

Latest FBI email release shows Hillary Clinton exposed on competence

The FBI says Democrat presidential candidate Hillary Clinton had had copies of some of her work e-mails deleted after her use of a private e-mail system was made public. Ty Wright AFR, Chris Strohm and Joe Sobczyk, 5 Sept 2016

The FBI report on its investigation into Hillary Clinton's e-mail use gives Donald Trump and other Republicans a fresh opening and more tools to chip away at the Democratic nominee's core argument to voters: competence and experience. In a late afternoon document dump on Friday, when many in Washington and the media were gearing up for the three-day Labor Day weekend, the FBI released [58 pages of material that give more depth and meaning to](#) director James Comey's assessment that the former secretary of state had been "extremely careless" in handling sensitive government communications.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation's release of the heavily redacted investigative summary and a July 2 interview with Clinton were quickly seized upon by Trump and Republicans. "Hillary Clinton's answers to the FBI about her private e-mail server defy belief," Trump said in a statement. "After reading these documents, I really don't understand how she was able to get away from prosecution." He took another swipe at "Crooked Hillary" and "new e-mail scandals" on Saturday via Twitter, while running mate Mike Pence told NBC News in an interview taped for Meet the Press that Clinton's e-mail practices "disqualify her from serving as president."

In a new headache for Clinton, the FBI summary reveals that copies of some of her work e-mails were deleted after her use of a private e-mail system was disclosed by The New York Times in March 2015. A House committee investigating the September 2011 attack in Benghazi, Libya, that killed four Americans responded a day later by demanding the retention and production of all of Clinton's documents.

The FBI report said a technician for a company that was hired to help manage Clinton's e-mail system said he deleted an archive of older e-mails after realizing he had failed to act on a request to do so months earlier from Clinton's State Department chief of staff.

According to the FBI report, Clinton said she had told her staff the e-mails were no longer needed after her lawyers gave the State Department ones they considered work-related in December 2014. She used at least eight different mobile devices to send private e-mail during her tenure as secretary of state -- none of which were recovered by the FBI, which said she flouted security standards for official communications by relying on private e-mail for government business. In addition to the eight devices she used as secretary of state, the FBI said they sought at least five additional mobile devices as part of its inquiry.

Clinton's lawyers said they couldn't provide any of the mobile devices she used. One person interviewed by the FBI said he recalled two instances in which Clinton's devices were destroyed by "breaking them in half or hitting them with a hammer." In addition, a personal laptop used to archive Clinton's e-mails when she was secretary of state went missing after

being put in the mail. While the e-mails were deleted before the computer was sent, the hard drive wasn't permanently wiped clean.

Revelations of how she conducted herself seem to be hurting her in the polls; her lead in the RealClearPolitics average of national polls has narrowed to 4 percentage points from 6 points. In an ABC News/Washington Post poll conducted Aug. 24-28, 59 per cent of registered voters viewed Clinton unfavourably, a 7-point increase from early August. That about matches Trump's 60 per cent unfavourable rating, levels that are unprecedented for major-party presidential candidates.

The FBI documents -- released under pressure of Freedom of Information Act lawsuits -- assure that Clinton will be grappling with the issue of her e-mails as the presidential campaign enters the final stretch into the Nov. 8 election.

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Clinton's central selling point to voters is that her eight years in the White House as first lady, eight years as a US senator representing New York, and four years as secretary of state make her one of the most experienced candidates ever to run for president. She's labelled Trump as unqualified and unfit for the office.

In the examination of how she came to use a private e-mail server while serving as the nation's chief diplomat: Clinton told the FBI she could not recall any briefing or training by the State Department related to the retention of federal records or handling of classified information. She couldn't give an example of how classification of a document was determined and said "she relied on career foreign service professionals to appropriately mark and handle classified information." Clinton told the interviewers she didn't recognise that passages marked with a small (c) stood for being confidential. Rather, she suggested the marking might refer to paragraphs marked in alphabetical order. She directed her aides to create her private e-mail account but said she had no knowledge of why a private server was installed in the basement of her New York home or how it was secured.

The FBI report also said Clinton, her aides and her lawyers lost track of at least eight mobile devices she used to send private e-mail during her tenure, meaning the FBI couldn't review them as part of its investigation. One person interviewed by the FBI said he recalled two instances in which Clinton's devices were destroyed by "breaking them in half or hitting them with a hammer."

The FBI also said in its summary that Clinton denied using her private e-mail to avoid federal open records laws. But it showed that she was warned about the system by one of her predecessors. Former Secretary of State Colin Powell "warned Clinton that if it became 'public' that [Clinton had a BlackBerry, and she used it to 'do business,'](#) her e-mails could become 'official record[s] and subject to the law.'" He told her to be "very careful" using the system.

Clinton spokesman Brian Fallon said the campaign was pleased that the FBI released its summary. "While her use of a single e-mail account was clearly a mistake and she has taken

responsibility for it, these materials make clear why the Justice Department believed there was no basis to move forward with this case," Fallon said in an e-mail.

The FBI released the summary Friday to provide context around its decision not to recommend prosecution of Clinton or her aides for using the private system. The Democratic presidential nominee was interviewed about her use of private e-mail by FBI agents and federal prosecutors for 3 1/2 hours on July 2. The bureau then recommended that the Justice Department not pursue criminal charges.

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