Informants, Provocateurs, and Entrapment: Examining the Histories of the FBI’s PATCON and the NYPD’s Muslim Surveillance Program

Abstract

Since September 11, 2001, the U.S. government and police departments across the United States, most notably the New York City Police Department, have been collecting intelligence targeting Muslim American communities. The controversial surveillance practices include the use of confidential informants, undercover operations, and entrapment, and infringing upon civil rights and civil liberties in the name of national security. A decade before 9/11, however, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) conducted the same practices against a completely different demographic – Christian Right militants, through a program called PATCON, short for Patriot Conspiracy. Building upon the concept of surveillance as social sorting (Lyon 2013) and surveillance and terrorism (Monahan 2013), This article will compare the history of surveillance tactics used by the FBI against Christian Right militants and those used by the NYPD against non-militant Muslim Americans, and assess their implications in the context of civil rights, leaving a legacy of mistrust between these respective groups and the federal government that further undermines the national security interests of the United States.
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Author Biography

Sara Kamali, Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford
Together, the FBI informant and Ferdaus devised a plan to attack the Pentagon and US Capitol, with the FBI providing fake weaponry and funding Ferdaus' travel. Widespread Surveillance of American Muslims and Use of Informants. The FBI has justified its “domain mapping” program, in which the FBI collects information on where ethnic and religious communities are located, by arguing that “terrorist and criminal groups target ethnic and geographic communities for victimization and/or recruitment.”[29] This approach to investigations is discriminatory and counterproductive, undermining trust in authorities in precisely the communities where law enforcement claims to want to.