderate-income folks... [We have created] 18 bulletproof community-organizing Frankensteins that they're going to have a very hard time attacking.*"<sup>2</sup>
- Tens of millions of dollars in ACORN's funds and other assets are unaccounted for. This is currently being investigated by the Louisiana attorney general's office and the U.S. Bankruptcy Court, as well as Judicial Watch.



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**Bertha Lewis, former CEO of the corrupt "community" organization ACORN, holds up a photo of the "ACORN President," Barack Obama.**

- The Obama administration continues to bankroll ACORN and its spin-offs in defiance of the funding ban. For example, one ACORN affiliate, ACORN Housing Corporation — simply renamed Affordable Housing Centers of America (AHCOA) — received a \$79,819 grant from U.S. Housing and Development (HUD) on March 1, 2011.<sup>3</sup>
- The ACORN’s Project Vote, Barack Obama’s former employer, remains active in trying to register a “Food Stamp Army” of voters on public assistance to re-elect Barack Obama and other leftist candidates in 2012.

For example, Judicial Watch uncovered documents proving that ACORN/Project Vote successfully pressured Colorado officials to implement new policies for increasing the registration of public assistance recipients during the 2008 and 2010 election seasons. After the policy changes, the percentage of invalid voter registration forms from Colorado public assistance agencies was four times the national average.<sup>4</sup>

Barack Obama served as a former employee of Project Vote and has said publicly that he’s “been fighting alongside” ACORN his entire career. Despite clear evidence of corrupt and criminal behavior by ACORN and its employees, the Obama Justice Department has thus far failed to take any serious steps to hold the ACORN organizations to account.

This report examines the alleged demise of ACORN, including serious questions about the ACORN bankruptcy, presents what is known about the state organizations that emerged from ACORN’s ashes, explores the status of the various state voter registration fraud investigations involving ACORN, and raises questions for further investigation.

## **ACORN and Its Affiliated Organizations**

### ***The Rise and Fall of ACORN***

ACORN was founded in 1970 by Wade Rathke, a veteran of the radical Marxist-inspired Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Though ACORN claimed to be “a non-profit, non-partisan social justice organization,” it was, in fact, an activist group that aggressively sought to register voters who could be counted on to support left-wing issues and candidates. At its peak, the organization had over 400,000 members and 1,200 neighborhood chapters in more than 100 cities in the U.S. Bertha Lewis was appointed chief executive officer in 2008.

Throughout its existence, as indicated in the handwritten notes of an FBI investigator obtained by Judicial Watch, “ACORN HQ [headquarters] was wkg [working] for the Democratic Party.” In doing so, there seemed to be no reluctance to flaunt election laws.

President Barack Obama has direct ties to ACORN. Obama trained ACORN employees and volunteers and served as a lawyer for the organization. He also served as the Illinois Executive Director for Project Vote, an ACORN ally, in 1992. In his

run for the Democratic presidential nomination, the Obama campaign paid ACORN's administrative arm, Citizen Services, Inc., \$832,000 to engage ACORN in "get out the vote" activities.<sup>6</sup>

In a speech to ACORN leaders in November 2007, then-Senator Obama reminded them of his close history with the organization. "So this is something I know personally, the work you do, the importance of it." "I've been fighting alongside ACORN," he said, "on issues you care about my entire career."<sup>7</sup> Obama's connection to ACORN has undoubtedly resulted in the Department of Justice's reluctance to prosecute the illegal activities of the organization that became nationally known during the first year of the Obama presidency.

In 2009, two conservative journalists caught ACORN workers red-handed trying to advise the undercover reporters on how to evade tax, immigration, and child prostitution laws. As reported by Fox News, the reporters "were given assistance...from a staffer at the ACORN office on how to avoid detection by law enforcement. The couple even tell ACORN staffer Tresa Kaelke — who admits on the videotape to previously having sex for money — that they plan on bringing in 13 girls from El Salvador to work in a home they hope to acquire via the community organization."<sup>8</sup>

The videos first appeared on [www.BigGovernment.com](http://www.BigGovernment.com) and quickly became a media and Internet sensation. Even the "ACORN President" in the White House couldn't ignore this scandal. "The conduct that you see on those tapes is completely unacceptable," said Obama White House spokesman Robert Gibbs after the videos surfaced.<sup>9</sup> Ultimately, President Obama would sign into law legislation banning the federal funding of ACORN and ACORN affiliates.

On March 22, 2010, ACORN announced it was closing its remaining state chapters and was disbanding, and on November 2, 2010, former ACORN CEO Bertha Lewis and former ACORN General Counsel Arthur Schwartz filed for Chapter 7 liquidation.<sup>10</sup>

ACORN's apparent dissolution, however, was a sham. Like a mob-connected shop that is shut down by authorities only to open across the street under a new name, ACORN organizations continue to survive, and thrive, aided by the negligence of the Obama Justice Department.

### **ACORN-Affiliated Organizations<sup>11</sup>**

The ACORN-affiliated groups existing today are ACORN in all but name. These groups tend to occupy ACORN's former offices, are staffed in many cases with former ACORN employees, and remain committed to ACORN's mission. With the exception of ACORN International (since the organization has no U.S. office), they will almost certainly be "up to their old tricks" and seek to have an influence on the elections in 2012.

**ACORN International.** This organization was rebranded as Community Organizations International in 2009, though the former name is used interchangeably. In fact, the website can be accessed via either [www.communityorganizationsinternational.org](http://www.communityorganizationsinternational.org), or the old URL, [www.acorninternational.org](http://www.acorninternational.org).

The name change was the inspiration of Wade Rathke, who founded ACORN International, as well as ACORN. Rathke has claimed that the change was motivated by the fact that ACORN was receiving a lot of unfavorable publicity in 2009, and he wanted to separate the international operation to prevent it from being tarnished by association.

Whatever his professed reason may have been, Rathke himself has ties to an ACORN corruption scandal. His brother, Dale Rathke, embezzled almost \$1 million (Louisiana claims \$5 million<sup>12</sup>) in 1999 and 2000 as chief financial officer of CCI (Citizens Consulting, Inc.), the entity that helped manage ACORN's corrupt financial enterprise. According to an investigation by the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Wade Rathke knew about the theft for more than eight years and reportedly kept it quiet, except for discussions with legal counsel and ACORN's management council. The extent of the coverup included filing bogus reports with the IRS and the U.S. Department of Labor. After Wade Rathke was forced to step down as the chief organizer of ACORN, ACORN senior staff members — including Bertha Lewis — continued to keep the embezzlement from the full board and from law enforcement authorities. Though terminated from ACORN, Rathke managed to retain his position for a time with ACORN International.<sup>13</sup>

ACORN International operates outside of the U.S., however, ACORN employees who knew about the embezzlement still have positions of authority in ACORN's spin-off state organizations. A few of them are mentioned in this report. The organization has offices in ten countries, but apparently none in the U.S. (For a time, ACORN International listed a New Orleans address.)

***Affordable Housing Centers of America.*** What was previously called ACORN Housing was renamed Affordable Housing Centers of America ([www.AHCOA.org](http://www.AHCOA.org)) in early 2010. In every other respect, the organization is unchanged. Former ACORN Housing president Alton Bennett has retained the same position with AHCOA, as has executive director Mike Shea and vice president Dorothy Amadi (who was also the former president of the Mutual Housing Association of New York). Public affairs director Bruce Dorpalen was formerly ACORN Housing's loan director. Mike Shea was a member of the ACORN executive council that was aware of — and chose to cover-up — the Rathke embezzlement.

AHCOA's headquarters are located at 209 West Jackson Boulevard, Chicago, IL 60606, the former headquarters of ACORN Housing, and its fourteen field offices were the former locations of ACORN Housing. The new corporation also adopted the same Employee Identification Number (EIN 72-1048321).

ACORN Housing received a great deal of its funding from federal sources in recent years. In fiscal years 2008 and 2009, the organization reported total revenues of \$30.5 million. During approximately the same time frame, Housing and Urban Development (HUD) granted the organization \$3.25 million, and NeighborWorks — a Congressionally-funded non-profit — awarded more than \$25 million in federal funds. (In 1978, Congress established the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation, which in 2005, became NeighborWorks America. Funding is appropriated annually by Congress, and the organization works in close association with HUD on partnership programs.)

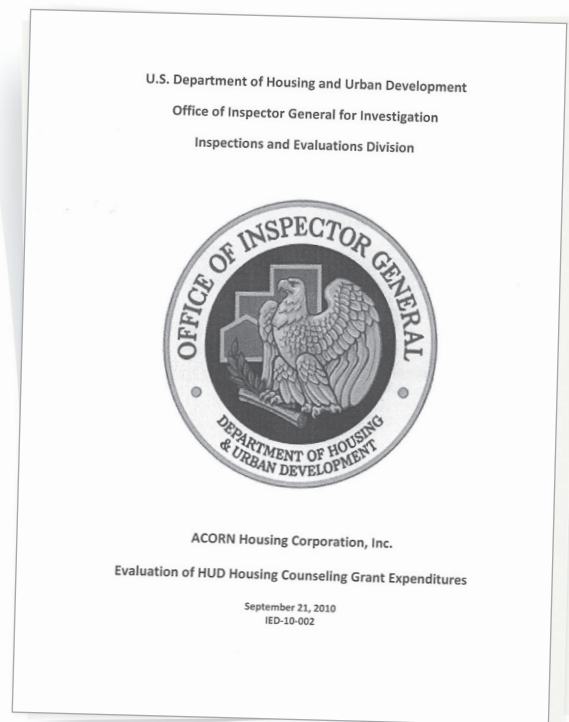
Federal investigators have documented fraudulent activity by ACORN Housing/AHCOA. For example, a September 21, 2010, HUD Inspector General report notes that ACORN Housing, “now operating as Affordable Housing Centers of America,” misappropriated funds from a \$3,252,399 federal grant. The Inspector General concluded that ACORN Housing/AHCOA had charged salary expenses to the HUD grant that “were not fully supported.” The organization also continued to pay its counselors even after they were terminated, did not meet federal procurement standards, and allegedly destroyed documents to conceal the fraudulent activity. The Inspector General articulated a number of benchmarks that must first be met by AHCOA before the organization could begin receiving any future federal funds, including reimbursing the government the misappropriated funds.<sup>14</sup>

A separate November 2010 HUD Inspector General report documented additional fraudulent activity by ACORN/AHCOA. The ACORN group “inappropriately expended more than \$3.2 million from its fiscal years 2004 and 2005 grants for the elimination of lead poisoning in its housing program,” the report concluded. The misappropriation included the use of funds “not identified in its grant application’s detailed budgets,” including “campaign services” and “grant fundraising activities.”<sup>15</sup>

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a highly controversial decision stating that the federal ban on funding for ACORN and its affiliates (as articulated in Section 418 of the 2010 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Act of 2010) was not grounds for withholding federal funding from AHCOA.<sup>16</sup>

Housing-related grants to non-profit organizations by NeighborWorks are still frozen since the GAO decision, pending further resolution. However, the organization has already re-listed Affordable Housing Centers of America as an authorized foreclosure assistance agency on its website. In February 2011, the House Financial Service Committee proposed defunding NeighborWorks, but no action has been taken on that recommendation.

*News Note.* On March 1, 2011, HUD awarded a \$79,819 grant to AHCOA to “educate the public and housing providers about their rights and obligations under federal, state, and local fair housing laws.” Although the grant was reportedly for AHCOA, the government’s website listing federal expenditures identifies the organization receiving the \$79,819 grant as “ACORN Housing Corporation Inc.” and lists ACORN’s New Orleans, Louisiana, address.<sup>17</sup> So the flood of federal funds continues to ACORN affiliates thanks to Obama – and at least one other ACORN-connected Obama administration official. *The New York Times* reported in October 2009 that “perhaps no administration official has had more interaction with Acorn [sic] than [Shaun] Donovan,” who is Obama’s Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. *The Times* notes that Donovan “worked closely” with ACORN’s politically-powerful New York



**According to a September 21, 2010 General Accounting Office report, ACORN and AHCOA are virtually the same entity. The report also documents fraudulent activity, including the misappropriation of taxpayer funds, by ACORN/AHCOA.**



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**Former ACORN CEO Bertha Lewis (second from right, front row) and Obama HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan (far right) are shown here at a 2005 event in New York City. Under Donovan's leadership, HUD is still funding an ACORN spin-off organization in violation of a federal funding ban.**

housing affiliate when he was a New York City housing official.<sup>18</sup>

**The Advance Group.** The Advance Group ([www.theadvancegroup.com](http://www.theadvancegroup.com)) is linked to the organization and continues to provide services to ACORN spin-offs, such as The Black Institute, described below. The Advance Group is a lobbying/PR firm that works almost exclusively with liberal clients and causes. Scott Levenson, formerly the national spokesman for ACORN, is the president and founder of the group. Rachel Mann, who produced ACORN's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala, is the group's chief operating officer.

Two other links of particular interest exist as well. Secretary of The Advance Group, is Arthur Z. Schwartz, who was formerly the secretary/treasurer and general counsel for ACORN and the person who filed ACORN's bankruptcy papers.<sup>19</sup> He was also on Obama's NYC field team and served as a delegate to the Democratic National Convention. Schwartz is a partner in the law firm of Schwartz, Lichten & Bright, P.C., 275 Seventh Avenue, Suite 1760, New York, New York 10001.

Michael Gaspard is Counsel for The Advance Group. Michael is the brother of Patrick Gaspard, one of the founders of the Working Families Group, a group occasionally associated with ACORN activities. Partrick Gaspard was also the political vice president of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) 1199. He is a former White House political director and is currently the executive director of the Democratic National Committee (DNC).<sup>20</sup> Gaspard was also in attendance at a March 7, 2011 "economic discussion" at the White House with President Obama and thirty well-connected figures in the business and finance world, most of whom were Obama donors or fundraisers. The event was sponsored by the DNC, which is reportedly the reason Gaspard was there.<sup>21</sup> The SEIU, incidentally, reportedly spent \$85 million during the campaign season in 2008 to get Obama elected.

**The Black Institute.** The Black Institute is the latest organizational vehicle of Bertha Lewis, former CEO of ACORN. Clearly, ACORN's scandals can be attributed, at least partly, to the decisions she made and the leadership she provided. Yet, she has never been charged with any crime. As has been reported, ACORN, its affiliates, and its state offices were ingeniously established, such that those who bore the brunt of charges in the courtroom have been almost exclusively lower-level workers. Though, as indicated, investigations are still ongoing, particularly in Louisiana, no progress has been reported that is likely to lead to the conviction of Bertha Lewis and other leaders. So, Lewis is free — at this point — to operate her new entity.

Lewis maintains that a primary focus of The Black Institute will be on immigration reform. Arthur Z. Schwartz is on The Black Institute's board, along with attorney Michael Anicette, who serves as treasurer of The Advance Group.

The Black Institute indicated in its filing of Form 1023 obtained by Judicial Watch, required by the IRS for new organizations seeking 501(c)3 charitable status, that the



Association for the Rights of Citizens (ARC) is the “fiscal sponsor” of The Black Institute. ARC was an affiliate organization of ACORN, providing a direct link between The Black Institute and ACORN.<sup>22</sup> Notably, Lewis signed the articles of incorporation for The Black Institute on February 17, 2010, *more than a month before* she announced that ACORN would be closing its doors.

The Black Institute is a client of The Advance Group, both of which recently moved from the old ACORN Nevins Street, Brooklyn location to share the same office space at 39 Broadway, Suite 2410, New York 10006. Lewis is being accorded free rent and free phones there for a year by The Advance Group. Previously, The Black Institute and the Advance Group had occupied the same space at the 2 Nevins Street address, along with the Working Families Party, which has its own history of ballot fraud. The Black Institute stills leases the office space at its former Nevins Street location.

**Project Vote.** Project Vote/Voting for America, ACORN’s voter registration branch and Barack Obama’s former employer, shortened its name to Project Vote, Inc. (www.projectvote.org) on July 19, 2010. When it was initially incorporated in May 1994 as Voting for America, the incorporator was listed as Naomi Akintonwa, who was also the incorporator of ACORN Community Land Association.

Voting for America was originally located at 1024 Elysian Fields, New Orleans, which was also the address of ACORN National, ACORN of Louisiana, ACORN Housing Corporation, the American Institute for Social Justice, SEIU Local 100, and other ACORN affiliates. The attorney who submitted Project Votes’s application for tax-exempt status with the IRS was Steve Bachmann, an attorney for ACORN. The president/director of the organization was Maxine Nelson, the national secretary of ACORN. So Project Vote was created to be part of ACORN from its inception.

ACORN and Project Vote frequently subcontracted with each other, and with other ACORN- affiliated organizations, though these contractual arrangements apparently were often nothing more than a means to move money between tax-exempt and non-exempt legal entities. A November 2010 audit by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission regarding Project Vote’s use of federal grant money noted that, “According to information provided by Project Vote, they contracted with the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) to conduct the grant work. Upon making requests for cost and accounting records, we were informed by Project Vote in 2010 that Project Vote could not locate any cost or accounting records to support its or ACORN’s expenditures under the grants. What is more, Project Vote could not demonstrate that a contract existed between itself and ACORN to perform the grant services.”<sup>23</sup>

Project Vote’s current address is 737-739 8<sup>th</sup> St. SE, Washington, DC 20003, which was the location of the former national headquarters of ACORN.

Most of the members of Project Vote’s board of directors have been replaced. Margaret



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**Current Project Vote Field Director Amy Busefink entered an Alford plea to two gross misdemeanor counts of conspiracy to commit the crime of compensation for registration of voters in Nevada while previously working for ACORN.**

Groarke, Associate Professor of Government at Manhattan College and co-author of *Keeping Down the Black Vote: Race and the Demobilization of American Voters*, remains on the board from the previous ACORN days. Executive Director Michael Slater was also never replaced after the voter registration scandals.

Amy Busefink has been retained as Project Vote's national field director, despite her *Alford plea* in a Nevada courtroom for voter fraud, committed when she was deputy field director for ACORN. (An *Alford plea* is a guilty plea in criminal court, where the defendant does not admit the act and asserts innocence, but admits that sufficient evidence exists with which the prosecution could likely convince a judge or a jury to find the defendant guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.)<sup>24</sup> Apparently, neither the board nor executive director Slater considered her crime to be a deterrent to the credibility and work of Project Vote.

Busefink is also linked to yet another scandal involving ACORN and Project Vote. On August 4, 2011, Judicial Watch released documents obtained from the Colorado Department of State showing that ACORN and its affiliate, Project Vote, successfully pressured Colorado officials into implementing new policies for increasing the registration of public assistance recipients during the 2008 and 2010 election seasons. Following the policy changes the percentage of invalid voter registration forms from Colorado public assistance agencies was four times the national average.<sup>25</sup>

The documents, which include 400 internal emails, show that ACORN's Amy Busefink, while under criminal indictment in Nevada on voter registration charges, managed an online program for Project Vote's Colorado campaign, the ultimate goal of which is to allow people without a driver's license or state identification to register to vote online.

Without question Project Vote's objective is to help Barack Obama and other leftist candidates nationwide to get elected (or re-elected). ACORN whistleblower Anita MonCrief, a former Project Vote staffer, reported in 2008 that the organization was given a donor list from the presidential campaign of Barack Obama for fundraising efforts.<sup>26</sup> Expect Project Vote to try to return Obama's generosity in 2012.

## **From the Ashes of ACORN: State Front-Groups<sup>27</sup>**

Following the undercover video scandal and the federal government's decision to "defund" ACORN, the organization scrambled to survive by shedding its tarnished name and keeping people and programs in place to do whatever it takes to influence the voter registration process — legally or illegally — especially in states where elections might be close.

In a May 2011 interview with *The Root*, Bertha Lewis, former CEO of ACORN, said that she and her ACORN colleagues have created 18 new independent state organizations around the country covering 25 states. (Some of these organizations conduct activities in more than one state.) All of these nonprofits were founded in the months *preceding* the announcement by Lewis that the parent organization was closing its doors.

“[We have created] 18 bulletproof community-organizing Frankensteins that they're

going to have a very hard time attacking,” Lewis boasted.<sup>28</sup>

And how did they do it? In many cases, when ACORN closed its state offices, furniture and supplies, as well as the membership and email contact lists, were purchased from ACORN by the new state organizations. The source of initial funding for these organizations remains unclear. ACORN closed the state bank accounts and drained off whatever assets existed in those particular accounts. However, investigators believe other accounts may have existed... and may still exist. (See page 15.)<sup>29</sup>

Bertha Lewis has attempted to mask the connection between ACORN and her “Frankensteins.” ACORN, as might be expected, is not mentioned on any of the state organization websites, which has presented a challenge in identifying some of the ACORN spin-offs.

Judicial Watch has been able to confirm the existence of ACORN spin-offs in the following states.

**Arkansas.** ACORN AR has morphed into Arkansas Community Organizations (ACO), which was incorporated on December 7, 2009. The registered agent for the organization is Neil Sealy, who was formerly the lead organizer for ACORN in Arkansas. Co-chair of ACO is Donna Massey, who was formerly the chairwoman of ACORN PAC (Political Action Committee) and was the president of Project Vote. ACO has taken over the office space previously occupied by ACORN AR at 2101 South Main Street, Little Rock, AR. ACO promotes itself as being affiliated with housing organization Arkansas Community Institute (ACI), founded in 1985. The ACO website is [www.arkansascomm.org](http://www.arkansascomm.org).

**California.** ACORN CA has become the Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE), incorporated on December 8, 2010. ACCE maintains seven offices in California. According to Secretary of State records, the registered agent of ACCE is Amy Schur, who is also the organization’s executive director. Schur was formerly the lead organizer for ACORN CA and was a member of ACORN’s management council. She reportedly knew of the embezzlement of ACORN funds by Dan Rathke, but chose to inform neither the ACORN board of directors nor law enforcement about the crime. (See page 6.) Lead organizer in the San Diego office is David Lagstein, former lead organizer for ACORN in Michigan. ACCE board member Edgar Hilbert was also formerly with ACORN CA member. ACCE took over the office space previously occupied by ACORN CA at 3655 So. Grand Avenue, Suite 250, Los Angeles, CA 90007. The ACCE website is [www.calorganize.org](http://www.calorganize.org).

**Louisiana.** With the closing of the ACORN LA office, two new organizations emerged, one favored by Bertha Lewis, chief executive officer of ACORN, and one *not*. One of the two organizations, A Community Voice (ACV), was founded by former ACORN members on October 17, 2009. Tanya Harris, the registered agent for ACV and a member of its board, was formerly the lead organizer for ACORN in New Orleans. Dawn Marie Hurt, a long-time ACORN organizer, is an organizer for ACV. Other ACV board members and staff with former ties to ACORN are:

- Beth Butler, ACORN LA executive director

- Lanny Roy, ACORN LA state co-chair
- Beulah Labostrie, ACORN LA president
- Vanessa Gueringer, 9<sup>th</sup> ward ACORN organizer
- Annie Falls, upper 9<sup>th</sup> ward chair
- Franzella Johnson, ACORN New Orleans, Louisiana (NOLA) organizer
- Yolander Lovely, ACORN Baton Rouge organizer

The New Orleans office for A Community Voice is located at 827 Tupelo Street, New Orleans 70117. The ACV website is [www.acommunityvoice.com](http://www.acommunityvoice.com).

While A Community Voice has taken on former members of ACORN, another organization, the Alliance Institute (AI), headed by Stephen Bradberry, managed to purchase the membership and email contact lists from Bertha Lewis for \$8,347. In the last months before ACORN closed its New Orleans office, Bradberry had been hired to replace Beth Butler, who was fired by Bertha Lewis from her job as executive director of ACORN LA. Different reasons have been given for her firing, but they seem to boil down to a personality conflict between Lewis and Butler. In any case, A Community Voice has the ACORN people, but the Alliance Institute has the membership donor contact information. The New Orleans office for the Alliance Institute is located at 200 So. Broad Street, #5, New Orleans 70119. The AI website is [www.theallianceinstitute.org](http://www.theallianceinstitute.org).

**Minnesota.** ACORN MN has become Minnesota Neighborhoods Organizing for Change (MNNOC), incorporated on December 3, 2009. The executive director of MNNOC is Steve Fletcher, former ACORN MN lead organizer. Much of its leadership consists of former ACORN management (in addition to Fletcher):

- Sunday Alabi, ACORN MN PAC chair and board member of Citizen Services, Inc. He was also formerly the treasurer of Project Vote.
- Billie Jean Campbell, co-chair of East St. Paul ACORN
- Peter Molenaar, ACORN MN chairman
- Steve Nelson, Minneapolis northside ACORN chapter leader
- Sherman Wilburn, ACORN MN board chairman

The Minnesota Neighborhoods Organizing for Change is located at 3318 East Lake Street, Suite 4, Minneapolis, MN 55406. The MNNOC website is [www.mnnoc.org](http://www.mnnoc.org).

**Missouri.** ACORN MO has been rebranded as Missourians Organizing for Reform and Empowerment (MORE), incorporated on December 3, 2009. The board of directors for MORE includes Jeffrey Ordower, former midwest regional director of ACORN and Lynn Oldham, a former Missouri board member. The organization's offices are located at 428 No. Skinker Boulevard, St. Louis, MO 63130, which is also the reported address of the World Community Center, Veterans for Peace, the St. Louis Workers' Rights Board, Missourians to Abolish the Death Penalty, and the Kansas-Missouri Friends of *People's Weekly World* (the Communist Party-affiliated newspaper formerly known as the *Daily Worker*). The MORE website is [www.organizemo.org](http://www.organizemo.org).

**New England.** The ACORN affiliates in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island have supposedly been reorganized as New England United for Justice (NEU4J), incorporated on January 19, 2010. As of the date of this report, however, the only

office established thus far is the one in Massachusetts. The president of NEU4J is Maude Hurd, though her name is not identified on the website. Maude Hurd was previously the president of ACORN and was on the board of ACORN Housing. Other NEU4J board members include vice president Sandra Ramgeet, former president of ACORN Massachusetts; and executive director Noemi Mimi Ramos, who was a head organizer for ACORN in Boston. New England for Justice is located in the former offices of ACORN MA at 196 Adams Street, Dorchester (Boston), MA 02122. The NEU4J website is [www.neunited4justice.org](http://www.neunited4justice.org).

**New York.** ACORN NY has been rebranded as New York Communities for Change (NYCC), incorporated on December 31, 2009. The organizing director of NYCC, Jon Kest, formerly led ACORN's New York office. He and his brother, Steven Kest — the former national executive director of ACORN — both reportedly knew of the Rathke embezzlement as well. NYCC organizer Jonathan Westin was previously the lead organizer for ACORN NY. NYCC's outreach and special projects director, Gregory Basta, was a lead canvasser for ACORN NY, and executive director Ann Sullivan was formerly the campaign director.

Other NYCC directors with former ties to ACORN and affiliated organizations include:

- Audrey Jackman, vice president (identified on the Working Families Party website as the point of contact for the party in North Brooklyn, NY)
- Anthony Cottman, secretary (ACORN member and vice president of the Parkside Tenant Association)
- Ed Ott (former executive director of the New York Central Labor Council, a union umbrella group)
- Neva Shillingford (executive vice president at SEIU 1199, United health Care Workers East)
- Marie Pierre (member of ACORN's executive committee)
- Jean Andre Sassine (chair of St. Alban's, Queens ACORN)
- Wilfredo Larancuent (New York AFL-CIO executive councilmember and laundry workers' union leader; listed as vice president of the Working Families Organization on 2007 Form 990)
- Ion Emsley (Uniondale, Long island ACORN co-chair)
- Maria Polanco (ACORN national vice president)

NYCC is listed as a "tenant advocacy organization" on the government website of Bill De Blasio (<http://pubadvocate.nyc.gov>), New York City's public advocate. De Blasio has had long-standing ties with ACORN. He was investigated in 2009 for receiving questionable campaign assistance from Citizen Services, Inc. and directed more than \$100,000 to ACORN and ACORN Housing while serving as a city councilman. He was endorsed by the Working Families Party.

ACORN Housing's New York branch now operates as Mutual Housing Association of New York (MHANY). As with NYCC, many of its board members have former affiliations with ACORN organizations. MHANY's executive director, Ismene Speliotis, for instance, was previously New York director for ACORN Housing.

New York Communities for Change is located at 2-4 Nevins Street, Brooklyn,

NY 11217, the former home of ACORN and ACORN Housing, and the current headquarters of the Working Families Party and its 501(c)3 branch, the Working Families Organization. NYCC has another office as well in Schenectady, New York. The NYCC website is [www.nycommunities.org](http://www.nycommunities.org).

**Pennsylvania.** ACORN PA has become Pennsylvania Communities Organizing for Change (PCOC) and Pennsylvania Neighborhoods for Social Justice (PNSJ). Both were incorporated on January 8, 2010. On July 26, 2010, PCOC filed for another name — Action United — and the organizations now operate under this name. Current board members and staff of these organizations with former ACORN affiliations include:

- Lucille Prater Holliday, chair (ACORN member and Democratic state house candidate)
- Pat Worrell, co-chair (Chester County, PA ACORN chairman)
- Rosa Chacon, secretary/treasurer (ACORN leader in Harrisburg, PA, profiled in ACORN's 2005 annual report)
- Fabrico Rodriguez, board member (executive director of Philadelphia Jobs with Justice)
- Craig Robbins, executive director (ACORN regional director in Philadelphia, PA)
- Maryellen Deckard, southwest regional director (head organizer for ACORN PA)
- Jennifer England, communications director (Pittsburg ACORN spokesperson)

Action United is located at 846 North Broad Street, Philadelphia, PA 19130 and 5907 Penn Avenue, Pittsburg, PA 15206. The Action United website is [www.actionunited.org](http://www.actionunited.org).

**Texas.** ACORN TX is now the Texas Organizing Project (TOP), incorporated on December 3, 2009. Its leadership includes former ACORN leaders, such as:

- Ginny Goldman, director (ACORN Texas lead organizer)
- Michelle McClelen, deputy director (ACORN Texas legislative director)
- Kimberly Olsen, field director, Dallas (head of Dallas ACORN and ACORN's national director of voter registration)
- Allison Brim, lead organizer, Dallas county (Irving, Texas ACORN organizer)

TOP also runs the Texas Organizing Project Educational Fund, which received a one-year grant of \$150,000 from George Soros' Open Society Foundation in 2010. The TOP Educational only received its nonprofit status on October 2010. The Texas Organizing Project headquarters are located at 2506 Sutherland, Houston, TX 77023. Other offices are located in Dallas and San Juan, TX. The TOP website is [www.organizetexas.org](http://www.organizetexas.org).

**Washington.** ACORN in Washington State has been replaced by Organization United for Reform (OUR). There are offices in Snohomish County, Pierce County, and King County. OUR staff with former ties to ACORN include John Jones, president, who was the president of ACORN WA, and Theresa Guerrero and Georgene Monday, who worked for ACORN. OUR is not, at this point, a nonprofit organization. The Organization

United for Reform office for King County is located at 132 SW 153<sup>rd</sup> Street, #201, Burien, WA 98166. The OUR website is <http://ourwashington.net>.

### **Other State Organizations**

In addition to the organizations profiled above, Judicial Watch has located five other state organizations with connections to ACORN, adding up to seventeen of the eighteen organizations claimed by Lewis. Judicial Watch continues to compile information on these organizations and has submitted requests with the IRS for copies of the Form 1023s filed by the organizations. Such forms, which require identification of the initial sources of funding, must be submitted by organizations applying for tax-exempt status.

1. **Communities United, Inc. (CU)**

737½ 8<sup>th</sup> Street SE  
Washington, DC 20003

*Note:* CU shares old ACORN space with Project Vote and reportedly was planning a chapter in Maryland as well. No website has yet been identified.

2. **Action NC (ANC)**

5500 Executive Center Drive, Suite 234  
Charlotte, NC 28205

Website: [www.actionnc.org](http://www.actionnc.org)

*Note:* Action NC also has an office in Durham, NC.

3. **Living United for Change in Arizona (LUCHA)**

1740 West Van Buren Street  
Phoenix, AZ 85018

Website: [www.luhaaz.org](http://www.luhaaz.org)

4. **Organize Now, Inc. (ON)**

P.O. Box 533732  
Orlando, FL 32853

Website: [www.organizeflorida.org](http://www.organizeflorida.org)

5. **Organizers in the Land of Enchantment (OLE)**

411 Bellamah NW  
Albuquerque, NM 87102

Website: [www olenm.org](http://www olenm.org)

## **Questions About the ACORN Bankruptcy**

“Louisiana investigators believe there is approximately \$20 million in cash in 800 bank accounts.” – U.S. House of Representatives staff report from the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, “ACORN Political Machine Tries to Reinvent Itself,” April 1, 2010.<sup>30</sup>

One fact is clear: the survival of ACORN was planned well in advance. As can be seen

in the section entitled “From the ashes of ACORN: State Organizations” (see page 10), all of the state organizations were set up months ahead of time, in some cases taking over the physical regional and state offices of ACORN.

Although ACORN announced in March 2010 the organization would be closing its doors in April 2010, the official bankruptcy was dated November 2, 2010. During this time, 219 state office bank accounts located at the Whitney National Bank in New Orleans were closed. Membership and email contact lists, computers, and furniture were sold to regional offices. And Bertha Lewis continued to pay herself her full salary up through September 24, 2010, despite supposedly being unable to pay other bills. Secretary/Treasurer and General Counsel Arthur Z. Schwartz was also paid his full salary through the same date.<sup>31</sup>



**Rep. Darrell Issa  
(R-CA), Chairman  
of the House  
Committee on  
Government  
Oversight and  
Reform**

With the national headquarters of ACORN closing down and filing for bankruptcy, and with the supposed disbanding of its network of regional offices, the overriding question raised by investigators in a number of states is, “*What happened to the money?*” Were any of the assets hidden away? Are any of these assets being used to help fund The Black Institute? Or the rebranded state organizations?

Judicial Watch has submitted requests with the IRS for copies of the Form 1023s filed by the state organizations to investigate the source of their funding. These records detail the assets of organizations at the time they apply for exempt status under section 501(c)3 of the tax code and are available to the public. (To date, Judicial Watch has received only one Form 1023, from Bertha Lewis’ The Black Institute.)

With respect to ACORN’s “missing assets,” the Louisiana attorney general’s office and the U.S. Bankruptcy Court are hot on the trail, evidently believing ACORN filed inaccurate and potentially fraudulent bankruptcy papers. For instance:

- In the bankruptcy filing dated November 2, 2010, ACORN claimed assets of \$114,931.04 and liabilities of \$4,092,596.76. The bankruptcy court, however, must have either found the claim to be blatantly false, or else it discovered additional assets. In any case, the court issued a Notice of Discovery of Assets, which notified creditors as follows:

“It appeared from the schedules filed when this case was initiated that there were not assets from which dividends could be paid to creditors, and this was indicated on the notice of meeting of creditors. It now appears that the payment of a dividend may be possible. Creditors must now file claims in order to share in any distribution from the estate.”<sup>32</sup>

Creditors were given a deadline of April 20, 2011 to file claims. Given the significance of the notice, Judicial Watch is investigating the status and results of the “discovery” in terms of net assets. The bankruptcy court has yet to release details.

- In October 2009, Louisiana Attorney General David Caldwell filed the first of two subpoenas seeking the financial records of ACORN, and in early November,



raided ACORN's office in New Orleans, taking dozens of computers into custody.<sup>33</sup> Investigators in the Louisiana Attorney General's office have stated they believe that ACORN may have had as many as 800 bank accounts, totaling as much as \$20 million in cash plus \$10 million worth of property. Their investigation is continuing, and no information is yet being released.

During testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Caldwell asked for help from the Obama administration in the investigation.<sup>34</sup> No help has apparently been forthcoming; and the failure by the Department of Justice to conduct its own investigation is a scandal in its own right.

In addition to potentially hiding assets, evidence suggests ACORN may have misstated liabilities to "fix" its balance sheet to deny funds to creditors. For example, in its bankruptcy filing, ACORN claimed a debt to the Pennsylvania Bureau of Charitable Organizations in the amount of \$750,000. However, the Pennsylvania Attorney General's office told Judicial Watch investigators that the state has no record of the debt.<sup>35</sup>

As reported by the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, ACORN operationally played a shell game over the years that enabled the organization to comingle funds and shift them covertly between tax-exempt and non-exempt entities.<sup>36</sup> Funds donated to ACORN or any of its 175 affiliates were deposited into bank accounts held by CCI. Thereafter, CCI transferred money into various affiliates. Also, according to testimony before the House Judiciary Committee, ACORN engaged in unreported transactions between its affiliates. Without question, the shell game continued to the end, as ACORN allegedly attempted to fix its balance sheet and hide potentially tens of millions of dollars in assets.

With so many questions unanswered, the ACORN bankruptcy remains an intense area of focus for law enforcement investigators and for Judicial Watch.

## **Voter Registration Fraud: Update on Criminal Activities by ACORN<sup>37</sup>**

### **Status of State Investigations**

The link between Project Vote and ACORN is well established (see page 9), including the fact that Project Vote had hired ACORN to register voters likely to vote for liberal candidates. The result has been ACORN's notorious flaunting of voter registration laws, with dozens of ACORN workers in various states ending up in court facing criminal charges. Voter registration fraud not only fundamentally undermines the integrity of elections, it can actually tip elections one way or another.

Take Minnesota, for example, a state in which Project Vote/ACORN accounted for some 43,000 voter registrations. Investigation by Minnesota Majority, a political watchdog organization, determined that thousands of voters across the state appear to have been double-registered; some 2,800 ineligible felons may have voted, nearly 2,000 voters were apparently under the age of 18, and thousands may have voted twice.<sup>38</sup>



**Former U.S.  
Senator Norm  
Coleman (R-MN)**

The bottom line is that voter registration fraud and voter fraud in Minnesota could well have victimized former Senator Norman Coleman, who lost to Al Franken by 312 votes out of the more than 3 million votes cast.

Consider also the following instances in which ACORN's corrupt activities have resulted in charges of voter registration fraud in other states.

Unfortunately, as can be seen, actual convictions to date have been few, and sentences have been light.

- In *Colorado*, 11,805 individuals — non-citizens at the time they obtained a driver's license — have been identified as registered voters in 2010. Many are undoubtedly illegally registered, but the precise number has been impossible to determine due to inconclusive voter registration data. No action is currently being taken by the state.

Judicial Watch also uncovered a systematic effort by Project Vote to manipulate voter registration policies for recipients of public assistance in the 2008 and 2010 election cycles. The percentage of invalid registrations from Colorado's public assistance agencies was four times the national average as a result.

- In *Connecticut*, Judicial Watch obtained documents from the FBI detailing a federal investigation into the alleged corrupt activities of ACORN in that state, as well as the Obama administration's decision to shut down a criminal investigation without filing criminal charges. The documents include background information on two specific complaints filed in October 2008 by Lucy Corelli and Joseph Borges, Republican Registrars of Voters in Stamford and Bridgeport, Connecticut, respectively, during the 2008 election season.
- According to Corelli, on August 1, 2008, her office received 1,200 ACORN voter registration cards from the Secretary of State's office. Over 300 of these cards were rejected because of "duplicates, underage, illegible and invalid addresses," which "put a tremendous strain on our office staff and caused endless work hours at taxpayers' expense." Corelli claimed the total cost of the extra work caused by ACORN corruption was \$20,000.
- Likewise, Borges contended that: "the organization ACORN, during the summer of 2008, conducted a registration drive which has produced over 100 rejections due to incomplete forms and individuals who are not citizens..." Among the examples cited by Borges was a seven-year old child who was registered to vote by ACORN through the use of a forged signature and a fake birth certificate claiming she was 27-years old.

The FBI and Department of Justice opened an investigation. However, the Obama Justice Department, while noting that ACORN had engaged in "questionable hiring and training practices," closed down the investigation in March 2009, claiming ACORN broke no laws.

- In *Missouri*, Judicial Watch obtained documents from the FBI related to the 2007 investigation and arrest of eight St. Louis, Missouri workers from the “community organization” ACORN for violation of election laws and voter fraud. The documents include handwritten notes from FBI investigators interviewing canvassers working with Project Vote.<sup>40</sup> Among the highlights from the FBI handwritten notes are the following:



**U.S. Senator  
Al Franken (D-MN)**

1. [ACORN] “told employees not to talk to the FBI. ‘FBI trying to intimidate you.’”
2. Fraudulent cards: a) cause confusion on election day to keep polls open longer, b) allow people who can’t vote to vote, and c) allow people to vote multiple times.
3. Project Vote will pay them whether cards are fake or not.
4. Canvassers were constantly threatened.
5. ACORN HQ’s is wkg [working] for the Democratic Party.
6. Project Vote pays ACORN \$6.00 per card. “You treat the cards like cash.”
7. Same [names] went right from the phone book; others made up.
8. Canvassers: homeless, volatile, drug users, drunks...
9. Anyone against PV [Project Vote] or ACORN’s goals are “right wing.”
10. One canvasser thought if she used a completely fake name, it would be less like ID theft. “Yeah, it’s against the law, I know...”

In addition to the hand-written notes, the documents also include copies of the arrest warrants, criminal case cover sheets and court documents. In April 2008, all eight ACORN employees involved in the scandal pled guilty to voter registration fraud.

- In *Nevada*, ACORN pleaded guilty to one count for illegally paying canvassers to register voters during the 2008 presidential campaign. The deal means that ACORN has avoided going to trial and no one is going to jail. Clark County District Court Judge Donald Mosely, who handed down the maximum \$5,000 fine on August 10, 2011, stated “If I had an individual in this courtroom... who was responsible for this kind of thing, I would put that person in prison for 10 years, hard time.”<sup>41</sup>

In addition, ACORN voter registration organizer and deputy regional director Amy Busefink, as previously mentioned, entered an *Alford plea* to conspiracy charges and received a two-year suspended sentence. Co-defendant Christopher Edwards pled guilty and also received a suspended sentence (plus a \$500 fine) after testifying against Busefink.<sup>42</sup> Busefink’s guilty plea, however, did not disqualify her from remaining as field director for Project Vote.

- In *New Jersey*, authorities arrested City Councilman Rigo Rodriguez and eleven co-conspirators of ACORN in December 2010 on charges of voter fraud related to the city’s May 2010 election. The charges are still pending.

- In August 2010, Harris County, *Texas* voter registrar Leo Vasquez reported that “the integrity of the voter roll of Harris County appears to be under an organized and systemic attack” by Houston Votes, using an “ACORN-like” strategy of submitting fraudulent voter registrations. Houston Votes is led by project director Sean Caddle, who is a former democratic campaign manager and fundraiser. More significantly, his roots go back as a worker in New Jersey for the ACORN-affiliated SEIU.<sup>43</sup> Of more than 25,000 voter registrations filed by the organization before the 2010 election, all but 7,193 were found to be fraudulent or incomplete. Over 1,000 of the fraudulent registrations included the false claim by the registrant that he or she did not possess a Texas driver’s license or state ID card. Caddle has admitted to false voter registrations and claims to have terminated a dozen employees. No charges are known to have been filed.
- In *Florida*, eleven ACORN workers were arrested in 2009 after submitting nearly 1,000 fraudulent registration forms. Five were sentenced to probation; one received a 125-day jail term plus probation, and a seventh was sentenced to 72 days plus probation. The disposition of the case for an eighth defendant, which involves drug charges as well, is still pending, while the fates of the remaining three are unknown and are being investigated by Judicial Watch.
- In 2008, *Indiana* election officials discovered more than 4,000 fraudulent registrations submitted by ACORN workers. Elections board director Sally LaSota reported that “ACORN vote canvassers pulled names and addresses from telephone books and forged their signatures.” No charges are known to have been filed.
- In *Pennsylvania*, a six-month FBI investigation culminating in May 2009 led to forgery and election fraud charges against seven Pittsburgh-area ACORN employees. Two had pending charges at the time of their arrest, one for resisting arrest and the other for aggravated assault. Previously, in October 2008, Philadelphia deputy city commissioner Fred Voight reported that ACORN had submitted approximately 8,000 fraudulent voter registration forms. Of those 1,500 involve apparent criminality and were referred to the district attorney for investigation. The disposition of these cases is currently unknown. Testifying before the Pennsylvania State Government Committee on voter fraud, Judicial Watch attorney Michael Bekesha reported that ACORN was found to have submitted tens of thousands of fraudulent registration forms in Philadelphia alone.<sup>44</sup>

As can be seen from the above examples, the problem of voter registration fraud in the U.S. is systemic, with the criminal activities of ACORN having had a direct impact on the electoral process in 2008. In actuality, no one really knows how many fraudulent votes may escape detection as a result of voter registration fraud. Absentee ballots, online registration, and the ability to register and vote on the same day — which is permitted in seven states — are complicating an already laborious problem of rooting out voter impersonations, double-voting, fake addresses, and ineligible voters.

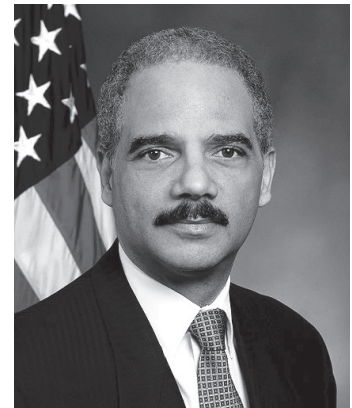
The Obama Justice Department has shown little interest in addressing the fraudulent activities of Project Vote/ACORN in registering voters. Nevertheless, many states have taken action independently to protect the integrity of elections. Table 1 identifies the twenty eight states that have enacted laws pertaining to voter identification.

**Table 1  
State Requirements for Voter Registration**

State	Requires ID Only	Requests or Requires Photo ID
Alabama	X	
Alaska	X	
Arizona	X	
Colorado	X	
Connecticut	X	
Delaware	X	
Florida		X
Georgia		X
Hawaii		X
Idaho		X
Indiana		X
Kansas		X
Kentucky	X	
Louisiana		X
Michigan		X
Missouri	X	
Montana	X	
North Dakota	X	
Ohio	X	
Oklahoma	X	
South Carolina		X
South Dakota		X
Tennessee	X	
Texas	X	
Utah	X	
Virginia	X	
Washington	X	



**President Barack Obama**



**U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder**

For most states, various forms of identification are acceptable: driver’s license, employee ID card, Social Security card, birth certificate, passport, hunting or fishing license, student ID card, even a current utility bill or bank statement. In short, for those legally qualified to register to vote, the opportunity to do so almost certainly exists. Where a prospective voter appears without an acceptable form of identification, some states offer provisional ballots, providing the individual with the opportunity to produce identification within a prescribed number of days.

## ACORN's Impact on 2008 and 2010 Elections

According to its own assessment of the 2008 election, ACORN — in conjunction with the efforts of Project Vote — submitted registration cards for 1,312,558 voters nationally. The goal was clearly partisan. ACORN and Project Vote targeted voters who were most likely to support left-wing causes and candidates, to the exclusion of others. A breakdown of ACORN registrations by state is as follows:<sup>46</sup>

<b>Arizona</b>	<b>12,018</b>
<b>California</b>	<b>39,570</b>
<b>Colorado</b>	<b>65,969</b>
<b>Connecticut</b>	<b>20,081</b>
<b>Florida</b>	<b>151,812</b>
<b>Indiana</b>	<b>23,090</b>
<b>Michigan</b>	<b>215,470</b>
<b>Minnesota</b>	<b>43,162</b>
<b>Missouri</b>	<b>47,362</b>
<b>Kentucky</b>	<b>14,200</b>
<b>Louisiana</b>	<b>12,452</b>
<b>Nevada</b>	<b>87,968</b>
<b>New Mexico</b>	<b>77,432</b>
<b>North Carolina</b>	<b>26,841</b>
<b>Ohio</b>	<b>247,335</b>
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	<b>153,898</b>
<b>Texas</b>	<b>42,695</b>
<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>31,203</b>
	<b>1,312,558</b>

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Of the total number submitted, Michael Slater, admitted in an interview with *The New York Times* that the actual figure of legitimate first-time voters was 450,000. About 400,000 of the voter applications collected were rejected by election officials for various reasons.<sup>47</sup> Some were the names of dead people, underage children, and people pulled from phone books. Others were simply made up... apparently including “Mickey Mouse” and “Donald Duck.” According to Slater, the remaining 460,000+ were previously registered voters who were changing their addresses.

Clearly, ACORN's corrupt activities could well have tipped the balance of individual elections in favor of leftist candidates, especially where the voting totals were close. Consider again the race between incumbent Minnesota Senator Norman Coleman and former liberal radio show host Al Franken. ACORN and Project Vote were able to register more than 43,000 new voters in Minnesota. While some of the registrations may have been discarded and a number of those signing up probably did not end up actually voting, Coleman lost his bid for re-election by only 312 votes. ACORN, and its “non-partisan” Project Vote, almost certainly had a hand in the election of Franken.

In 2010, ACORN was under fire during most of the year for its corrupt activities and was concentrating on closing bank accounts and incorporating state organizations under new names before ultimately closing its doors. As a result, the troubled organization

had little time to focus on registering new voters. Then too, funding was either drying up or being squirreled away, or both.

During 2010, however, Project Vote remained active with get-out-the-vote (GOV) partners in Pennsylvania and other states and worked hand-in-hand with leftist environmental groups, The Sierra Club and Voting for America (VFA) with the objective of registering 50,000 students in the expected battleground states of Colorado, Minnesota, Nevada, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Texas. Compared with its efforts in 2008, however, the organization was reportedly lying low during the 2010 election cycle with the intent of emerging full force in time for Obama's 2012 re-election campaign.<sup>48</sup>

The number of voter registration cards submitted by Project Vote are unreported for 2010; and by Election Day in 2010 (November 2), ACORN had supposedly closed its doors. The efforts by Project Vote to register minority, inner city, and public assistance voters, however, were almost certainly less successful than they were in 2007/2008. This is no doubt due — at least in part — to the negative publicity and legal problems of ACORN, which spiked public outrage among Americans. In the words of Bertha Lewis, former ACORN chief executive officer, “2010 came and the Democrats had no ground game.”<sup>49</sup>

The elections in 2012 will be another story. Project Vote is gearing up for the presidential election by threatening lawsuits under the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) and working to oppose weaker fraud protections in voter registration and voting in a number of states. In Colorado, for instance, Project Vote appeared to have dictated voter registration forms and procedures and had been provided internal voter registration data by the Colorado election officials.<sup>50</sup> Supervising Colorado's efforts to establish an online registration program in Colorado is Project Vote's field director Amy Busefink, who had plead guilty in Nevada to voter registration violations.

In Louisiana, Project Vote has sued the state under NVRA, claiming that Louisiana is disenfranchising minority and low-income voters by failing to offer them the opportunity to register to vote.<sup>51</sup> Project Vote has been allowed under a federal court ruling on July 21, 2011, to proceed with its lawsuit.

In Virginia, on August 3, 2011, a federal judge issued a stay to an earlier ruling that would have made the state's voter registration records available to the public. Legal action was brought against Virginia by Project Vote, supposedly predicated by the fact that a number of Norfolk State University students had their voter registrations rejected during the last presidential election. The stay is evidently to give the Virginia General Assembly and Congress time to change the law, which currently restricts access to voter registration applications to the local registrar and the individual voter.<sup>52</sup>

In addition, to the efforts of Project Vote to influence the 2012 presidential election, the new independent state organizations — essentially ACORN spinoffs — are up and running and preparing for aggressive drives to register new voters for Barack Obama as well as local left-wing candidates. Primary targets of Project Vote's registration efforts for 2012 are people on public assistance, such as food stamps and welfare (who are sometimes known as “Obama's Food Stamp Army”). They are being targeted because they are considered most likely to vote for candidates supporting government welfare causes and programs.

## Judicial Watch: Holding ACORN Accountable

While the Obama administration has failed to hold ACORN and Project Vote accountable, Judicial Watch is on the front lines exposing the scandalous activities of ACORN and its affiliates, including Obama's former employer, Project Vote.

Judicial Watch has submitted numerous Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests to federal agencies, one of which was refused on August 10, 2011 by the Department of Justice as being "too broad," despite the fact that the records requested pertain to communications with one office and one specific investigative target for a specified time frame. Judicial Watch has also filed open records requests to unearth details regarding ACORN's new state organizations. Two new ACORN-related FOIA lawsuits are scheduled to be filed the week of August 15, 2010, and Judicial Watch will soon launch a comprehensive "Voter Registration Accountability Project" in preparation for the 2012 elections.

In 2009, Judicial Watch exposed a plan by the Obama Census Bureau to partner with ACORN in conducting the 2010 U.S. Census, including recommending workers to perform the census (which may have included felons). Ultimately, the exposure by Judicial Watch and the resulting negative publicity surrounding ACORN led to the bureau's decision to sever ties with the organization.

Judicial Watch has also forced the release of documents detailing federal investigations of ACORN's fraudulent voter registration activities, and filed a lawsuit to obtain records related to funds embezzled from ACORN by Dale Rathke, brother of ACORN founder Wade Rathke.

Judicial Watch continues as well to battle in court for the release of documents related to ACORN's abuse of federal tax dollars. Finally, Judicial Watch is following through with its investigations regarding the various matters in this report, and in particular, the questions raised by the ACORN bankruptcy filing.

In its campaign to ensure the integrity of the 2012 elections, Judicial Watch filed a lawsuit on August 19, 2011 against the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) seeking records related to the DOJ's communications with Estelle Rogers, Director of Advocacy for Project Vote. Ostensibly, under Rogers' leadership, Project Vote has been very active in fighting election integrity initiatives in several states (particularly in swing states like Florida, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Louisiana).

Judicial Watch also filed a second lawsuit on August 19, 2011 against the Obama Department of Housing and Urban Development to obtain documents regarding the agency's decision to grant "housing agency" status to the ACORN spinoff Affordable Housing Centers of American, enabling the group to continue to receive federal funding in violation of the federal funding ban.

Judicial Watch's activities have helped to complete the public profile of one of the most flagrantly corrupt organizations in our nation's history, an organization dubbed



a “criminal enterprise” by Rep. Darrell Issa (R-CA), Chairman of the House Oversight Committee.

Please visit [www.judicialwatch.org/investigation-acorn](http://www.judicialwatch.org/investigation-acorn) for more information on Judicial Watch’s campaign to investigate and hold accountable ACORN and its affiliates.

## Conclusions

The following are Judicial Watch’s conclusions and issues that merit further investigation.

1. Rumors of ACORN’s demise are completely false. While, technically speaking, ACORN’s state and parent organizations, along with CCI, have filed for chapter 7 bankruptcy, ACORN lives on in the form of its affiliated organizations, such as Affordable Housing Centers of America, The Advance Group, The Black Institute, and Project Vote. Moreover, ACORN’s newly formed state organizations will continue to carry on — in the words of Bertha Lewis — “*ACORN’s work of organizing low- and moderate-income folks.*”<sup>53</sup>
2. According to state attorney general investigations and an analysis of ACORN’s bankruptcy filings, the bankruptcy papers filed by Bertha Lewis and Arthur Z. Schwartz appear to be incomplete and/or inaccurate. Moreover, investigators believe these papers do not account for tens of millions of dollars in ACORN funds. Were these funds squirreled away? Or have the funds been distributed to any of the derivative organizations, including The Black Institute? These questions merit further investigation.
3. Project Vote is clearly going to continue to undermine the rule of law and the integrity of elections through fraudulent voter registration. Project Vote, which has retained voter registration fraud-tainted staff, has not gone away; the scandal of 2008 is bound to be repeated in 2012. The tiger has not changed its stripes.
4. ACORN leaders at both the state and national levels seem to have systemically violated numerous laws, and yet, the Obama Justice Department, likely due to the president’s personal and political ties to the organization, refuses to investigate. With many former ACORN staff filling key roles in the state entities and in the ACORN-affiliated organizations, these groups should be subjected to close scrutiny, as the previous corrupt practices will almost certainly continue.

## End Notes

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- <sup>2</sup> Cynthia Gordy, “Bertha Lewis on Life After ACORN,” *the ROOT*, May 16, 2011, [www.theroot.com/views/bertha-lewis-life-after-acorn?GT1=38002](http://www.theroot.com/views/bertha-lewis-life-after-acorn?GT1=38002)
- <sup>3</sup> “Obama Administration Issues \$79,819 Grant to ACORN Offshoot in Apparent Violation of ACORN Funding Ban,” Judicial Watch News Release, July 5, 2011, [www.judicialwatch.org](http://www.judicialwatch.org)
- <sup>4</sup> “Documents: ACORN and Project Vote Activity Led to Dramatic Increase in Invalid Colorado Voter Registrations for 2008 and 2010,” Judicial Watch News Release, August 4, 2011, [www.judicialwatch.org](http://www.judicialwatch.org)
- <sup>5</sup> FBI handwritten notes pertaining to 2007 investigation and arrest of eight St. Louis, Missouri ACORN workers for violation of election laws and voter fraud, “Judicial Watch Obtains New FBI Documents Regarding ACORN Voter Fraud Investigation,” Judicial Watch News Release, June 9, 2010, [www.judicialwatch.org](http://www.judicialwatch.org)
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- <sup>7</sup> Jon Bauman, “A Mighty Oak from a Little Acorn,” *The Wall Street Journal*, August 7, 2008, <http://online.wsj.com>
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- <sup>12</sup> “ACORN Missing Money Could Top 5 Million Dollars,” 7KPLC and The Associated Press, October 8, 2009, [www.kpletv.com](http://www.kpletv.com)
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