

Mapping the FBI: Uncovering Abusive Surveillance and Racial Profiling

Source: American Civil Liberties Union

Available at: <https://www.aclu.org/issues/national-security/privacy-and-surveillance/mapping-fbi-o?redirect=feature/mapping-fbi>

The Federal Bureau of Investigation is collecting racial and ethnic information and “mapping” American communities around the country based on crude stereotypes about which groups commit different types of crimes. Nationwide, the FBI is gathering reports on innocent Americans' so-called “suspicious activity” and sharing it with unknown numbers of federal, state and local government agencies.

In response, the ACLU's “Mapping the FBI” initiative seeks to expose misconduct, abuse of authority, and unconstitutional profiling and other violations of Americans' rights and liberties across the country.

As our nation's predominant law enforcement agency, the FBI should be tracking true threats, not wasting resources and inappropriately mapping American communities on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, or religion. Law enforcement programs based on evidence and facts are more effective than a system based on racial stereotypes or mass suspicion.

Yet, in the decade since 9/11, long-standing safeguards on the FBI's investigative and intelligence collection activities have been erased, allowing it to engage in racial and ethnic profiling and to initiate intrusive investigations with little or no suspicion of wrongdoing.

Taken together, the changes in the FBI's authority have vastly expanding its ability to engage in unlawful and abusive surveillance of innocent Americans.

The ACLU is working in the courts, in Congress and in communities to expose the ways in which the FBI's expanded authority threatens civil rights and civil liberties. Our work includes:

- **Unleashed and Unaccountable:** Shortly after James B. Comey was sworn in to lead the FBI in September 2013, the ACLU published “Unleashed and Unaccountable: The FBI's Unchecked Abuse of Authority.” This report documents the extraordinary expansion of FBI power since 2001, including abuses against racial and religious minorities, immigrants, and protest groups. It establishes a foundation for reform with recommendations to ensure FBI respect for civil liberties.
- **Eye on the FBI:** Consolidating information obtained through ACLU records requests, lawsuits and reports, the ACLU's “Eye on the FBI” alerts provide regular and detailed analysis of FBI activities that pose a threat to civil liberties. These activities include the use of factually incorrect and bigoted biased counterterrorism materials and FBI racial profiling.

- **Racial and Ethnic Mapping:** [34 ACLU affiliates](#) have filed public records requests to uncover how the FBI is using racial and ethnic demographic information and data about “ethnic-oriented” business and facilities to “map” and investigate local communities. ACLU affiliates in [Michigan](#), [New Jersey](#) and [Northern California](#) are in federal court to enforce their records requests and secure information for the public.
- **eGuardian:** The ACLU has sued the FBI and the Justice Department to learn more about an FBI monitoring and information-sharing program known as “eGuardian,” through which the bureau collects so-called [“Suspicious Activities Reports”](#) (SARs) from local, state and federal law enforcement agencies nationwide.
- **Spy Files:** This ACLU effort paints a comprehensive picture of the vast and expanding infrastructure of surveillance in the U.S. today by local, state and federal law enforcement—including the FBI. Documents obtained by the ACLU show that through this de facto domestic intelligence system, our government is monitoring and recording Americans' First Amendment-protected beliefs and activities.
- **FBI Interviews:** The ACLU is working to educate individuals and community organizations across the country about their rights when encountering law enforcement. Over the past two years, the FBI has significantly increased its use of “voluntary” interviews – especially within specific racial, ethnic, and religious communities – often encouraging interviewees to serve as informants in their communities.