

Supreme Court Reverses “Bridgegate” Convictions, Clarifies Meaning of “Property” Under Federal Fraud Statutes

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On May 7, 2020, the Supreme Court in *Kelly v. United States* reversed the convictions of two former New Jersey officials charged with fraud after closing lanes of the George Washington Bridge to punish the mayor of Fort Lee, New Jersey for refusing to endorse then-governor Chris Christie's reelection campaign. News of the scheme resulted in a political scandal known as “Bridgegate.” The Court's unanimous opinion, written by Justice Elena Kagan, acknowledges that while the defendants' actions may have involved deception, corruption, and abuse of power, their aim was not to obtain money or property as required by federal fraud laws. This decision continues a recent trend narrowing the ability of federal law enforcement to prosecute political corruption, and may have implications for other fraud cases in which the definition of property in the hands of the government is at issue.

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