

US Federal Prosecutors Charge Smartmatic Executives Over Philippine Bribery Scheme

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MIAMI, Three executives of election technology company Smartmatic have been indicted by federal prosecutors in Miami for allegedly bribing a former Philippine election official to secure lucrative voting equipment contracts. The indictment claims that between 2015 and 2018, Smartmatic executives, including co-founder Roger Alejandro Piñate Martínez, allegedly paid bribes to Juan Andrés Donato Bautista, who

served as chairman of the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) during that period.

The charges include violations of the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act and money laundering. Prosecutors allege that the bribes were routed through offshore shell companies and falsified invoices to benefit Bautista and his associates. The executives have pleaded not guilty to all charges.

Smartmatic itself has not been charged with wrongdoing in the bribery case. The company has placed the indicted executives on leave and is cooperating with investigators. In a statement, Smartmatic called the allegations “false and misleading,” asserting that it had no knowledge of the alleged misconduct and emphasizing its commitment to lawful and transparent operations.

The case has drawn attention because of Smartmatic’s role in election technology in the Philippines and abroad. The company provides electronic voting systems used in multiple national elections. During the 2020 U.S. presidential election, Smartmatic was mentioned in claims alleging voter irregularities, which have been widely discredited.

The bribery indictment is intersecting with a defamation lawsuit that Smartmatic filed against Fox News. The company is seeking \$2.7 billion in damages, alleging that the network and its hosts, including Rudy Giuliani and Sidney Powell, made false statements about Smartmatic’s involvement in the 2020 U.S. election. Fox News has denied the allegations and has filed a countersuit, asserting that Smartmatic is attempting to suppress free speech.

Legal arguments in the defamation case now involve materials related to the bribery charges. Fox News successfully requested access to internal Smartmatic documents associated with the bribery investigation, arguing that they are relevant to its defense. A New York appeals court recently ruled in favor of Fox News, allowing the network to obtain specific internal documents.

Legal experts say the bribery charges may add a new dimension to Smartmatic's ongoing challenges, including reputational concerns and complex litigation. While the company itself is not accused of criminal activity in the Miami indictment, the allegations against its executives may influence public perception and have implications for other legal proceedings.

Observers note that the cases illustrate broader challenges at the intersection of election technology, corporate governance, and media reporting. The allegations raise questions about accountability, transparency, and the responsibilities of both private companies and public officials in managing election systems.

As the proceedings move forward, attention will remain focused on the outcomes of both the criminal case against the executives and the civil defamation suit. The legal developments are likely to continue shaping debates on election integrity, corporate conduct, and media accountability in the United States and abroad.