

## HOW THE SEATTLE P-I PUT THIS STORY TOGETHER

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To tell the story of how the FBI's mission has been profoundly altered by terrorism, the Seattle P-I spent more than six months analyzing more than a million records - including more than 250,000 FBI investigations touched by federal prosecutors across the country in the wake of 9/11.

Case-referral activity, indictments, conviction rates and staffing levels were examined for every federal district in the nation, based on records obtained from the Justice Department.

Last year, the P-I obtained 245 files on five DVDs and one CD, covering more than a decade of civil and criminal cases handled by federal prosecutors. These data include both cases taken to trial and those known to prosecutors but in which a case was not filed.

Using a database built from those records by P-I investigative reporter Daniel Lathrop, the newspaper was able for the first time to fully measure the dramatic decline in the number of cases and convictions resulting from the FBI moving resources to terrorism and walking away from areas of criminal enforcement.

Copies of the analysis were given to federal officials in Seattle and in Washington, D.C., who did not dispute the newspaper's findings but wouldn't make database experts available to discuss the analysis.

FBI referrals dropped 34 percent, and convictions based on those referrals dropped nearly 20 percent. Most dramatic was the drop in white-collar fraud investigations, where the FBI is considered the pre-eminent agency.

Prosecutors log cases in their database once agents bring them for any reason - subpoenas, warrants, even dropping a case. Those cases count as referrals, whether or not investigators seek charges.

This was the first attempt to quantify not only the national trends, but to evaluate whether those trends were replicated systematically across the U.S. They were.

For example, Washington state saw an 88 percent plunge in FBI white-collar referrals from 2000 to 2005, while New York saw a 69 percent drop. White-collar convictions dipped by 68 percent in Washington; the New York decline was 43 percent.

These data are valuable because prosecutors record facts about every case, including both the criminal charge investigated and the type of criminality the prosecutor believes is involved.

The data are relatively complete because federal prosecutors are much more involved in investigations than most local prosecutors. According to one Justice Department report, the data include information for federal cases in which at least one hour of investigation has been done.

The congressional Government Accountability Office and the Justice Department's investigator general have used these same data in evaluating the bureau, as have researchers at Syracuse University and elsewhere.

The data given to the P-I had been scrubbed of personal information about defendants, lawyers and agents, and also been subject to redaction of important information about cases still under consideration by prosecutors and cases where sealed indictments had been handed down.

The result of the redactions means that categories of crime do not get credit for those cases until they have either been closed or led to an indictment, and that depresses by a small amount the category totals. Even so, those cases are included in the substantial overall declines - which means the FBI is losing ground in many areas.

- Memo: P-I SPECIAL REPORT: THE TERRORISM TRADE-OFF

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