Is it Just A Bunch of Guys? - Evaluating the Sageman Theory of Terrorism.

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Presented at the Third Annual U.S. Department of Homeland
Security University Network Summit.
Tuesday March 17th, 2009

Overview

- Background
- Theory & Hypothesis
- Data
- Analysis
- Results
- Conclusion
- Future Directions

Background: Competing Explanations

- Since the mid 1960s many theoretical explanations for terrorism have been advanced:

    - Religion
    - Poverty
    - Demographic composition
    - Insanity

Background (cont.): Sageman vs. Hoffman

- More recently research has focused on understanding group formation & violence among Arab terrorists.

- Recent debate
  - *Sageman vs. Hoffman*: whether terrorist groups are more hierarchically organized or comprised of flatly distributed social networks.

- Debate requires theory testing to move forward.

Background: The "Bunch of Guys" Theory In Brief

- Formulated by Marc Sageman (Sageman, 2005, 2006, 2007).

- **A group based social psychological processes theory of terrorism.** Contains four core steps arranged in a temporal order.

Background: The "Bunch of Guys" Theory In Brief

(1) Alienation

(2) Homophilic Association

(3) Closed Society

(4) Jihad Membership & Violence

Research Questions

- Q1: Are indicators of the "Bunch of Guys" theory related to terrorist acts?

- Q2: Do indicators of the "Bunch of Guys" theory provide more explanatory power than alternative explanations?

Data: The Sageman Terrorism Database

- A *convenience sample* developed to define the *individual characteristics* and *relationship structure* of members of the global salafi jihad.

- Inclusion criteria:

- Members of "islamist" organizations

- Stated goal of targeting foreign governments and pursuance of salafi objectives, n = 366 males.

Data (cont.)

- For example...

Data Collection

- Assembled by Sageman Consulting, LLC, the data was abstracted from a combination of sources:

  - Reviews of legal transcripts & gov docs

  - News reports

  - Personal interviews with key experts

  - Other sources.

Analysis

- Descriptive one and two way tables.

- Descriptive logistic regressions.

- All calculations done in SAS version 9.0.

Analysis Operationalization

- **Outcome:**

  - *Any participation in terrorist operations*, 1 or 0.

- **Predictors:**

  Alternative Explanations:

  - **Demographics, religiosity and economic disadvantage***:* marital status, age, religiosity, madrassa attendance and unskilled labor, low socioeconomic status and less than high school education (all 1, 0).

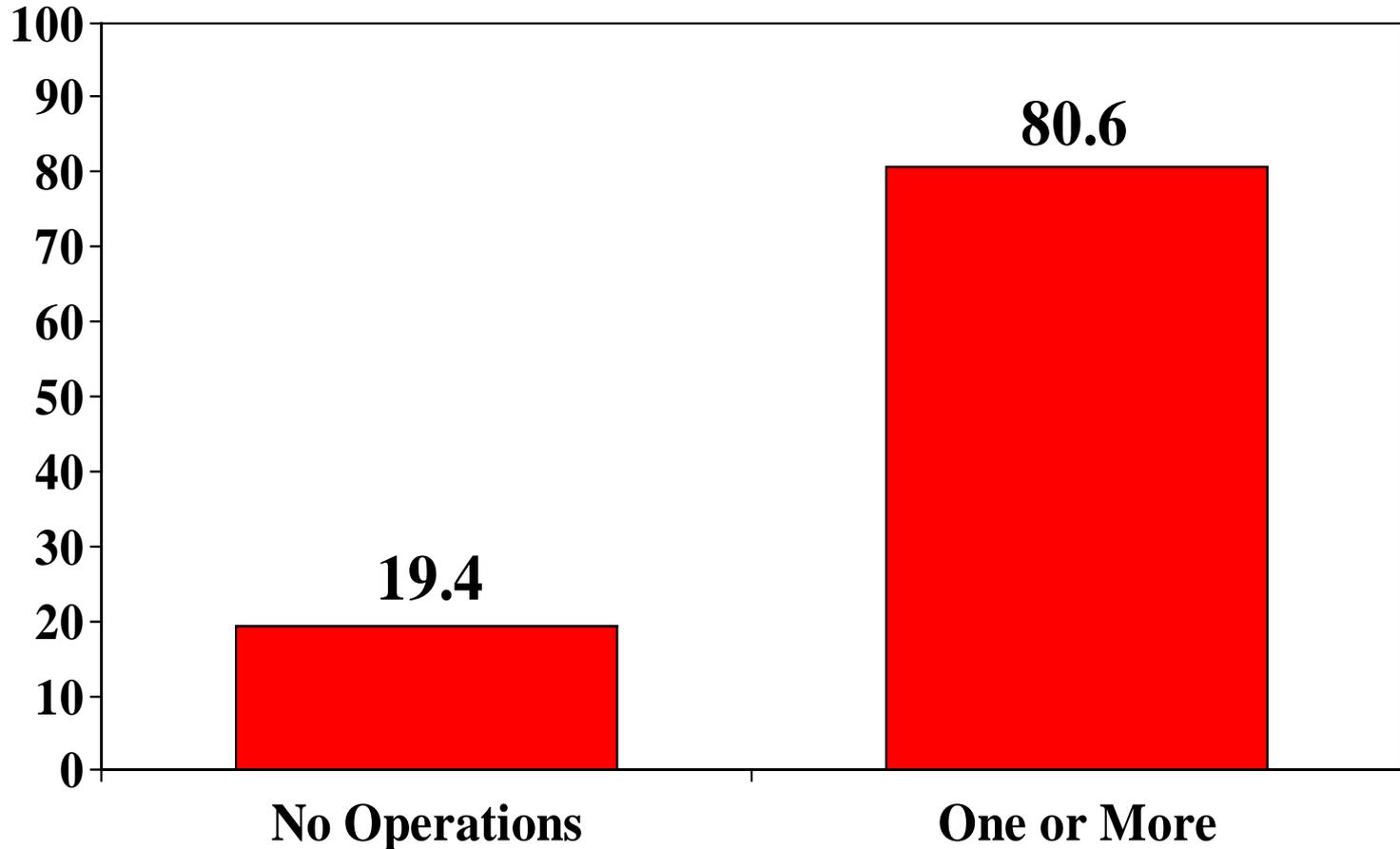 **Sageman's "Bunch of Guys":**

  - *Alienation*: Living as an expatriate (1 vs. 0)

  - *Homophilic association*: Pre-jihad clique membership (1 if in a four or more person clique)

  - *Closed society*: Any family in Jihad (1 vs. 0).

Table 1: Percent Participating in Terrorist Operations*

*Data Source: Sageman Terrorism Database. Figures calculated using SAS v9.0.

Table 2: "Bunch of Guys" by Pct. Engaged in One or More Terrorist Operations

"Bunch of Guys" Measures	Percent Engaging In One or More Operations*		
	Yes	No	Sig?
Expatriate	**53.9**	**80.3**	**.001**
Pre-jihad Clique Membership	54.4	49.3	NS
Any Family in Jihad	12.7	21.1	NS

*Data Source: Sageman Terrorism Database. Figures shown are column percentages. Figures calculated using SAS v9.0 Chi-square test of independence. NS = Not significantly different.

Table 3: Comparative Multivariate Models Showing Impact Of Covariates on Terrorist Operations

Covariates	Any Terrorist Operation (Odds Ratio)*	
	Alternative Explanations	**Alternatives and "Bunch of Guys"**
Bunch of Guys		
Expatriate		**0.303***
Pre-jihad clique membership		1.241
Any Family in Jihad		1.217
Demographics		
Married	1.189	1.336
Age	0.986	0.999
Religiosity		
Attended Madrassa	**0.056****	**0.063****
Religious Background	**5.693***	**5.800***
Economic Disadvantage		
Unskilled Labor	**0.323***	**0.369***
Low SES	1.985	1.689
Less than HS Ed	2.103	1.792
Pseudo R Square	.100	.130
2 Log Likelihood	194.765	187.968
Model n =	214	214

*Data Source: Sageman Terrorism Database. *p.<.05 ** p<.01. Figures calculated using SAS v9.0.

Results

Q1: Are "Bunch of Guys" indicators related to terrorist acts?

A1: No.

   - Only one of the three indicators is statistically significant, *but in an unexpected direction* (expatriate, OR = .330, p <.05).

Results (cont.)

Q2: Do indicators of "Bunch of Guys" theory provide more explanatory power than alternatives?

A2: No.

  - "Bunch of Guys" variables *fail to substantially improve the fit of the model*, (pseudo r-squared .100 vs., .130).

  - Results are similar when specified using linear, ordinal logistic and multinomial modeling methods.

Conclusions

1. "Bunch of Guys" **DOES NOT APPEAR** substantially related to terrorist operations.

2. Results contradict previous research, but **further study is needed.**

   - Similar ideas are strongly supported, examples

     - Sutherland's differential association

     - Bandera's social learning.

Limitations

- **Small Ns.** Models have only 214 cases, possibly not enough power to pick up weak relationships.

- **Lack of Psychological Measures:** Human relationships are dynamic. However, most variables in the STDB are static & don't measure psychology.

- **Fuzzy Boundaries:** Data may not fully capture the extent of the Al-Qaeda and affiliated networks, boundaries of the jihadi network are unclear.

Policy & Future Directions

- Policy recommendations?

  - None at this time, lack of support too preliminary.

- Authors currently working on replicating these findings using an updated version of the data.

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