The politics of data-driven governance

Lina Dencik @LinaDencik
Data Justice Lab @DataJusticeLab
Cardiff University, UK
Structure

1. Data Justice Lab
2. The Snowden moment
3. Beyond privacy
4. Situating data in practice (a case study)
5. Politics of data
6. Social justice response?
Data Justice Lab

Exploring social justice in an age of datafication

Lina Dencik      Arne Hintz      Joanna Redden      Emiliano Treré

Cate Hopkins      Jess Brand      Harry Warne      Isobel Rorison      Philippa Metcalfe      Fieke Jansen      Javier Sanchez
• Public launch: March 2017
• Situated within the School of Journalism, Media and Culture (JOMEC), Cardiff University, UK
• Expanding team (PhDs, post-docs, established scholars)

Projects:
• DATAJUSTICE (European Research Council, 2018-23)
• Data Scores: Investigating uses of citizen scoring in public services (Open Society Foundations, 2017-18)
• Data Policies: Regulatory Approaches for Data-Driven Platforms in the UK and EU (ITforChange/IDRC, 2017-18)
• Data Harms Record (ongoing)
• Big Data from the South (ongoing)
• Towards Democratic Auditing: Participation in the Scoring Society (Open Society Foundations, 2018-20)

Events/workshops:
• Data Justice Conference, 21/22 May 2018, Cardiff University
• Fact-finding and stakeholder workshops – practitioners and civil society
• Public events – policy-makers
• Critical data journalism / data justice journalism training
The Snowden moment


Historical juncture
• Big data and surveillance capitalism as governance
• Normalisation of data collection and surveillance culture

Public and civil society response
• Digital resignation and surveillance realism
• Disconnect in understandings and concerns
The datafied society....

Refugee or Terrorist? IBM Thinks Its Software Has the Answer. *Defense One*

When your boss is an algorithm. *Financial Times*

Councillors use 377,000 people’s data in efforts to predict child abuse. *The Guardian*

Machine Bias: There’s software used across the country to predict future criminals. *Propublica*

New Zealand experts warn Australia data-driven welfare ‘abuses and brutalises’. *The Guardian*

What happens when an algorithm cuts your health care. *The Verge*
What is at stake? From privacy to fairness

- Focus on ‘data ethics’
  - Technological solution(ism) (e.g. ‘debiasing’ ML, fairness-by-design)
  - (Re)training engineers (e.g. ethics curricula)
  - Guidelines and principles (e.g. code of ethics, certification)

Neutralisation (depoliticisation) of challenges?
“We are witnessing the gradual disappearance of the postwar British welfare state behind a webpage and an algorithm. In its place, a digital welfare state is emerging.”

Statement On Visit to the United Kingdom by Philip Alston, United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, 16 November 2018
DATA SCORES AS GOVERNANCE: Investigating uses of citizen scoring in public services

- Comprehensive mapping and analysis of the use of data analytics by government and local authorities in the UK
- Desk research, automated searches (gov’t and media), FoI requests
- Case studies: Interviews with public officials and civil society organizations
- Multistakeholder workshops
- Journalist training workshop

www.data-scores.org
- 53 Councils
- 14 Police forces (Liberty report)
- Public-private partnerships (e.g. Capita, Xantura, CallCredit, Experian)
- Data warehouses and predictive analytics
- Prominent areas: benefit fraud, child welfare, policing
- Citizen scoring: identity verification, risk assessment, ranking

- [https://data-scores.org/overviews/predictive-analytics](https://data-scores.org/overviews/predictive-analytics)
Context of ‘citizen scoring’

Public sector workers
- Interpretive and regulatory vacuum (heterogeneity of data practices)
- Austerity context
- ‘Golden view’
- Challenges seen as cultural and technical
- Lack of impact assessment

Civil Society
- Extent of data collection and sharing
- Bias and discrimination
- Targeting, stigma and stereotyping
- Lack of agency (professionals and service-users)
- Politics, not technology
Politics of data: Transformations in governance?

- Expertise transferred to (commercial) calculative devices
- Citizens positioned as (potential) risk
- Rationalisation of lived experiences
- Individualisation of social problems
- Pre-emption over prevention
Data justice – data as part of integrated social justice agenda
The politics of data-driven governance

Lina Dencik @LinaDencik
Data Justice Lab @DataJusticeLab
Cardiff University, UK