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*The Enforcement Blues: Formal and Informal Sanctions
for Campaign Finance Violations*

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Abstract by Rosy Lor

This article builds on the authors' previous investigation of the Federal Election Commission (FEC) by comparing the enforcement practices of the FEC with those of the California Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC). In examining each agency and the formal sanctions they imposed for violations, the authors found that the FEC focused on less serious violations and imposed relatively mild sanctions. The FPPC, however, tended to pursue more serious violations and administer more severe penalties. The authors conclude this discussion by providing reasons why the enforcement of campaign finance laws through formal sanctions is generally difficult. In particular, the authors state that because election law implicates important constitutional rights, the use of criminal sanctions can only be imposed in the most egregious cases. Thus, the enforcement of violations usually involves the question of how great a fine to impose. This method of enforcement has different effects on wealthier and less affluent candidates. The authors also discuss the deterrence of campaign violations through informal sanctions, particularly through media exposure and public opinion. In exploring this issue, the authors examine how much media attention was given to state candidates in California who violated FPPC regulations. The authors concluded that the extent of press coverage correlated with the seriousness of the offense.