



Ever since 9/11, counterterrorism has been the FBI's No. 1 priority, consuming the lion's share of its budget—\$3.3 billion, compared to \$2.6 billion for organized crime—and much of the attention of field agents and a massive, nationwide network of informants.

After years of emphasizing informant recruiting as a key task for its agents, the bureau now maintains a roster of 15,000 spies—many of them tasked, as Hussain was, with infiltrating Muslim communities in the United States. In addition, for every informant officially listed in the bureau's records, there are as many as three unofficial ones, according to one former high-level FBI official, known in bureau parlance as "hip pockets."

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The informants could be doctors, clerks, imams. Some might not even consider themselves informants. But the FBI regularly taps all of them as part of a domestic intelligence apparatus whose only historical peer might be COINTELPRO, the program the bureau ran from the '50s to the '70s to discredit and marginalize organizations ranging from the Ku Klux Klan to civil-rights and protest groups.

Throughout the FBI's history, informant numbers have been closely guarded secrets. Periodically, however, the bureau has released those figures. A Senate oversight committee in 1975 found the FBI had 1,500 informants. In 1980, officials disclosed there were 2,800. Six years later, following the FBI's push into drugs and organized crime, the number of bureau informants ballooned to 6,000, the Los Angeles Times reported in 1986.

And according to the FBI, the number grew significantly after 9/11. In its fiscal year 2008 budget authorization request, the FBI disclosed that it had been working under a November 2004 presidential directive demanding an increase in "human source development and management," and that it needed \$12.7 million for a program to keep tabs on its spy network and create software to track and manage informants.

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