



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 3, 2007

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Minnesota reform groups urge against complacency as state's traditionally strong electoral system shows cracks

*Study finds Minnesota's elections are a model, but warns
against local spread of negative national trends*

SAINT PAUL – Minnesota reform groups today urged against complacency after a new study found the state's electoral system remained strong but showed vulnerabilities that could affect the reliability and fairness of elections.

The study of five large Midwestern states, by researchers at The Ohio State University's Moritz College of Law, hailed Minnesota's electoral system as "exemplary" and a "model." At the same time, the researchers cautioned against potential problems with poll workers, absentee balloting and the fact that a national trend toward "partisan polarization" was seeping into the state, which could make running elections and solving election disputes more controversial and difficult.

The study dubbed Ohio a "poster child for reform," while Illinois' election system was found to be "mismanaged," prone to "partisan influences" and "toothless." Wisconsin and Michigan were somewhere in between those states and Minnesota.

"Minnesota has earned a good reputation despite recent attempts to politicize elections. The organizations that make up the Voting Rights Coalition deserve a lot of credit for preventing this backslide," said Dan McGrath, executive director of TakeAction Minnesota, the group that convenes the coalition. "We must not be complacent. Minnesota has not kept up with recent advancements in making elections more open and accessible. We have a lot of work to do."

Top reform priorities include stepping up recruitment and training of poll workers and enhancing voter registration options.

"There is real work to be done to ensure we have non-partisan election judges and poll workers," said McGrath. "The human element is perhaps more important than the policy element when it comes to running a good and clean election system."

Ideas advanced by TakeAction Minnesota to facilitate continued voter participation include "no-fault" absentee balloting, automatic voter registration, and expanding forms of identification

used to register to vote on election day. Another key change would be to translate voting materials to help recent citizens take part in the process.

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“Our election system must change with the times to recognize Minnesota’s increasing diversity and new technologies,” said McGrath. “We used to translate voter instructions for Scandinavian immigrants, and we should extend the same courtesy to our newest citizens.”

The study gave high marks to Minnesota’s long-standing “moralist” political tradition as a reason behind the state’s ability to view elections as a shared enterprise designed to enhance the greater good. But, it said, states cannot “go it alone” and must work to positively influence federal elections policy.

“As much as we would like to think that as Minnesota goes, so goes the nation, the reality is that right now when it comes to election oversight, as the nation goes, so it goes here,” said McGrath. “We should view this as an opportunity to shore up our own election system and maybe export our best practices to help improve the nation’s overall electoral health.”

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

TakeAction Minnesota unites the power of diverse individuals, organizations, and communities in active grassroots democracy to build social, racial, and economic justice. It is Minnesota’s only multi-issue, multi-constituency organization, made up of 33 member organizations and over 4,000 individual activists.

TakeAction Minnesota is a leader in Minnesota’s democracy reform community. It convenes the Voting Rights Coalition, a group dedicated to protecting and expanding voting rights. Its election protection program, which provides legal assistance and translation support to voters at the polls, has served thousands of voters. TakeAction Minnesota also leads the Fair and Clean Elections (FACE) coalition, an effort to reduce the influence of money in politics.

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