

CALL FOR PAPERS: “DATA-DRIVEN ELECTIONS: IMPLICATIONS AND CHALLENGES FOR DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES”

The Big Data Surveillance (BDS) project, centered at Queen’s University, and funded by a Partnership Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), in collaboration with the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for British Columbia (OIPCBC) is organizing a research workshop on “Data-Driven Elections: Implications and Challenges for Democratic Societies” to be held in Victoria, B.C. on April 29th and 30th, 2019. The OIPCBC is one of the only data protection authorities in the world to have conducted investigations into the capture and use of personal data in the electoral context, both under the current commissioner, Michael McEvoy, and his predecessor, Elizabeth Denham, the current Information Commissioner in the UK.

We envisage a relatively small workshop (maximum of 40 participants) bringing together some of the most prominent researchers in the world who work in this area. It will be held at the offices of the OIPCBC in downtown Victoria. We also plan a more public event, to be held at the University of Victoria, on the evening of Tuesday, April 30th.

As the emergence of big data analytics has enabled organizations to target consumers in an increasingly granular manner, so the same techniques are being used to influence voters. Delivering the right message, at the right time, to targeted voters has the potential to shift the fate of the modern election campaign and to influence electoral outcomes. Practices observed extensively in the U.S. (integrated voter management platforms, the use of social media to analyze issue trends and to micro-target precise segments of the electorate, mobile campaigning tools, digital campaigning through automated software programs or “bots”, and more advanced online behavioral marketing techniques based on AI and machine learning) are gradually appearing in other democratic systems. The competitiveness of current elections continues to place enormous pressure on political parties and candidates in most democracies to capture as much personal data as possible on the electorate, and to employ data analytics to gain any edge over their rivals. Thus, more data on voters are being captured, and those data are increasingly shared through a complicated network of organizations within the contemporary campaign “ecosystem.”

What are the contemporary trends in voter analytics in different societies, and how are they shaped by distinctive legal, institutional and cultural conditions? What is the impact on privacy, civil liberties, and other democratic values? What are the key questions in striking the appropriate balance between freedom of political speech and privacy rights and interests? How should these practices be regulated, and by whom? What are the larger surveillance implications of voter analytics in the electoral process?

We look forward to an engaging and interactive workshop in which contemporary multi-disciplinary research on these and other issues will be presented. This interdisciplinary gathering will bring academic researchers into conversation with government regulators, civil society groups, political parties (and their consultants) and other stakeholders. The program will be constructed to facilitate that broader conversation. The workshop will also be international in scope, and we are particularly interested in contributions from scholars outside North America.

We are also planning an edited volume and are in consultation at the moment with the University of British Columbia Press on such a project. Accordingly, we would expect the circulation of a draft paper in advance. The BDS Project can cover the economy travel and up to three nights' hotel accommodation for those selected to present papers.

Proposals for paper presentations (a one-page abstract) should be submitted to Colin Bennett (cjb@uvic.ca) and David Lyon (lyond@queensu.ca) by November 16th, 2018.

Colin Bennett and David Lyon

<https://www.oipc.bc.ca>

<http://www.sscqueens.org/tags/big-data-surveillance>