

THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF DATA

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Abstract: Despite our widespread recognition of an emergent politics of data in our midst, we strikingly lack a political theory of data. We readily acknowledge the presence of data across so much of our political lives, but we often do not know how to conceptualize the politics of all those data points—the forms of power they constitute and the kinds of political subjects they implicate. Recent work across a spate of academic disciplines is evidence of the first steps toward a political theory of data. This talk offers a survey of this emergent literature with the specific goal of mapping some of its limits and underdeveloped possibilities. Three foci for the political theory of data emerge. First, the study of political *institutions* is crucial for understanding data politics, but also insufficient. What is needed is a shift to the study of the politics of technologies. Second, and with respect to data technology specifically, contributions in political theory (and elsewhere) have thus far focused on the *algorithm*. But a focus on the politics of algorithms already suggests the need for inquiries into other politicizing elements of data technology. Therefore, third, this talk locates a further dimension of data politics in the work of *formatting* technology, or more simply *formats*. If technologies are too often ignored by political analyses focusing on institutions, then similarly are technologies of formatting too often overlooked amidst all the recent fervor for a political analysis of the algorithm.

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5:00-6:30 pm (ET)

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