Methodological challenges in counter-terrorism research: practical and ethical dilemmas

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Overview

- Police involvement in counter-terrorism

- Implications for modern policing

- Studying police involvement in counter-terrorism:
  - Practical limitations
  - Ethical dilemmas

- Overcoming the challenges: examples from case studies
When did we go from this:
To this:
Police involvement in counter-terrorism

- Since the terror attack of 9/11, police organizations in Western democracies have been increasingly engaged with counter-terrorism (Bayley & Weisburd 2009; Jonathan-Zamir & Weisburd 2013; LaFree, 2012).

- In many countries officers are expected to police not only terrorism, but also more elusive manifestations of political extremism and radicalization (Awan & Blakemore, 2016).

- Accordingly, a growing body of literature has focused on examining this field of responsibility in policing.
Attorney General John Ashcroft, 2008:

“To meet this new threat and to prevent future attacks, law enforcement officials at all levels of government – federal, state, and local – must work together, sharing information and resources needed both to arrest and prosecute the individuals responsible and to detect and destroy terrorist cells before they can strike again”.
How does counter-terrorism affect modern policing?

- Police involvement in counter-terrorism has significant effects on many aspects of policing, including (Jonathan & Weisburd, 2013):
  - Police effectiveness
  - Policing culture and militarization
  - Police & public relations
    - Police relations with minority groups
Counter-terrorism and police effectiveness

- The diffusion of benefits (Clarke, 2005):
  - Increased surveillance of police in specific areas as a means of preventing terrorism might be expected to deter other crime and disorder problems.
    - Herzog (2003): In Israel, the impacts of closures and other anti-terrorism efforts during the period of the Second Palestinian Intifada lead to a significant decline in vehicle thefts.

- Resource allocation:
  - Police agencies often operate within limited budgets, in which they must balance different services to the public
    - Montgomery County, 2002: when police were trying to identify and capture a sniper responsible for a series of fatal shootings, a number of units, including the sexual crimes unit, were closed for a period (University of Maryland Symposium, 2003).
Counter-terrorism and police effectiveness

Fig. 2.3  Terrorism threats and clearance rates in predominantly Jewish/Arab communities

Source: Jonathan-Zamir, Weisburd & Hasisi, 2014
Counter-terrorism and police effectiveness

"Handling terrorism threats hampers other police duties, such as property crimes, violence, drugs and traffic"

N = 3030

Source: Jonathan-Zamir, Weisburd & Hasisi, 2014
Policing culture and militarization

- Bayley and Weisburd (2009):
  - The potential danger of the attractiveness of “high policing” in contrast to traditional crime control or “low policing” obligations.

- “Paramilitary policing” - the employment of PPUs, military methods and equipment by civil police organisations for civil policing tasks (DeMichelle & Kraska 2001; Hills 1995; Kopel & Blackman 1997; McCullow 2001; Weber 1999).
  - From 59% of American police agencies using PPUs in 1982 to 78% in 1990 and to 89% in 1997 (Kraska & Cubellis 1997).
  - Paramilitary methods are employed by "regular" patrol units and small-town police agencies.
  - Similar developments in other Western democracies, particularly the UK (Bunyan 1985; Hills 1995; Jefferson 1990), Australia (McCulloch 2001; McCulloch & Sentas 2006), and South Africa (Tait & Marks 2011).
| Test variable | Model I | | | Model II | | | Model III | | |
|---------------|---------|---|---|---------|---|---|---------|---|
| Use of paramilitary policing methods | \(-.25^{***}\) | .03 | -.38 | \(-.24^{***}\) | .03 | -.37 | \(-.09^{**}\) | .03 | -.15 | \(-.06\) |

**Control variables**

### Socio-demographic characteristics

- Family status – married (vs. single)
  - \(-.07\)
  - .09
  - -.04
  - -.78
  - -.05
  - .07
  - -.03
  - -.77
- Family status – other (vs. single)
  - \(-.19\)
  - .20
  - -.06
  - -.95
  - -.13
  - .15
  - -.04
  - -.85
- Education
  - \(.08^{*}\)
  - .03
  - .13
  - 2.30
  - \(.09^{***}\)
  - .03
  - .14
  - 3.38
- Residence – other (vs. Tel Aviv)
  - \(.16\)
  - .09
  - .10
  - 1.76
  - \(.13\)
  - .07
  - .08
  - 1.79
- Occupation – university student (vs. employee)
  - \(.05\)
  - .11
  - .03
  - .50
  - \(.05\)
  - .08
  - .03
  - .65
- Occupation – other (vs. employee)
  - \(-.03\)
  - .10
  - -.02
  - -.27
  - \(-.07\)
  - .07
  - -.04
  - -.92
- Gender – female (vs. male)
  - \(-.10\)
  - .08
  - -.06
  - -.124
  - \(-.05\)
  - .06
  - -.03
  - -.81
- Income
  - \(.06\)
  - .03
  - .10
  - 1.71
  - \(.04\)
  - .02
  - .07
  - 1.61
- Religion - other (vs. Jewish)
  - \(-.25\)
  - .13
  - -.10
  - 1.91
  - \(-.14\)
  - .10
  - -.05
  - 1.41
- Religiosity – other (vs. secular)
  - \(.34^{*}\)
  - .17
  - .11
  - 2.04
  - \(-.03\)
  - .13
  - -.01
  - 2.3
- Age
  - \(-.01\)
  - .00
  - -.09
  - 1.22
  - \(-.01\)
  - .00
  - -.10
  - 1.87

### Experience with police/protests

- No contact with police (vs. contact)
  - \(.06\)
  - .09
  - .04
  - .69
  - \(.09\)
  - .07
  - .05
  - 1.35
- Member of a social movement (vs. not a member)
  - \(-.02\)
  - .03
  - -.04
  - .77
  - \(-.05^{*}\)
  - .02
  - -.09
  - 2.40
- Participated in more than five protest events in the last year
  - \(-.11\)
  - .08
  - .07
  - 1.35
  - \(.12\)
  - .06
  - .07
  - 1.80

### Expected predictors of trust

- Participation + respect (P.J.)
  - \(.59^{***}\)
  - .05
  - .57
  - 12.85
- Neutrality (P.J.)
  - \(.14^{**}\)
  - .05
  - .13
  - 2.99
- Police effectiveness
  - \(.07^{*}\)
  - .03
  - .11
  - 2.23

### \(R^2 (Adjusted \ R^2)\)

- \(.15 (.14)^{***}\)
- \(.22 (.19)^{***}\)
- \(.57 (.55)^{***}\)

\(N\)

- 470
- 470
- 470

\*\(p<.05\); \**\(p<.01\); \***\(p<.001\)

Note: Standard errors are adjusted for the clustering of the data (by protests).

Tolerance levels were larger than .510 for model II and .490 for model III, suggesting no multicollinearity problems (Menard 1995).

Source: Perry, Jonathan-Zamir & Weisburd (forthcoming)
Police & public relations

“…This new set of demands, with its emphasis on collecting intelligence on terrorist networks, apprehending terror operatives, and protecting likely targets, may push policing back to a more professional model that is distant from the community”.

Braga & Weisburd (2006, p. 350)
Police & public relations

- Counter-terrorism policing –
  - Less transparent and accountable strategies
  - May change the orientation of the police from providing service and viewing citizens as clients, to controlling the public and viewing citizens as suspects
  - Limit resources to crime control – decrease perceived effectiveness
    - Hamper public evaluations of the police and its legitimacy
Police & public relations

“Dealing with terrorism negatively affects the relationship between the police and the public”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of agreement</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>21.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>17.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>26.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>18.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>16.42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 2942

Fig. 5.2 The perceived effects of policing terrorism on the relationship between the police and the public (N=2,942)

Source: Jonathan-Zamir, Weisburd & Hasisi, 2014
Police relations with minority groups

- Minority communities that are linked ethnically or nationally to terrorist groups –
  - The police may consider those communities as high risk and may increase surveillance and control (Hasisi et al., 2009).
  - Such increases in police activities in minority communities have often been viewed by the communities themselves as a case of their being unfairly profiled by the police as “the enemy within” (Henderson, Ortiz, Sugie, & Miller, 2006; Innes, 2006; Khashu, Busch, Latif, & Levy, 2005; Thacher, 2005).
Studying police involvement in counter-terrorism

Several factors related to the nature of counter-terrorism translate to inherent methodological challenges in the study of this aspect of policing:

- Availability and the quality of data
- Spatio-temporal and ideological context
- Confidential data
- Multi-organizational nature
- Ambiguity of definitions
Availability and the quality of data

- **Quantity:**
  - High-impact, low-probability - rare events (Bouhana & Wikstrom, 2011).
  - Especially difficult to study, generalize, and conceptualize in an efficient modelling scheme.

- **Quality:**
  - While the technical details of the attack (e.g. time, location, type of weapon used) are usually available, details about the offender or are rarely published.
  - Personal information on the processes leading to the event, and high-policing strategies used to mitigate this process, are almost impossible to come by, and are often strictly confidential.
  - Need for cross-agency and/or international data to gain a comprehensive understanding of counter-terrorism.
Spatio-temporal and ideological context

- Differences in police roles in counter-terrorism in different settings
- Comparability of cases and samples
- Closer look or cross-national research?
Differences in police roles in counter-terrorism in different geographical settings

- Whether general police agencies undertaken covert counterterrorism is a function of six factors (Bayley & Weisburd, 2007):
  - Whether terrorism has occurred locally
  - Governmental level at which policing is organized
  - Size of police agencies
  - Duration of exposure to terrorism
  - Cultural tolerance of political dissent
  - Availability of new resources
# Table 2: National Models for Counterterrorism: Domestic Organizations

## National Models: Domestic Organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Model</th>
<th>Intelligence</th>
<th>Disruption</th>
<th>Arrest/ Detention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1) Specialized National</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Communications Security Establishment (CSE)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Canadian Security Intelligence Service</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire (DST)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Bundesamt fur Verfassungsschutz - BfV)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>Intelligence Bureau (IB)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>Shin Bet</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Intelligence and Military Security Service (SISMI)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Intelligence and Democratic Security Service (SISDE)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Public Security Investigation Agency (PSIA) (Koan Chosa Koancha)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>Binnenlandse Veiligheiddient (BVS)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>National Intelligence Center Centro Nacional de Inteligencia</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>National Security Service (Sakerhetspolisen) (SAPO)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>MI5</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bayley & Weisburd, 2007
Ethical considerations

- Confidential data –
  - “Secrecy, which results from the sensitivity of counterterrorism material, may constrain the individuals who are involved in deciding how to respond to a particular problem” (RAND 2014)

- Transparency and sensitivity of material

- How to present research findings that are based on confidential data?

- Can we trust confidential data provided by counter-terrorism agencies?

- The spatio-temporal definition of terrorism
Overcoming the challenges: CT policing in vulnerable populations

- Policing CT through counter-radicalisation
- Police working with vulnerable populations – minority communities and “suspect” communities
- UK Prevent programme
  - A lesson in how NOT to police counter-terrorism?
- Channel – safeguarding programme, counter-radicalisation, de-radicalisation or thought policing?
How do we conduct research here?

- **Research on Channel**
  - Part of a 3 year PhD project in the UK, accessing practitioners
  - Confidentiality for themselves and the individuals they work with
  - The need for security clearance for researchers
  - The added problem of ‘vulnerable’ populations
  - How to best publish critique of government efforts
    - Channel is the best thing to come out of Prevent
    - Don’t want to further marginalise and stigmatise police or community
    - Use of Channel is a legal requirement across UK education sector
Overcoming the challenges: EU FP7 PRIME Project

- €2.9M
- 3 years
- Consortium of 6 universities (Denmark, UK, Israel, Poland, Netherlands) led by University College London
- Bring together social science and engineering to model lone actor extremist events
Overcoming the challenges: EU FP7 PRIME Project

- A comprehensive use of a meta-theoretical framework:
  - Overcome the ambiguity of definitions
  - Bridge the spatio-temporal gaps

- Combining data sources:
  - Limiting the reliance on confidential data
  - Working within agencies

- Methodology:
  - Closer look AND cross-national research
PRIME: Understanding and countering radicalisation

- Danish and German contexts – confidential police data
PRIME: Attack planning and preparation

- Dutch and US data – confidential police data
PRIME: Factor-based model of Vehicle-Bourne terrorist attacks
Food for thought…

- International cooperation as the foundation of counter-terrorism study
- Agreed general theoretical frameworks: overcoming the limitations of context
  - Moving beyond specific ideologies
  - Are some countries different? The elusive “Israel syndrome”
- Applying the accumulated knowledge in policing to the study of counter-terrorism
- Are there viable substitutions for confidential data?
- Counter-terrorism research as an ethical gatekeeper
Thank you!

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