

# Smartmatic executives charged by Justice Department in alleged Philippines bribery scheme

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Picture of the logo of Smartmatic, the firm that supplies Venezuela's voting technology, seen on a sliding door at the headquarters of the company in Caracas on August 2, 2017. Ronaldo Schemidt/AFP/Getty Images

**(CNN)** — Three current and former executives from Smartmatic, the voting technology company suing right-wing media outlets over their 2020 election coverage, have been charged in the US in connection with an alleged bribery scheme in the Philippines.

Among the Smartmatic executives facing charges is the company's president, Roger Piñate, according to a Justice Department release.

The indictment was unveiled in south Florida federal court on Friday.

Prosecutors said in the press release that the indictment stems from bribes allegedly paid by Smartmatic to Andres Bautista, the former top election official in the Philippines, "to obtain and retain business related to providing voting machines and election services for the 2016

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Philippine elections.”

Bautista was already facing related charges in the US and is named in the new indictment, according to the press release.

Smartmatic released a statement acknowledging the indictments, saying that the two executives who are still at the company have immediately been “placed on leaves of absence,” though they “remain innocent until proven guilty.”

The company added, “No voter fraud has been alleged and Smartmatic is not indicted. Voters worldwide must be assured that the elections they participate in are conducted with the utmost integrity and transparency.”

Even though the charges aren’t about the 2020 election, the new indictment is already making waves in the ongoing lawsuits that Smartmatic brought against conservative outlets that promoted the lie that its software rigged the 2020 US election.

Fox News and Newsmax are facing defamation lawsuits from Smartmatic. Fox declined to comment. In a statement Friday, Newsmax said the allegations in the indictment were “simply shocking” and would help its defense against Smartmatic’s defamation case.

“While Mr. Piñate is presumed innocent, media reports from before the 2020 election make clear that Smartmatic has a long, troubling, and questionable history,” the statement said. “Alleged corruption anywhere undermines public confidence in elections and democracy everywhere.”

The far-right network OAN, which in April settled a defamation suit brought by Smartmatic, said in a statement that the indictment raises two key points.

“The press has a right to report the allegations without fear of having to prove their truth at some later time in a defamation suit – but the Smartmatic officials have the right to the presumption of innocence until all the facts are determined and prove otherwise,” the statement said.

Both Fox News and Newsmax deny defaming anyone and maintain that the First Amendment protected their 2020 coverage, when they gave airtime to allies of then-President Donald Trump who falsely claimed that Smartmatic and another voting company manipulated the results.

Fox News and Newsmax have seized on the Philippines bribery allegations ever since CNN reported last year on the original charges against Bautista and the Justice Department’s ongoing criminal probe.

Lawyers for Fox News and Newsmax have argued that any criminal prosecution against top Smartmatic executives would significantly harm Smartmatic's public reputation, making it much harder for the voting company to claim it was solely damaged by the controversial 2020 election coverage.

Smartmatic's foreign work, including past activities in Venezuela and the Philippines saga, has long been seen as a vulnerability that could weaken its defamation cases in the US.

The [Newsmax-Smartmatic trial](#) is scheduled for next month in Delaware state court, unless there is an outside settlement.

*This story has been updated with additional developments.*

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