

# money in politics

a project of Ohio Citizen Action

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## **Ohio Citizen Action urges stronger bipartisan election administration** *State also must create statewide voter list*

COLUMBUS – Ohio Citizen Action today called for deeper reforms of the state’s election administration after a new study found the Buckeye state had the weakest electoral system among five large Midwestern Great Lakes states.

The study, by researchers at The Ohio State University’s Moritz College of Law, dubbed Ohio a “poster child for reform,” a fact made all the more worrisome by the expectation that Ohio will once again play a large role in the outcome of the presidential election. Illinois ranked a close second to Ohio in terms of election mismanagement and partisan influence. Minnesota was hailed as “exemplary” and a “model,” with Wisconsin and Michigan somewhere in between.

“The problems that gave Ohio a black eye in 2004 ran much deeper than one election or one administration,” said Catherine Turcer, director of the Money and Politics Project at Ohio Citizen Action, and a former member of the Ohio Secretary of State’s Help American Vote Act State Planning Commission. “There are systemic issues in Ohio that should concern voters and policymakers heading into a critical election year.”

One way to achieve more independent oversight without changing the constitutional duties of the secretary of state is to develop a joint bipartisan advisory commission to help administer elections, according to Ohio Citizen Action.

“Both political parties play an important role at the local level. It’s time to extend bipartisan administration,” said Turcer. “Let’s give everybody an incentive to have clean and fair elections and increase voter confidence.”

Another key reform would be for the legislature to create a bipartisan election tribunal that could arbitrate election disputes without the specter of conflicts of interest – something very important in a state where the Supreme Court, which is the ultimate arbiter of such disputes, can be dominated by elected judges that originally hailed from one of the two main parties. This would provide an intermediate step before the court steps in.

The study found that Ohio has not resolved issues with mishandling of ballots and recounts, the accuracy of voting equipment and the state’s continuing failure to produce a statewide voter database as mandated by Congress.

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One growing problem – pervasive to all the states studied – was what Ohio State researchers called “vendor dependency,” leaving too much responsibility to vendors of voting equipment.

“Of all the things to outsource, democracy isn’t one of them,” said Turcer.

The full Ohio State Moritz study, *From Registration to Recounts: The Election Ecosystems of Five Midwestern States*, can be found at [www.electionlaw.osu.edu](http://www.electionlaw.osu.edu).

The Ohio Citizen Action Education Fund has been producing money and politics studies since 1994. Ohio Citizen Action’s Money in Politics Project ([www.ohiocitizen.org/money.html](http://www.ohiocitizen.org/money.html)) is committed to fundamental democratic values and principles: honesty, fairness, transparency, accountability, citizen participation and the public’s need for reliable information.

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