Important issues on the use and abuse of data

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My background

- Grew up in Silicon Valley
- Worked a few years designing, merging, managing databases
- Research focus on government failure, monopoly and regulation (mostly via water)
- Data matters, e.g., “how much groundwater is left?”
- Focussed on “social welfare” (i.e., no advertisements)
Governments and data governance

Government of India’s Aadhaar ("foundation") program started as private initiative. It uses a biometric identification card with a national number that can confirm identity via an open-API.

- Reduced fraud in benefits
- Stimulated innovation ("credit" rating)
- May be part of leap-frog strategy (cashless society)
- Cost $900 million. Saved 2x that on LPG fraud *in one year*
- Already debates over privacy, crime-fighting, exclusion
Governments and data governance II

- G of China planning “social credit score” to control citizens online/offline
- G of US “do not fly” lists have false positives. G loses lots of important data. Trump wants names of “climate workers”
- G of TR arresting “disloyal Gulenists” (à la Jews in NL)

**Bottom Line:** Governments can manage data via democratic means or abuse their power. Independent checks, transparency, etc. are necessary.
Companies and data governance

Advertising is systematic lying.

“If the product is free, then you are the product”

- Google search manipulation can swing votes by 20 percent
- Facebook can manipulate “feelings” via feed
- Fake news persists longer than science, in echo-chambers (http://www.pnas.org/content/113/3/554.full)
- Facebookistan’s 1.8b “citizens” lack rights or data ownership

Network effects give market power (eyeballs) that is sold to advertisers. Algorithms (WMDs) distort what we see, who we meet, and our environment.

**Bottom Line:** Ad-supported platforms are harmful and more harmful when they are bigger in terms of non-accountable damages. Regulation is necessary (but not sufficient!)
Thank you!

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