

08-876 BLACK V. UNITED STATES

DECISION BELOW: 530 F.3d 596

LOWER COURT CASE NUMBER: 07-4080, 08-1072, 08-1106

QUESTION PRESENTED:

This Court held in *McNally v. United States*, 483 U.S. 350 (1987), a public corruption case, that the mail fraud statute could not be used to prosecute schemes to deprive the citizenry of the intangible right to good government. Congress responded in 1988 by enacting 18 U.S.C. § 1346, which expands the definition of a "scheme or artifice to defraud" under the mail and wire fraud statutes to encompass schemes that "deprive another of the intangible right of honest services." Twenty years later, the courts of appeals are hopelessly divided on the application of Section 1346 to purely private conduct. In this case, the Seventh Circuit disagreed with at least five other circuits and held that Section 1346 may be applied in a purely private setting irrespective of whether the defendant's conduct risked any foreseeable economic harm to the putative victim. In the alternative, the Seventh Circuit ruled that the defendants forfeited their objection to the improper instructions by opposing the government's bid to have the jury return a "special verdict," a procedure not contemplated by the criminal rules and universally disfavored by other circuits as prejudicial to a defendant's Sixth Amendment rights.

1. Whether 18 U.S.C. § 1346 applies to the conduct of a private individual whose alleged "scheme to defraud" did not contemplate economic or other property harm to the private party to whom honest services were owed.
2. Whether a court of appeals may avoid review of prejudicial instructional error by retroactively imposing an onerous preservation requirement not found in the federal rules.

CERT. GRANTED 5/18/2009