Call for Papers

Special Issue "Predictive Governance in the 21st Century – Governing Futures through Forecasting Algorithms"

Guest Editors: Simon Egbert, Manuel Reinhard

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1. Overview of the Theme

Against the backdrop of the growing presence of **forecasting algorithms** in society—encompassing fields as diverse as healthcare, education, the military, marketing, and finance—this special issue seeks to deepen our understanding of how the algorithmization of futures shapes **governance in the 21st century**. Despite the broad range of societal sectors and actors affected by forecasting algorithms, research on the topic remains highly fragmented, underscoring the need for an overarching review of this emerging phenomenon. To address this gap, we welcome proposals for articles that offer **theoretical**, **empirical**, **or methodological perspectives** on the governance effects of forecasting algorithms. We aim to foster an interdisciplinary dialogue among scholars from diverse academic backgrounds, including cultural studies, critical media and communication studies, governance studies, critical policy studies, science and technology studies, and critical data studies, among others.

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2. Theoretical, Empirical, and Methodological Perspectives on Forecasting Algorithms

Theoretical
We welcome articles that, by unfolding new research horizons, shed light on the theoretical dimension of forecasting algorithms. Potential themes include mapping the directions that theoretical frameworks—such as actor-network theory or (post)phenomenology—point toward to arrive at a nuanced understanding of how forecasting algorithms shape governmentalities across society. We are particularly interested in articles that address current socio-theoretical debates, situating the theoretical reflection of forecasting algorithms against the backdrop of broader socio-cultural developments of our present era (e.g., the increasing trend toward 'securitisation' in late modernity).

Contributors may wish to consider one of the following questions:

- In light of specific theoretical frameworks, what "are" forecasting algorithms, what do they "do," and what is the *differentia specifica* of "algorithmic futures"?
- Given these frameworks, what kinds of systematic typologies of these futures can be developed (e.g., projections, simulations, etc.)?
- What does the growing presence of these futures across society, ultimately, mean for an understanding of future culture(s) in the 21st century—against governmental horizons and beyond?

Empirical

We appreciate articles that, by making explorations into the terrain, illuminate the empirical dimension of forecasting algorithms. Possible topics include following the tracks of how organizations—such as public agencies and private firms—embed forecasting algorithms within specific fields of practice. We take a particular interest in articles that engage with specific cases, bringing selected organizations into close-up (e.g., government agencies).

Contributors are encouraged to discuss questions such as:

- How is the algorithmization of futures practically enacted within organizations, sector-specific regulations, and broader policies?
- How do organizations contend with the resulting institutional and / or professional tensions of this development (e.g., the upgrading and downgrading of organizational roles)?
- How does it affect notions of "good governance" within specific organizations?

Methodological

We invite articles that take a reflective step back to investigate the methodological dimension of forecasting algorithms. Possible themes include marking the methodological obstacles thrown up by forecasting algorithms for empirical researchers—such as algorithmic opacity and impact measurement—, and the methodological ladders needed to surmount them. We are particularly interested in articles that address the mutual (dis)advantages of the methods currently employed in empirical research (e.g., qualitative approaches), based on a critical review of the current state of research.

We invite contributors to focus their attention on questions like:

- Which empirical research methods can researchers deploy to study in detail the "datafication of the future" through forecasting algorithms, what are their respective (dis)advantages, and what implications do they have for the validity of findings?
- Which methodological innovations (e.g., in areas such as data ethnography or algorithmic auditing) should be tested, notably for fields characterized by opaque or proprietary algorithmic processes?
- Which methodological approaches can capture in detail the interplay of human and machine decision-making, within and beyond predictive governance?

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3. Submission Details

We look forward to receiving your proposals for papers in the form of **300–500 word** summaries delineating their connection to the themes and questions described above.

- **Deadline for submissions:** March 31, 2025
- **Deadline for invited full texts (6000-8000 words):** September 30, 2025
- **Contact details for submissions:**
    - Dr. Manuel Reinhard (Helmut Schmidt University Hamburg) – manuel.reinhard@hsu-hh.de
    - Dr. Simon Egbert (Bielefeld University) – simon.egbert@uni-bielefeld.de

The special issue will be published in a peer-reviewed journal. We are already at an advanced stage of discussions with one of the leading journals in the field of digital studies. Selected authors will be invited to submit full manuscripts following an initial review. We look forward to your contributions – and to the vibrant conversations they will inspire on how forecasting algorithms (re)shape governance in the 21st century.