

Title: Reporting Suspicion in Canada: Insights from the Fight against Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing

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Research Question:

Following the premise that suspicion is less an event than a process, how do banks produce suspicion about financial transactions for reporting purposes? To what extent the quality of suspicious activity reporting is controlled?

Importance:

The importance of suspicious activity reporting is certainly the most glaring example of the extensive articulation between surveillance and suspicion for law-enforcement and counterterrorism purposes. In this respect, much has already been written about the renewed emphasis on public campaigns urging citizens and businesses to contribute to national security intelligence. According to the hallowed phrase, ordinary people as well as financial and corporate sectors have been increasingly invited to become the 'eyes and ears' of national authorities for reporting suspicious behaviours, objects and situations. While the pervasiveness of suspicion throughout society has become a matter of course in the literature, little is known yet about the 'suspicion-in-the-making' in relation to the wide range of potential eyes and ears of the State. The focus on anti-money laundering and counterterrorism financing in Canada provides an opportunity to reflect upon suspicious activity reporting as routine work outside police and intelligence organizations.

Research Findings:

This research questions three key moments of the production process of suspicion at work in many more security areas than the policing of financial activities. First of all, suspicious activity reporting depends on the dynamic interplay of surveillance with the definition of risk and normality. Secondly, it relies on the investigation of alerts as enigmas that shed light on situations that disturb a set of expectations about normality. Two generic situations ultimately lead to reporting. Thirdly and lastly, the quality control of suspicion takes the form of an argumentative battle between 'financial policing partners', with an implicit but structural incentive for over-reporting. Suspicion is not a question of discovery but a question of interpretation.

Implications:

Suspicion appears as a boundary object that is double-edged for state authorities. On the one hand, its interpretive flexibility allows state actors from security-oriented institutions to work with social actors from non-security-oriented institutions without consensus. Security-oriented institutions may even try to benefit from the unease that stems from the interpretive flexibility to increase the daily involvement of potential informers. On the other hand, the interpretive



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flexibility makes it impossible to mark out the exact contours of suspicion and the intrinsic value of the information supplied.