

## WGBH Informants Project Deliverable Zero - Project Description

### 2.9.20

#### Motivation/background of the project

Phil Martin, a journalist working for Paul Singer at WGBH, believes that the state of Massachusetts and other states in New England including New Hampshire and Rhode Island, may be using jail-house informants improperly. We want to assess how often cases with different types of informants are overturned in order to be able to answer this question.

#### Goals, hypothesis, outcomes

We want to test if jailhouse informants are more likely to give false information, leading to cases in which they are used being overturned more often than cases with street informants. We believe that jailhouse informants are more likely to give false information. If the data needs additional proof, it may be necessary to compare our results with a baseline of all criminal cases being overturned. Per instructions from the client, we will also pay attention to any interesting patterns in the data we uncover as we go along, and this may change the focus of the data.

There will be many steps and goals along the way:

1. Separate civil cases from criminal cases in the data previously collected; verify if we have enough data, and collect more if it turns out that we only have appeals court data
  - a. In this case, we will need to clean the rest of the data from criminal cases in Massachusetts
2. Figure out which criminal cases informants were used in.
3. Figure out which of these cases were overturned
4. Categorize the cases in which different types of informants were used. i.e. Civilians, incarcerated individuals, civilians with connections to the police.
5. (happening continuously) compare the numbers of cases in the different categories and do analysis of the data.

#### Non-goals, out of scope topics

- Check to see if certain judges are more likely to overturn with informants.
- Topics already covered by previous groups working with parts of our data set
  - If certain judges overturn cases with a higher likelihood than others
  - If there are discrepancies between new judges and tenured ones
  - Creating an online searchable repository with the data

#### End result/product -> definition of done

We have little idea how long any of the phases of the project are going to take. Certainly we will figure out what cases informants were used in, and will likely need to collect more data, since it appears that the previous groups that worked on this only used data for appellate courts. Whatever is the main number that the team produces, we will also produce a number that

serves as context, maybe the total number of criminal cases that are overturned or the total number of informant cases that are overturned.

Open questions, uncertainties

- How does one analyze the legitimacy of informant information when a case can be overturned or not for reasons that have nothing to do with the legitimacy of the information?
- A crucial assumption of this project is that the justice system functions well enough to overturn cases in which informants are used improperly. We are unsure that this is true.
- Who is an informant?
- Can we tell if informants get charges dropped against them?
- Do informants ever testify anonymously? If so, is there a higher likelihood for another ruling?
- How do social classes, races and ethnicities come into play?