

What kind of methodology & data do we  
need to understand radicalization?

Marc Sageman

Scholar in Residence, NYPD

[sageman@post.harvard.edu](mailto:sageman@post.harvard.edu)

# Definition & strategy

Path to political violence: process

Capture the context

Capture internal factors

Any predispositional characteristics?

# Context

- Define the context: process may differ according to context
  - New NYPD research project is only in the West
  - Multi-site field research where incidents happened
    - Variations in the process according to context
    - (France, Hamburg, Madrid, Netherland, London, Copenhagen, Toronto, Australia)

# Predispositional Variables

- Measure them before, during & after the process:
  - Any school records or employment records or treatment records that capture such characteristics *contemporaneously*?
  - Administration of tests and interview after capture
    - Interviews of people who knew subjects (many flaws & biases involved)

# Interactivity

- Recorded participant observation of complete process
  - Not possible because observer would be guilty of participating in criminal activity
- Approximation of participant observation
  - Captured documents, diaries, wiretaps, phone conversations
  - Post hoc recollections of participants (problematic: memory, self justification, exculpatory)

# Methodology - 1

- Multi-site format
- Acquisition of trial transcripts, where they exist or judgments (justifying verdicts): thick description & reliable information
- Identify people who had opportunity to turn to violence, but did not (control group: specificity)
- Set up field team, who interviews people willing to talk
- Archived forum data, where subjects were active

# Methodology - 2

- Visit the respective fields
- Reconstruct the various contexts chronologically to estimate social forces acting on individuals at the time
- Reconstruct the various plots chronologically to identify patterns and variations
- Compare within each sites, people who turned to violence with people who did not (specificity)
- Compare similarities and variations between sites

# Data Collection - 1

- Witness the trials
- Trial transcripts & supporting documents: pay attention to released contemporaneous evidence (wiretaps, but mindful of selection) & mindful of local admissibility & purpose
- Post hoc interviews with subjects and controls, and people who knew them
- Interviews with investigators

# Data Collection - 2

- Investigative media reporting
  - Inaccurate, biased
  - Line up accounts chronologically, according to publication dates
  - Resolve conflicting evidence through actual corroboration (large echo effect)
  - Later information gathered as investigation unfolds usually more accurate than earlier

# Internet Collection

- Some subjects were active on Internet
- Review archived data to see evolution of specific discourses and compare them to others within forum that did not turn to violence offline
- All evidence is shared by all (all there is to it)
- Evidence must be viewed in context and some form of skepticism
  - Lots of bragging & pretending on the Internet