



# IRS Has Long History of Political Dirty Tricks

May 15, 2013

By ALAN FARNHAM via [World News](#)



IRS Scandal Now Center of Criminal Probe

If you think the IRS's targeting of Americans for their political views is something new, think again.

Historians, tax lawyers, civil libertarians and past victims of abuse say the practice goes back to the Nixon, Johnson, Kennedy and FDR administrations, all of which reportedly used the agency as a weapon against political enemies.

"We need to be careful, here," cautions [David Schuyler](#), professor of American Studies at Franklin & Marshall and editor of the book "[Power to Destroy: The Political Uses of the IRS from Kennedy to Nixon](#)," written by his now-deceased fellow Franklin & Marshall professor, John Andrew.

"Nobody has shown that Obama had anything to do with this. We do not know if that's true or not. That's one of the mysteries that undoubtedly will come to light," he told ABC News.

The current controversy involves IRS employees targeting Tea Party and other conservative groups for audits and scrutiny. The agency has maintained that low-level employees took it upon themselves to do this. [An internal report by the agency's Inspector General cited "ineffective management" as the cause.](#)

If, however, it were to be established some link existed between the Obama administration and what Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell has referred to as the IRS's "[thuggish abuse of power](#)," it wouldn't be the worst—only the most recent—example of an administration using the tax service to engage in what Nixon's enemies branded "dirty tricks."

Andrew's book, says Schuyler, "documents that Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon were complicit, to varying degrees, in using the IRS for political purposes. And it didn't end there. John had enough material to take it up through the 1970s and '80s. That's all in our college archives."

During the Clinton administration, Paula Jones, who had filed a sexual-harassment suit against President Clinton, alleged she was being audited by the IRS because of it.

Targets of the IRS during the Kennedy administration, according to Andrew and Schuyler, included such groups as the conservative John Birch Society. Former editor of the Washington Post Ben Bradlee in his 1976 book "Conversations With Kennedy," wrote that Kennedy had shared with him confidential information from the tax returns of rich conservatives H.L. Hunt and J. Paul Getty.

The 1974 Senate Watergate Report confirmed that the Nixon administration and sought to use the IRS to make life miserable for a wide spectrum of political enemies including Senators George McGovern, Hubert Humphrey and Edmund Muskie.

Whistleblower John Dean produced memos confirming that the Nixon administration had even considered using the IRS to go after such small game as the producer of "Millhouse: A White Comedy," a satiric film making fun of Nixon.

[Travis Watkins](#), an attorney with offices in Oklahoma City and Tulsa, Okla., who specializes in tax resolution cases said: "In other words, fighting with the IRS." He represents individuals and businesses at odds with the IRS and subject to its audits and investigations.

Watkins tells ABC News it takes very little for a citizen to earn the Service's political enmity. He cites the case of two clients—"African-American pastors targeted for being outspoken conservative folks." For reasons best known to them, the pastors sent to the IRS "informational DVDs" they had made that were critical of the administration and of the IRS. The DVDs, he says, were "essentially about black America, and how the IRS is part of an evil regime."

His clients, in return, received audits.

A lot of pain can be inflicted, he points out, under the guise of auditing. The IRS demands in-person meetings; it subjects the persons being audited to "a paperwork blizzard." Once an audit starts, he says, the IRS wants to look into "all kinds of things," not just income and deductions.

"Currently," Watkins says, referring to today's evolving IRS scandal, "people are shocked and talking about their loss of confidence. But it has always been this way. The IRS has a storied history of being bulldogs.

"It has a history of blaming low-level employees for these intrusive behaviors. But with Nixon and FDR, it was clearly direction from the top: FDR used it to look into Huey Long; he used it to look back into the Hoover administration."

Various laws prohibit the IRS and other government agencies from singling out a group for special scrutiny because of its politics, according to the Legal Information Institute of Cornell Law School. That would violate, for example, the Hatch Act, which prohibits civil servants from engaging in partisan political activity during the performance of their jobs and 18 USC Section 241, which makes it unlawful for two or more persons to agree together to intimidate a person in the free exercise of any right secured to him/her by the Constitution or the laws of the United States.

<http://abcnews.go.com/Business/irs-irs-long-history-dirty-tricks/story?id=19177178&singlePage=true>