FEDERAL ELECTION CRIMES

The FBI's Role in Protecting Your Vote

FEDERAL ELECTION OVERVIEW

In the United States, the election process is the method by which we hold our government accountable and facilitate the peaceful and orderly transfer of power among elected officials. Our system of representative government only works when votes are not diluted by fraudulent ballots and campaign activities are bound by the law. When the legitimacy of elections are corrupted, our democracy is threatened.

While individual states have primary responsibility for conducting fair and free elections, the FBI plays an important role in protecting Federal interests and preventing violations of our Constitutional rights. Generally, Federal jurisdiction in election-related crimes exists when:

- the ballot includes one or more Federal candidates;

- an election or polling place official abuses their office;

- the conduct involves false voter registration; or

- the activity violates Federal campaign finance laws.

Federal election crimes investigated by the FBI fall into three broad categories:

- Voter/Ballot Fraud

- Civil Rights Violations

- Campaign Finance Offenses

The Federal Bureau of Investigation

Also administers the Threats to Election Workers Task Force to identify, investigate, and mitigate threats targeting election workers.

REMEMBER

Armed FBI agents may not respond to any place where an election is actively being held. FBI agents also may not participate in counting, recounting, or tabulating ballots prior to certification of an election and the end of any election contest. However, FBI agents may be armed at a polling place for the purpose of casting their own vote.

FEDERAL ELECTION OFFENSES

1. VOTER/BALLOT FRAUD

A voter intentionally gives false information when registering to vote (e.g., false citizenship claims) or an ineligible person votes in a Federal election (e.g., noncitizens and some felons).

Vote buying schemes where the voter receives money or something of value (e.g., money, cigarettes or drugs) in exchange for voting for a specific candidate or party in a Federal election.

An individual votes more than once in a Federal election (e.g., schemes to obtain absentee ballots and/or vote in the name of others).

An election official corrupts his or her office to benefit a candidate or party (e.g., stuffs a ballot box with illegal ballots or changes a ballot tally).

2. CIVIL RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

A voter is threatened with physical or economic harm unless the voter declines to vote or casts a ballot a particular way.

Efforts to prevent qualified voters from effectively voting by deceiving them as to the time, place or manner of an election (voter suppression).

3. CAMPAIGN FINANCE CRIMES
FEDERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN ACT (FECA)

Excessive Contributions: A person gives more than the specified amount of money or things of value to a Federal candidate. The current individual donor limit to a candidate is $2,900 per candidate per election (primary and general). Other limits apply to donations to and from national political parties and certain political committees. (A comprehensive list of campaign donation limits can be found at www.fec.gov).

Conduit Contributions (Straw Donor Schemes): A donor asks an individual (such as an employee or family member) to contribute money or things of value to a Federal candidate and provides funds for or reimburses that person for the expense.

Domestic Prohibited Sources: A corporation, labor organization, bank or government contractor contributes money or things of value to a Federal candidate's campaign.

Foreign Prohibited Sources: A foreign individual or entity (not to include permanent residents) contributes to any Federal, state, or local candidate or makes independent expenditures to influence any Federal, state, or local election.
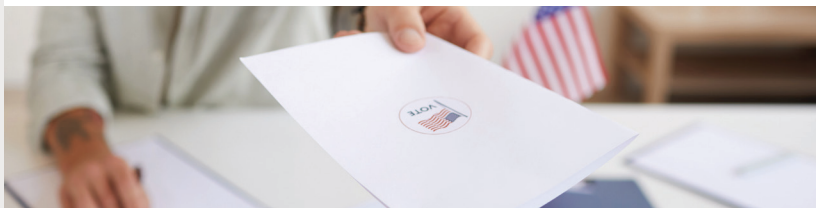
Super PACs and Independent Expenditure Organizations (IEOs): FECA donation limits do not apply to IEO (e.g., Super PAC) contributions or expenditures. However, it is unlawful for these entities to coordinate their activity with a candidate's campaign.

Abuse of Campaign Funds: This corrupt activity involves schemes to exploit campaign contributions for personal and unauthorized use (e.g., using campaign funds to purchase a boat for personal leisure).

WHAT IS NOT A FEDERAL ELECTION CRIME

- Giving voters a ride to the polls or time off to vote.
- Offering voters a stamp to mail an absentee ballot.
- False claims about oneself or another candidate.
- False or forged nominating petitions.
- Asking an opponent to withdraw from a race.
- Honest mistakes by polling place workers.
- Campaigning too close to the polls.
- Lack of immediate election results while ballots are counted.

THREATS TO ELECTION WORKERS TASK FORCE

The Department of Justice, in partnership with the FBI, established the Threats to Election Workers Task Force to address threats of violence, harassment, or intimidation targeting election workers.

If you or someone you know is a victim of a perceived threat of violence, harassment, or intimidation, as an election worker, please consider taking the following steps:

- Call **911** for an immediate threat to life;
- Contact the FBI via: your local FBI Field Office (**www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices**); **1-800-CALL-FBI**; or **www.tips.fbi.gov**; and
- If feasible, attempt to preserve the threatening, harassing, or intimidating communication for future law enforcement use.

"**The FBI will not tolerate threats against any federal, state, or local election worker participating in the common goals of safeguarding our electoral process and the rights of voters. From election administrators to volunteers to vendors and contractors, threats against any one individual is a threat against us all. The FBI's mission is to protect the American people and uphold our Constitution, and protecting our democratic process is paramount. We take this responsibility seriously and will investigate any and all federal violations to the fullest.**"

Paul Abbate
Deputy Director

CONTACT US

If you think an election crime is occurring
Call your local FBI field office and ask for the Election Crimes Coordinator.

www.tips.fbi.gov   **www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices**   **1.800.CALL.FBI (225.5324)**