

FBI warns voters about election crimes ahead of November election

Written by Staff Reports

Friday, 23 October 2020 07:11



Fair elections are the foundation of our democracy in the United States, and the FBI is committed to protecting the voting rights of all Americans.

The FBI is issuing this warning to educate voters about federal election crimes and how to avoid them, and to encourage voters to report suspected violations.

“Every year, Americans pick their leaders and make their voices heard through elections,” Calvin Shivers, assistant director for the Criminal Investigative Division, said. “Those elections must remain free and fair to ensure voters’ voices are truly heard.

“As Americans get ready to vote, the FBI is asking each citizen to remain vigilant and report any suspected criminal scheme targeting voters to the FBI immediately,” he added.

Election Crimes

Election crimes threaten the legitimacy of elections and undermine public confidence in our democracy. Election crimes fall into four broad categories:

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Ballot fraud

Campaign finance violations

Patronage offenses

Civil rights violations, such as voter suppression or voter intimidation

While individual states and localities have the constitutional authority and responsibility to manage elections and have their own election laws, an election crime becomes a federal crime when one or more of the following occurs:

A ballot includes one or more federal candidates

Election or polling place officials abuse their office(s)

The conduct involves false voter registration

The crime is motivated by hostility toward minority protected classes

The activity violates federal campaign finance law

Examples of federal election crimes include, but are not limited to:

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Giving false information when registering to vote

Voting more than once

Changing ballot markings or otherwise tampering with ballots

Compensating voters

Threatening voters with physical or financial harm

Intentionally lying about the time, manner, or place of an election to prevent qualified voters from voting

Political fundraising by federal employees

Campaign contributions above legal limits

Conduit contributions

Contributions from foreign or other prohibited sources

Use of campaign funds for personal or unauthorized purposes

Distinguishing between legal and criminal conduct is critical for ensuring the integrity of U.S.

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elections.

The following activities are not federal election crimes; however, states have their own individual election laws. If you are concerned about a possible violation of a state or local election law, contact your local law enforcement authority:

Giving voters rides to the polls or time off to vote

Offering voters a stamp to mail a ballot

Making false claims about oneself or another candidate

Forging or faking nominating petitions

Campaigning too close to polling places

The FBI plays an important role in preventing violations of your constitutional rights, including your right to vote. Report any instances of potential election crimes to your local FBI field office as soon as possible.

Voter Suppression

Intentionally deceiving qualified voters to prevent them from voting is voter suppression—and it is a federal crime.

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Do you know when, where, and how you will vote? If not, there are many reputable places you can find this information, including [eac.gov](https://www.eac.gov) and [usa.gov/how-to-vote](https://www.usa.gov/how-to-vote). Not all publicly available voting information is accurate, and some is deliberately designed to deceive you to suppress turnout.

Bad actors use various methods to spread disinformation about voting, such as social media platforms, texting, or peer-to-peer messaging applications on smartphones. These bad actors may provide misleading information about the time, manner, or place of voting. This can include inaccurate election dates or false claims about voting qualifications or methods, such as false information suggesting that one may vote by text, which is not allowed in any jurisdiction.

Always consider the source of voting information. Ask yourself, “Can I trust this information?” Look for official notices from election offices and verify that the information you found is accurate.

Help defend the right to vote by reporting any suspected instances of voter suppression—especially those received through a private communication channel like texting—to your local FBI field office.

Scam PACs

Making political contributions can be a powerful way to exercise your First Amendment rights. But some individuals and groups soliciting contributions are bad actors trying to enrich themselves at your expense.

The billions of dollars in political spending each election cycle attract criminals who use deception to cheat Americans out of their hard-earned money. The FBI assesses that seniors are at a high risk of being targeted.

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Scam PACs are fraudulent political action committees designed to reroute political contributions for personal financial gain. This is a federal crime. Signs that a PAC is a scam include the PAC and its website disappearing, and the phone number going out of service.

If you or someone you know has been targeted by a scam PAC, contact your local FBI field office and ask to speak to an election crimes coordinator.

Recommendations for Protecting Your Vote

Know when, where, and how you will vote.

Seek out election information from trustworthy sources, verify who produced the content, and consider their intent.

Report potential election crimes—such as disinformation about the manner, time, or place of voting—to the FBI.

If appropriate, make use of in-platform tools offered by social media companies for reporting suspicious posts that appear to be spreading false or inconsistent information about voting and elections.

Research individuals and entities to whom you are making political donations. If something seems suspicious, reconsider the donation.

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Victim Reporting and Additional Information

The FBI encourages the public to report information concerning suspicious or criminal activity to their local FBI field office.