

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About Political Activities by Members of the Armed Forces

Background and Policy Overview

Q1. What rules and regulations govern political activities by members of the Armed Forces?

A1. Department of Defense Directive (DoDD) 1344.10 lays out the rules and policy concerning political activities by members of the Armed Forces.

Q2. What is DoD policy regarding participation in political activity by members of the Armed Forces?

A2. It is DoD policy to encourage members of the Armed Forces to carry out the obligations of citizenship such as voting. However, active duty members are specifically prohibited from engaging in partisan political activity, and all members of the Armed Forces should always avoid actions that could reasonably be perceived as implying DoD sponsorship, approval, or endorsement of partisan political activity.

Defining Terms

Q3. Who are included in the definition of “members of the Armed Forces?”

A3. As defined by DoDD 1344.10, members of the Armed Forces include members on active duty, members of the Reserve Components not on active duty (including members of the National Guard when in a non-Federal status), and retired members.

Q4. What constitutes “partisan political activity?”

A4. As defined by DoDD 1344.10, a partisan political activity is “activity supporting or relating to candidates representing, or issues specifically identified with, national or State political parties and associated or ancillary organizations or clubs.”

Q5. What are “partisan political groups?”

A5. “Partisan political groups” are committees, clubs, and other organizations affiliated with a political party or candidate for partisan political office. The term also includes committees and clubs organized for a partisan political purpose or engage in partisan political activity. Additionally, organizations created to influence the selection, nomination, election, and appointment of candidates to federal, state, or local public office are considered partisan political groups.

Q6. What constitutes “Active Duty” for the purposes of these rules?

A6. Active Duty is full-time duty in the active military service of the United States regardless of duration or purpose. Active duty includes the following: full-time training duty, annual training duty, and attendance while in the active military service at a school designated as a Service school by law or by the Secretary concerned. Additionally, for purposes of DoDD 1344.10, Active Duty also includes full-time National Guard duty.

Defining Participation – Partisan and Nonpartisan Political Activities

Q7. In what ways may active duty Armed Forces members participate in political activities?

A7. Active duty military members may vote and express their personal opinions on political candidates and issues so long as they do not do so as a representative of the Armed Forces. Active duty members may also promote and encourage others to exercise their right to vote but may not use their official authority while engaging in such activity.

DoDD 1344.10 includes several additional examples of permissible participation such as joining a partisan or nonpartisan club, attending political meetings while not in uniform, signing a petition, writing a letter to the editor of a newspaper, making monetary contributions to a political campaign, displaying a political bumper sticker on a personal vehicle, and attending (but not actively participating in) political fundraising activities. Please note, the examples described above may have additional nuances and requirements, so ensure you review all available written guidance. Always speak with your chain of command or a Judge Advocate to ensure you are participating properly.

Q8. Regarding political activities, are there any things that active duty military members are prohibited from doing?

A8. DoDD 1344.10 specifically lists several “must nots” for military members on active duty, as that term is defined in the directive. As a starting point, any activity that can be reasonably viewed as directly or indirectly associating the DoD with partisan political activity or which is contrary to the Directive shall be avoided. Some specific prohibitions include the following: active participation in political fundraising activities, conventions, debates, and political clubs; use of official authority or influence to interfere with an election; publishing partisan political articles, letters, or endorsements that solicit votes for or against a candidate for partisan political office, or soliciting others with respect to fundraising activities.

Q9. Can I ever wear my uniform when I attend political events?

A9. No; military members must refrain from participating in political activity while in military uniform in accordance with both DoDD 1344.10 and DoDI 1344.01. This prohibition applies to all Armed Forces members.

Q10. What are the rules concerning nonpartisan political activities?

A10. DoDD 1344.10 does not preclude participation in local nonpartisan political campaigns, initiatives, or referendums. However, members taking part in nonpartisan activities may not wear their military uniforms or use any government property or facility while participating. Members must also ensure that their participation in these events and activities does not interfere with or prejudice the member's performance of military duties. And, as always, a member should never engage in conduct that implies that the DoD has taken an official position on, or is otherwise involved in, the local political campaign or issue.

Q11. What if I'd like to participate in a political activity but the example is not covered expressly by DoDD 1344.10?

A11. DoDD 1344.10 also provides a "catch all" provision (para. 4.1.5), which pertains to any activities that are not specifically prohibited by the regulation. It provides: "Any activity that may be reasonably viewed as directly or indirectly associating the Department of Defense or the Department of Homeland Security (in the Case of the Coast Guard) or any component of these Departments with a partisan political activity or is otherwise contrary to the spirit and intention of this Directive shall be avoided." Consult your chain of command or a Judge Advocate if you have a question about a specific type of political activity.

Non-Active Duty Personnel

Q12. As a member of the Armed Forces not on active duty, how may I participate?

A12. Members not on active duty have fewer specific prohibitions than their active duty counterparts. While non-active duty members have fewer restrictions with respect to partisan political activity, they still cannot wear the uniform to a political event and must not otherwise act in a manner that could reasonably give rise to the inference or appearance of DoD sponsorship, approval, or endorsement (*See also* DoDI 1334.01, *Wearing of the Uniform*).

Campaign Limitations

Q13. Are there limitations on what a member of the Armed Forces can include in their campaign material and associated content?

A13. Yes, DoDD 1344.10, para. 4.3 and its subparagraphs, lay out additional limitations for members not on active duty who are nominees or candidates for offices described in DoDD 1344.10, para. 4.2.1. Some examples include being able to mention their military rank, grade, and service affiliation but being required to clearly indicate their retired or reserve status. Members are also required to use a prominently displayed disclaimer regarding DoD endorsement (i.e., "John Doe is a member of the Air National Guard. Use of his military rank, job titles, and photographs in uniform does not imply endorsement by the Department of the Air Force or the DoD"). Additionally, photos of the member in uniform must not be the primary graphic representation in any campaign media and the member must ensure the photograph or depiction accurately reflects their actual performance of duty. For a full and complete list of limitations, please reference DoDD 1344.10 para. 4.3 and its subparagraphs.

Rules Governing Social Media

Q14. How do the rules of DoDD 1344.10 generally apply to social media?

A14. Military members generally may express their personal opinions on public issues or candidates for public office via personal accounts on social media platforms, such as Facebook, “X” (formerly known as Twitter), or personal blogs, in the same way they could write a letter to the editor of a newspaper. If, when expressing their personal opinions, personnel are identified by a social media site as Service members, the posting must clearly and prominently state that the views expressed are the personal opinions of the individual and do not represent the views of the Department of Defense.

Q15. Do active duty military members have additional restrictions when it comes to social media?

A15. Yes, active duty military members are prohibited from participating in partisan political activity; therefore, they must be careful about the kind of political content that they post on their personal social media. For example, while active duty military members may “follow,” “friend,” or “like” a political party or candidate running for partisan political office, they may not post links to, “share,” or “re-tweet” comments or tweets from the Facebook page or “X” (formerly known as Twitter) account of a political party or candidate running for partisan political office. Such activity constitutes participation in partisan political activities, which is prohibited.