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**ARTICLE SUBMITTED 2022 TO STUDIES IN CONFLCIT AND TERRORISM.**

**Exploring the Motivation of the United Kingdom's Domestic Extremist Informants.**

**Abstract**

Understanding a potential informant's motivation can lay the foundation for managing the risks and opportunities associated with the informant-handler relationship and operational deployments. The present research explored the self-disclosed and handler-assessed motivations of UK informants authorised to report against domestic extremists. Informants reported being motivated overwhelmingly by both ideological and financial considerations. Those reporting on right-wing domestic extremism *primarily* reported for financial reasons, while those reporting on left-wing extremism did so *primarily* for ideological reasons. The findings also revealed that motivation is neither one dimensional nor unchangeable, with most informants declaring financial *and* ideological reasons for informing. Handlers were accurate at identifying informants' primary motivation, with a minority of the handler assessments revealing a perceived change after a six-month period. By designing recruitment approaches around ideological and financial motivational hooks, law enforcement and intelligence agencies may increase the probability of recruitment success, as well as enhance both the effectiveness and longevity of their informant-handler relationship.

**Keywords:** Covert Human Intelligence Source; Informant; Motivation; Intelligence; Domestic Extremism; Counter-Terrorism.

## **Introduction**

Criminal acts planned or committed through Domestic Extremism (hereafter DE) impact individual and community safety. The ability of law enforcement to mitigate such threats is conditional on the availability of timely, accurate flows of intelligence. To that end, reporting by legally authorised and ethically managed informants affords a useful deployable tactic against known threat actors.<sup>1</sup> Informants, whether motivated for ideological, financial, or other reasons, provide information at some risk to themselves and their family. Critical to their safety and effective management is both the identification *and* understanding of their self-declared and handler assessed motivation. The present article explores the multiplicity of motivational factors reported by United Kingdom (UK) Law Enforcement Informants reporting on DE. The scope of this article does not cover the use of undercover officers, nor *Assisting Offenders*,<sup>2</sup> defined as persons seeking a reduction in sentence by way of a formalised agreement either by the provision of intelligence and in rarer cases, evidence in court.

### ***Definitional Clarity: Informants and Domestic Extremism***

Within the media, the use of the term *informant* appears to be interchangeable with other terms, agent, spy, confidential sources, undercover operative, community source or informers. Inconsistency in nomenclature not only causes confusion in analysis, but it also weakens efforts to instigate comparative research. Prior to the enactment of Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (hereafter RIPA 2000), the factors determining categorisation of an informant varied; criminal convictions, financial rewards sought or received,<sup>3</sup> degree of activity outside of any formal contract, the duration of reporting activity or the extent of the person operating without formal organisational direction. Since the enactment of RIPA 2000, the lexicon no longer accurately reflects law, policy, or practice. The term *informant* is now specifically defined as a Covert Human Intelligence Source (CHIS). RIPA 2000 or in Scotland, RIPSAs 2000,<sup>4</sup> in broad

terms, defines the informant as *any* person who establishes or maintains a personal relationship with another person for a covert purpose to obtain information, or provide access to information, or disclose information as a consequence of the use of this relationship, to a public authority.<sup>5</sup>

The second description to be illuminated is that of *DE*. Informants that principally provide information on DE matters are handled by Dedicated Source Units (DSU) operating within a Home Office force and/or national counter-terrorism network.<sup>6</sup> Unlike the term *terrorism*, what constitutes DE is not defined in law. In practice, the definition has now incorporated the extreme far right, violent animal rights extremists and violent anarchist groups. However, it does not include Islamist groups such as Al-Qaeda, Islamic State, nor does it encompass Northern Ireland terrorism. Developments since the 2017 UK terrorist attacks and an increase in extreme right-wing plots have led to MI5 taking on responsibility for combating the threat,<sup>7</sup> although it focuses on the extreme end of the problem.<sup>8</sup> At what exact point the threshold of DE is met before responsibility for a group falls to MI5 will need to be undertaken on a case-by-case basis and any decision is likely to centre on the nature and scope of the threat to national security. MI5's current website states that since April 2020 it took responsibility for "...Right Wing Terrorism (RWT) and Left, Anarchist and Single-Issue Terrorism (LASIT)."<sup>9</sup>

### ***A Critical Intelligence Asset***

While this paper does not principally deal with issues in moral or political philosophy, it does recognise that ethical concerns and informant use can be morally problematic for public institutions.<sup>10</sup> Informant use is a challenging and legally complex area of law enforcement.<sup>11</sup> Abuses, including entrapment by informants, have undermined judicial and public confidence in the tactic.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, the emotional and moral dimensions of informants remain

surprisingly neglected, with recent research setting out an agenda for moral significance, emotional disruption and the power dynamics at work.<sup>13</sup>

However, there are significant contributions made by informants to crime reduction, counter-terrorism and community safety, although formal recognition of this public service involved is largely silent. The accompanying narrative to informants is widely pejorative. Moreover, a decision to become an informant may be as life changing as it is with undercover officers.<sup>14</sup> The informant deployment may require them to lead, what in effect is a double life, tasked to elicit as much intelligence as possible while simultaneously evading suspicion from those they are associating with and intimate with. The repercussions of failure in this task are grave.

Despite these pressures, a small number of citizens are motivated enough to act as a legally authorised informant, deployed to assist law enforcement and intelligence agency efforts to reduce the risk of harm and serious disruption to individuals and communities. Law enforcement, intelligence agencies, and the Courts all have established precedents that recognise the contribution of informants and the importance of rewarding information either financially or through non-tangible means.<sup>15</sup> Rewarding informants is not a new phenomenon. Sun Tzu noted the importance of maintaining motivation through financial reward and, in a contemporary setting, this may also extend to include ideological reward.<sup>16</sup> Rewards are an important motivator to some informants, and the prospect and anticipation of payment can offer a degree of handler control and leverage over the informant.

### **Understanding Motivation and its Value**

Motivation has been defined as “the contemporary (immediate) influence on direction, vigour, and persistence of action”,<sup>17</sup> as well as “a process governing choice made by persons... among alternative forms of voluntary activity.”<sup>18</sup> These definitions denote that a form of influence

takes place on voluntary behaviours. In an informant context, this influence may include the role of the handler to firstly, identify the potential benefits to informing, secondly, persuasively articulating these to the potential informant, and finally, throughout the relationship, monitoring and maintaining the positive motivation.

There are two differentiated aspects of motivation: *initiating motivation*, which is concerned with the *reasons* for doing something and *deciding* to do something, and *sustaining motivation*, referring to the effort for sustaining or persisting in doing something.<sup>19</sup> Within motivation studies, there is also a degree of consensus that there are two dimensions to defining motivation: *direction* and *magnitude* of human behaviour.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, motivation specifies the reason why people decide to do something, how long people are willing to sustain the activity, and how hard they are going to pursue the activity. In this context, handlers must not only discover the type of motivation(s) but also the strength and extent of this cooperative driver. The benefits of identifying both the nature and extent of the motivation includes an enhanced control over the informant's activities,<sup>21</sup> and identifying and managing an informant's vulnerabilities, therefore ensuring safer future tasking deployments. Identifying an informant's motivation also helps understand the limits of cooperation and their likely temporal obligation, in the first instance, to the relationship and finally, understanding motivation may also highlight potential for informant misconduct.

The importance of understanding an informant's motivation is based on a belief that it improves effectiveness and efficiency of intelligence collection. "A HUMINT [Human Intelligence] collector can best adapt himself to the source's personality and control of the source's reactions when he understands basic behavioural factors, traits, attitudes, drives, motivations, and inhibitions."<sup>22</sup> To others, an accurate identification of an informant's motive is the key to control.<sup>23</sup>

Understanding motivation in the context of veracity of informant reporting may also be useful when seeking to avoid risks and, maximise operational opportunities. An informant who is motivated by revenge may provide more accurate and detailed intelligence. By doing so, they will be seeking to maximise the opportunities for an agency to act against the person who is the target for the informant's revenge. Conversely, this determination to seek revenge may also lead to the risks of a target being *set up* by the aggrieved informant. Where revenge is the assessed motivation, the informant's assistance should not necessarily be declined but, it is more incumbent on the handler to ensure detailed provenance questions are asked of the informant and this information, further corroborated. This may or may not be right, and further research is required to evidence this assertion rather than take it at face value.

### ***Identifying an Informant's Motivation(s)***

Assessing an informant's motivation(s) may be aided both through their own disclosure on why they wish to cooperate, along with the informant handlers' own assessment. An informant's reported motivation may not always be accurate. Assessments based on self-disclosure need to be tempered with the influence of social desirability bias whereby the informants, to impress or reassure their handlers may over-report virtuous motivations (i.e., moral concerns) and be less forthcoming about additional, less attractive motivation (i.e., revenge).

Evidence of motivation can be drawn from the informants themselves including autobiographies and these highlight disclosed motivations that are consistent with academic findings.<sup>24</sup> Storm<sup>25</sup> who has self-declared as an Informant (rather than being publicly avowed), disclosed motivations revealing the multi-dimensional aspects of cooperation. He stated his motivation for informing for both US and UK intelligence agencies was based on ideology and morality and, the loss of his Islamic faith.

Further corroboration of the self-disclosed motivation may come from those involved in their management. The handler's judgement of motivation may be based on their own research (e.g., checking organisational databases, which in a UK policing context, would include the Police National Database (PND), the Police National Computer (PNC), open-source platforms and other law enforcement and partner intelligence systems, the officer's intuition from previous handling experience, or through a thorough debrief of the informant.

Four broad categories of motivation are regularly proffered to explain a person's willingness to provide information to an intelligence agency or law enforcement. This is reflected in the Money, Ideology, Compromise and Ego (MICE) model<sup>26</sup> Others have offered slight variations of this acronym; Money, Ideology, Coercion/Compromise and Ego<sup>27</sup> and Money, Ideology, Coercion/Compromise and Ego or Excitement.<sup>28</sup> In practice, these four motivations broadly hold true, although they are oversimplified and one dimensional.

Accurately identifying, assessing, and continually monitoring motivation, offers the informant handler, and the organisation they represent, an increased chance of ethical management of the informant prior to, and during, operational deployments. Guidance on just how this can be achieved can differ starkly across agencies. The British Army's Force Research Unit (FRU), established to identify and recruit informants during the Northern Ireland *Troubles*, generally rejected volunteers or *walk-ins* based on their experience and fear of Irish Republican counter-penetration efforts.<sup>29</sup> The Stasi also steered away from recruiting motivated volunteers, although their reluctance was not based on concerns over infiltration, but rather effectiveness.<sup>30</sup> During the Cold War, intelligence agency staff, charged with the recruitment and management of informants received training on how to identify motivation with a view of exploitation. In practice, this learning effort was considered surplus to requirements as "almost any spies of any importance had been walk-ins, volunteers who chose to betray without any prompting or recruitment."<sup>31</sup>



Assessments are often too simplistic with motivation more complex and nuanced. Charters<sup>32</sup> notes an informant, reporting against the Irish Republican Army (IRA), who was ideologically motivated, and who he described as “anti-Republican, loyal to the UK, but opposed to Protestant extremism.” The same informant’s motive also included ego, a moral basis linked to his “desire for peace” and the securing of a commercial advantage with regards to his business.<sup>33</sup> This nuanced approach was further illustrated by Sean O’Callaghan, a Garda Siochana informant, who wanted to stop the IRA terrorist attacks, but in doing so, did not want to work on behalf of the British Security agencies.<sup>34</sup>

Criminal informants’ motivations are similar to those who have been motivated to inform for States, including US citizens who provided intelligence to the Soviets. In the UK, *spies* or *traitors* generally fit the legal UK definition of an informant; they have maintained or established a personal relationship for a covert purpose of providing access to, disclosing, or obtaining information. In these cases, studies have revealed that money is the dominant motive, although ingratiation, disgruntlement, fantasy, and self-importance are also drivers.<sup>35</sup> While there are examples of people betraying a State for primarily ideological reasons,<sup>36</sup> since the 1950’s the motivation to inform for pure ideological reasons has “dropped dramatically.”<sup>37</sup> Herbig’s analysis of motivation of *spies* holds that only 7% of those caught/identified were motivated solely for the money, although, it remains one of several motivations including ingratiation, coercion, thrills, and recognition or ego.<sup>38</sup> Others though, doubt the declared motivations of those caught informing in espionage cases, holding that “spies frequently use the guise of ideological motivation as a face-saving technique.”<sup>39</sup>

It is imperative that officers understand the motivation of informants who come forward with information.<sup>40</sup> With deep suspicion of *volunteers* in Northern Ireland, the identification of motivation was seen as critical in pinpointing attempts at counter-penetration operations.

Charter discussed informant use during the Northern Ireland Troubles and held that “it is important to note that motivation is also closely associated with an agent’s reliability.”<sup>41</sup>

UK Courts have also highlighted the importance of identifying motivation to mitigate risk to police operations.

“...There may be risks to the CHIS or his family from third parties if his identity becomes known. There may also be risks to police operations, depending on the motives and reliability of the CHIS. Many informers have criminal backgrounds and belong to a criminal social environment. Their motives for giving information to the police may be ambiguous or mixed. Their role may turn out to be less innocent than they would have the police believe.”<sup>42</sup>

While correctly identifying motivation is important in ensuring a productive informant-handler relationship, the operational affiliation can be undermined by other factors; poor handler succession planning, an absence of trust or ill-fitting handler profiles, failure to maintain rapport and on-going informant concerns over safety. Even cooperative and motivated informants sometimes hold back on full disclosure to their handlers on the grounds of self-preservation.<sup>43</sup> This fear was based on a concern that information “if disclosed and then used or misused would increase the risk of their discovery and death.”<sup>44</sup> It’s been reported that informants have also held back intelligence from their handlers in furtherance of financial gain.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, the bureaucracy within policing and that associated with the control and management of informers can also weaken informant motivation.<sup>46</sup>

Accurately identifying the motivation can be challenging. The US Army views the understanding of a person’s religious affiliation as one means of identification, “the source’s religious affiliation may provide insight into his motivation, moral strengths and weaknesses, and other motivational factors.”<sup>47</sup> The US Army’s assertions in its guidance manual have no obvious evidence base, rather they are simply working assumptions. For example, the guidance

on identifying indicators of deceit “consider that a source motivated primarily by money will likely be tempted to fabricate information in order to get paid.”<sup>48</sup> This assertion is made without any supporting quantitative or qualitative data.

### ***A Motivated Informant Relationship***

Understanding a potential informant’s motivation can lay the foundation for managing the risks and opportunities associated with the informant-handler relationship, and their subsequent operational deployments.<sup>49</sup> The process of identifying motivation is conditional on the successful application *and* establishment of rapport. While most of the research into the role of rapport has been undertaken within the context of police investigative interviews, the findings are germane to (potential) *informant-handler interactions*. The use of rapport in law enforcement interactions has been described as the “heart of the interview”<sup>50</sup> and a core interviewing skill.<sup>51</sup> Rapport can potentially aid the informers recall of information<sup>52</sup> and assist with improving the probability of cooperation and securing faster agreement in the context of negotiations.<sup>53</sup> The aim of the handler is to secure what Kleinman describes as the concept of *operational accord*, an affinity that goes beyond rapport and describes a productive relationship between the source (i.e., informant) and interviewer (i.e., handler).<sup>54</sup>

One method to enhance rapport and, therefore, opportunities for identifying motivation, is through the adoption of a motivational interview approach.<sup>55</sup> This approach seeks to:

“Establish an empathic, respectful, and non-judgmental atmosphere (i.e., ‘search for the truth’) and to maintain a flexible but goal directed strategy throughout the interaction (i.e., adapting to the suspect’s responses but focused on key topics and items relevant to the case at hand).”<sup>56</sup>

While it is necessary to identify and understand an informant’s potential motivation to cooperate, very little systematic and evidence-based training appears in law enforcement

handling courses on rapport. The extent one can apply rapport building skills though may have limitations,<sup>57</sup> for example, in its day-to-day application for cold call Informant recruitment pitches deployed within a short collapsing time frame.

For law enforcement to first draw out and then secondly, evaluate information required to assess a person's motive, the use of motivational interviewing may prove useful. *Motivational interviewing*, which derived from the therapeutic community is defined as “a directive, client-centred counselling style for eliciting behaviour change by helping clients to explore and resolve ambivalence.”<sup>58</sup> The use of motivational interviewing can provide insight into the future management of an individual's motivation and subsequent management of the intelligence source. Thus, it can introduce a cautionary element when determining the provenance, veracity, and the actionability of elicited information.

Additionally, Taylor's cylindrical model of communication behaviour may provide informant handlers an insight into the underlying motivational emphasis of an individual's dialogue.<sup>59</sup> The cylindrical model's robustness was tested within crisis negotiations and established that individuals communicate at three levels, avoidance, distributive, or integrative. At each level, the individual's dialogue aligns to either an instrumental theme (motivated by a gain of tangible commodities), relational theme (motivated by affiliation and relationships) or the identity theme (motivated by a positive self-presentation).<sup>60</sup> To encourage an informant's cooperation, as with crisis negotiations, an emphasis is placed on the handler to firstly identify which level the informant is communicating at, and which form of dialogue is motivating them. If a handler can identify the informant's motivation and then align their dialogue accordingly, the relationship between the handler and informant will be enhanced.

In summary, for a handler to remain sighted on an informant's motivation, they need to establish both a personable and independent relationship, remaining both objective and empathetic. This approach not only increases the probability of control and longevity of

authorised relationships but also may hold the key to increasing intelligence elicitation. It will also benefit from new handlers being introduced as part of a considered succession plan.

## **Research Method**

Research, specifically, on informant motivation has been scarce.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, the present exploratory research aimed to revise the current understanding of DE informant motivation, and to provide an evidence-base to develop informant policy and practice. Unprecedented access was secured to the present sensitive dataset, which understandably required a healthy negotiation with the data holders (the RIPA Authorising Officers throughout the counter-terrorism network). Due to the sensitive nature of the data set, the authors developed a spreadsheet in agreement with the data holders, categorised as: informant gender, self-declared motivations of the informant, the handlers' assessed motivation of the informant, DE area of reporting, and duration of informant status. To avoid data associated with ongoing investigations, the data collected was from 2018.

The sample consisted of adult DE informants, the majority of whom were male (85%). The authors were specifically instructed not to quote the sample size in the present research, due to its sensitive nature and to prevent initiating any source identification activity. Consequently, this article provided percentages from an *extensive sample* of DE Informants and has not broken down further the figures as this may compromise informants. The deliberate selection of informants from all forces and regions was authorised to reduce the likelihood of pinpointing the findings against a specific Counter-Terrorism Unit, and to enhance generalisability at a national level. The concerns over breaking down the category of CHIS and the authorising public authority (i.e., police force/agency) is also shared by the UK body

responsible for independent judicial oversight (The Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office, IPCO) who avoid such disclosures even in their annual report to the Prime Minister.

At all times, the overriding consideration was, and is, the protection of the informant and associated methodology. To this end, details that could directly lead to the identification of the informant were not sought. The authors chose to balance the research design and academic rigour with the need to protect the security of the informants. Accordingly, for the purposes of publication, the authors have chosen not to use some of the data where there is a risk of providing mosaic disclosure. This has meant that there was limited analysis of data on gender, age, or specific reporting areas. Specific details of violent domestic extremist groups are omitted and simply categorised as Extreme Right-Wing (XRW) and Extreme Left-Wing (XLW), as to even confirm the existence of an informant in a small domestic extremist cell could raise the likelihood of a counter-security effort to *hunt the informant*. Details, which if aggregated, that could lead to suspicion or identification of an informant, were not included in this article.

## **Results**

The findings from UK DE informants are reported under four key areas; (i) informants' declared motivations; (ii) domestic extremism reporting; (iii) handler assessments of informant motivation; and (iv) informant longevity.

### ***Informants' Declared Motivations***

Table 1 displays the motivations for DE informants broken down by the overall self-declared primary motivation, and further categorised by the informants' self-declared secondary motivation. The majority of informants declared their primary motivation as either *financial*

(48%) or *ideological* (38%). *Financial* motivation includes reward in terms of money or payment in kind. *Ideological* motivation includes cooperation based on a person's *ideological* or moral standpoint, for example, support for a cause but a belief that the cause should be progressed by non-violent lawful action means rather than violent activity.

The majority of informants (64%) provided a secondary motivation for reporting. When considering both primary and secondary motivations, 45% report for either *ideological* or *financial* reasons. This 45% is broken down into the two most reported combinations of primary and secondary motivations, namely, *ideological-financial* (28%) and *financial-ideological* (17%). Moreover, of the informants who reported on XRW, 60% reported their primary motivation as *financial*, whereas the most common primary motivation for Informants reporting on XLW was *ideological* (44%).

Table 1. Primary and Secondary Motivations Declared by the Informants

Primary motivation %	Secondary motivation %								
	Financial	Ideological	Other	Lifestyle	Sentence	Revenge	Ego	Not declared	
Financial	48	-	36	7	4	0	0	7	46
Ideological	38	72	-	5	0	0	0	0	23
Other	5	67	0	-	0	0	0	0	33
Lifestyle	3	100	0	0	-	0	0	0	0
Sentence	2	0	0	0	0	-	0	0	100
Revenge	2	100	0	0	0	0	-	0	0
Ego	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	0
Not declared	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-

Note. It is not possible for an informant to declare an identical primary and secondary motivation; therefore, a dash is placed for clarity. The motivation *Other* was an option at the time of data coding, as then, the motivation framework was not as extensive as the new motivation framework displayed in Table 4, which developed as a result of this research. No informants throughout this research were categorised under the motivation *Coercion*, though in order to generate a framework that may be applied internationally, other literature has suggested this has been the practices by other Nations.



### ***Domestic Extremism Reporting***

Within the context of DE, informants report across a range of ideological positions from the XRW, to violent single issues groups, and to XLW. The findings show that 51% of male informants who reported on DE gave their primary motivation as *financial*, 33% as *ideological*, and 16% gave other reasons, including seeking a change in *lifestyle*, *revenge* or simply the *thrill* of undertaking the role. Of the females, two thirds gave their primary motivation as *ideological* and the remaining third as *financial*. Table 2 further displays the breakdown for gender between XRW and XLW reporting. Additionally, the majority of male informants (57%) and female informants (56%) reported on XRW DE.

Table 2. Informant Primary Motivation Across Gender and Area of Reporting

Primary motivation	Male %		Female %	
	Extreme right wing	Extreme left wing	Extreme right wing	Extreme left wing
Financial	64	33	40	25
Ideological	28	38	60	75
Lifestyle	4	5	0	0
Sentence	4	0	0	0
Revenge	0	5	0	0
Other	0	14	0	0
Not declared	0	5	0	0
Total (%)	57	43	56	44

### ***Handler Assessments of Informant Motivation***

The consistency of the informants' primary declared motivation and the informant handler's assessment were explored. Within the sample, very few (10%) of the informant handlers' assessments contradicted the primary self-declared motivations by informants. The handlers own assessment would have been informed by the direct debriefing of the informant, background checks on the informant using Force, Regional and National intelligence and data systems and other corroborative testing.

Additionally, the informant handlers reviewed the original primary declared motivations by informants post six months of authorisation. The results showed that when comparing the original handler assessments of motivation with their six-months review of motivation, the majority of the informants (87%) were assessed to be driven by the same motivation. Therefore, 13% of the handlers' assessments of informant motivation had changed six months into the relationship, with the most common shift in motivation revealed as *ideological to financial* (29%) and *ideological to ego* (29%).

### ***Informant Longevity***

Within the UK, the minimum period of a RIPA 2000 authority for adult informants is 12 months,<sup>62</sup> however, if during this 12-month period it is determined the informant is no longer necessary for continuing use, then the authority can be cancelled at any time. Therefore, those within the *under 12-month* category may well have been terminated by the authorising force prior to *servicing* the full 12-month legal authorisation term. In relation to interpretation, the data was collected in 2018. Accordingly, the informants may continue to report longer than the first *authorised period*.

Table 3. Duration of Informant Status per Primary Self-Declared Motivation

Primary motivation	Duration of informant status			
	Under 12 months	12 months – 2 years	2 – 4 years	4+ years
Financial	33	60	46	52
Ideological	59	40	36	31
Lifestyle	0	0	0	7
Sentence	0	0	9	0
Revenge	8	0	0	0
Other	0	0	9	7
Not declared	0	0	0	3
Total (%)	21	9	19	51

Just over half of the informants operated for *4+ years* (51%), with a further 19% operating between *2 - 4 years* at the time of the data capture. Of the informants who reported on XRW, 47% remained as informants for *4+ years*, whereas informants who reported on XLW, 64% remained as informants for *4+ years*. Those informants who have been authorised for 4 years or more, more than half gave their primary motivation as *financial* (52%), with the next largest cohort as *ideological* (31%). The results also revealed a gender difference in the longevity of authorised reporting. It was revealed that the majority of female informants (89%) have been reporting for less than four years, and that most of these have been reporting for 12 months or less (67%), whereas the majority of males (58%) reported for more than four years.

## **Discussion**

Intelligence collected by informants on behalf of law enforcement and intelligence agencies is critical to effective threat management necessary for delivering community safety. But how can we ensure the optimal use of informants?

The consensus amongst agencies operating informants is that identifying, and monitoring informants' motivation is a critical element of this process.<sup>63</sup> Understanding the motivation of an informant helps Dedicated Source Units determine informant recruitment priorities, as motivational knowledge informs the selection of tactical decisions, it cautions against risk, and identifies new intelligence collection opportunities. It provides insight into the limitations of an informant, and in doing so, reduces management and operational risk to both the informant and the handler.<sup>64</sup> Finally, knowledge of an informant's motivation optimises tasking and reduces the probability of subsequent judicial challenge.

Arguably, the key to determining who should be recruited as an informant and how they should be subsequently deployed rests on securing a credible understanding of their motivation

for cooperation. Although this appears operationally and legally important, with a few exceptions in the UK<sup>65</sup> and in the US,<sup>66</sup> academic research has largely ignored the issue of informant motivation. The reasons for this paucity of research are varied, though many are linked to the understandable research challenges stemming from the access to sensitive data, the level of researcher vetting, the need for safe handling of highly sensitive data, the possibility of legal restrictions, the requirement to protect covert methodology, the absence of deep trust between academia and law enforcement and finally, securing agreement on ethical safeguards.

It is important that academia and the covert intelligence world invest in building research partnerships. The consequences of failing to do so to date has led researchers to overly rely on open-source material, often related to disclosures in judicial proceedings, which in turn introduces a selection bias and skews research findings by over-reporting the exceptional which in turn reinforces the negative nomenclature assigned to the activity of informing. This is the first UK research to explore informants' motivation based on both the informants' own self-disclosure and their handlers' own evidenced assessment of their informants' motivation within a DE context. In doing so, the research highlights six areas that maybe of interest to both the practitioner and academic community.

First, the analysis revealed that Informants reporting on DE are primarily motivated on an *ideological* and *financial* basis. This is at odds with earlier literature which highlights other motivational drivers as important, including *revenge*, *excitement*, *corruption*, and forms of *coercion*.<sup>67</sup> Second, the majority of informants provided a secondary motivation for reporting. This finding challenges the traditional approach of reducing motivation to a single unchanging dimension, which risks oversimplification of our understanding of informant use.<sup>68</sup> The findings in this research offer support to earlier research that held that an informants motivation is dynamic, likely to change and is multi-layered.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, in order to equip handlers with

the awareness and skillset to fully comprehend the dynamic layers of an informant's motivation, handler training should incorporate motivation as a key theme.

Third, when political ideologies are examined, those reporting on XRW were primarily motivated by *financial* considerations, while the most frequent motivation for those reporting on XLW was *ideological*. If the motivation of the potential informant is unknown, it seems wise for handlers during the recruitment phase to approach those able to report on XRW with a *financial* influence, and XLW with an *ideological* influence, which may increase the likelihood for a successful approach. However, this is not a *silver bullet*, as the present research is suggestive rather than definitive, and it is clearly acknowledged that more research is required to understand why this may be the case.

Fourth, when exploring the area of reporting and primary motivations, a gender difference was identified within the present sample. With regards to XRW, males were predominately motivated by *financial* motives, whereas the majority of females were motivated by *ideological* reasons. In relation to XLW, males were more evenly split between *financial* and *ideological* motivations, while females were again predominately motivated by *ideology*. In contrast to previous research,<sup>70</sup> females in the present sample only declared *financial* and *ideological* as their primary motivators. The topic of gender and motivation is another interesting yet undeveloped area of research. For example, understanding the factors that underpin the longevity of an informant-handler relationship, including the *likeability of handlers*, may be an interesting area of future research.

Fifth, the findings revealed that handlers seemed to accurately identify an informant's motivation, as only 10% of the handler assessments contradicted the primary declared motivations by informants. Although a high level of consistency was identified, informant motivation is subject to adjustment throughout the course of the authorised informant and handler relationship. Approximately 13% of the handlers' assessments of informant motivation

changed within the first 6 months of the authorised relationship. This highlights the importance of revisiting an informant's motivation throughout the relationship. The handler's effectiveness and efficiency of managing and utilising their informant may be weakened if a change in motivation is not identified, it may consequently prevent the handler from developing their communicative approach.<sup>71</sup> The most common change in the handler assessments of motivation were *ideological to financial* and *ideological to ego*. Perhaps, ideological motivations are not as long lasting as other forms of motivators?

Finally, just over half of the sample continued to provide intelligence for at least a four-year period. Longevity of informants' relationships may offer law enforcement and intelligence agencies an opportunity to recognise an informant's motivation more confidently, when it changes and perhaps, the way its changes. Interestingly, it was revealed that the majority of female informants have reported for 12 months or less, whereas the majority of males have reported for more than four years. However, it remains uncertain what factors could be at play with regards to the gender differences and informant longevity. Hence, further research is required in this area, which would help to establish the rationale behind the deficit in long-term female informants.

The longevity of the informant-handler relationship may be advantageous in assessing how best the informant can be tasked against a subject of interest and the full extent of their capabilities. Additionally, longevity also offers the opportunity for long-term strategies to place an informant in a position to report more effectively against key individuals within a target group. Therefore, the identification and understanding of an informant's motivation could help maintain the informant-handler relationship, as the handler is able to tailor their approach to what influences the informant to continue a vitally important, yet potentially dangerous role.<sup>72</sup> The findings in this research may offer indicators on the positive impact of longevity of authorisation on the informant, first identified by other researchers, "the motivations of a

human source involved in a long-term relationship usually become more civic-minded. The Informant rationalises his “double agent status by taking on the investigator’s goals and responsibilities” and<sup>73</sup> the positive type of “moral change”,<sup>74</sup> as the relationship strengthens and develops.

## **Conclusion**

So, what contribution does this research offer to those charged with informant use in the UK? It should be stressed that the access to data around motivation was understandably limited to protect methodology and source identities. Consequently, a number of the observations are also informed and supplemented through extensive academic literature searches, open sources, open Government policy publications, media reporting and informant autobiographies. The research supported the continued efforts to strengthen understanding of the role of motivation in the management of informants. By further understanding the process of identifying and monitoring motivation during informant recruitment and prior to subsequent deployments, handlers can be more effective and efficient at managing and maximising informant use. This will require an uplift in the application of rapport identification and building techniques, not only during training and at the recruitment stage but also throughout the legally authorised relationship. To embed and reinforce within daily practice, UK informant policy should be reviewed, and where necessary, amended to reflect consideration of best evidence on how rapport can be enhanced, and elicitation skills developed, for the purposes of identifying, understanding and operationally exploiting an informant’s motivation.

The present research has provided additional support to the notion that motivational factors should be identified in a more dynamic and multi-dimensional way to develop a handler’s understanding of their informant, which may improve future recruitment and development. Consequently, the motivation framework for informants (e.g., FIREPLACES)

has been developed<sup>75</sup> from the findings of the present research, together with the literature review on informant motivations (see Table 4). Not all motivations were identified in this specific sample (e.g., *Coercion*), but to generate a framework that can be applied internationally, other literature has suggested this has been a practice adopted by other States. This developed framework highlights the possible motivations of informants. The framework may prove helpful to future researchers to adopt when assessing informant motivations. It may also be of use to those practitioners looking to reform their current practices around the identification and understanding of their informant motivations.

In concluding this article, it is important to note that while much of the academic literature and media comment about informants are characterised by a negative nomenclature, members of the public are still willing, at considerable risk, to covertly collect and impart information for the benefit of society. Informants reporting on DE do so not only based on a *financial* motivation but also on an *ideological* basis. Informing is a courageous decision, a decision which brings with it risks of compromise and serious harm, not only to the informant but also their family. This difficult and challenging activity by our citizens should not be lightly dismissed, even when the exceptional case of informant misuse comes to light. Nonetheless, handlers must remain vigilant to abuses in informant use and deployment and one way this vigilance can be aided is by the accurate identification and monitoring of an informant's motivations.



Table 4. A motivation framework for informants.

<b>FIREPLACES</b>		
<b>Code</b>	<b>Motivation</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>F</b>	Financial	Includes the receipt of monetary reward, either paid in cash or electronic transfer. Also includes other in-kind financial payment (i.e., payment of rent, tools, phones, or purchase of clothes).
<b>I</b>	Ideology / Moral	Information is provided against a person or group who possess a system of ideas or beliefs at odds with those held by the informant. (i.e., drug dealing or terrorism).
<b>R</b>	Revenge	Information is provided to harm or hurt another in response to a previous injury or perceived wrong (i.e., as a result of an acrimonious breakup of a personal or criminal relationship).
<b>E</b>	Excitement	Undertaking the role of an informant offers a feeling of excitement, eagerness or arousal to the person providing the information.
<b>P</b>	Protection	Passing information to authorities to protect the informant from persons or networks threatening the informant or their family, with the aim of encouraging police action to diminish this threat.
<b>L</b>	Lifestyle	The role played by the informant provides the person with an enhanced lifestyle, either as a consequence of deployments and/or payments.
<b>A</b>	Access	The relationship with the handler provides the informant an opportunity to identify agency interest in other networks and associates. This may include deliberate infiltration by criminals.
<b>C</b>	Coercion	Information is provided to avoid the carrying out of a threat made by an official (i.e., threat of deportation or threat of preventing access to or from a country). It can also include blackmail.
<b>E</b>	Ego	Undertaking the role of an informant enhances the persons self-esteem or self-importance. Sometimes colloquially known as <i>Walter-Mitty</i> informants.
<b>S</b>	Sentence	Information is passed on in an effort to mitigate against the length of a likely forthcoming prison sentence. There are established legal precedent for sentence reduction for cooperation.

Note. Adapted from Stanier and Nunan (2021).

## **Declaration of Interest**

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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