

A Democratic Experimentalist Approach to Machine-Learning Algorithms in Administrative Agencies

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1. Democratic Experimentalism

- Why: Uncertainty and failure of Command & Control.
- What: Decentralization and policy experimentation; local circumstances and learning from variation; iterative revision Accountability by evaluation + local autonomy.
- How: rolling rules, peer review, performance measurement and error correction; information pooling.

2. Algorithms in Administrative Decision-making

- Why: improve consistency, efficiency, accuracy.
- What: different domains, from criminal justice to welfare; Federal/State/Local agencies.
- How: designing tools and rules – technical decisions, protocols and procedures.

3. Governing Algorithms

- Currently: minimal requirements: internal management, Procedural DP/Administrative Procedure
- Concerns: less transparent, accountable, explainable, fair.
- Proposals: Guidelines, Moratoria, Impact Assessment, Audits, Oversight Bodies, Hearing/Appeal Rights, Procurement.
- Prescriptive approach – too rigid, chilling effect?

4. Experimentalist Approach

- Governance mode, not unavoidable prospect: iterative ML development & policy-making.
- Set **high-level goals** (measurable improvement, reducing biases)... Then **decentralized development**, evaluation, information pooling, and revision.
- Role of center: incentives, carrots & sticks, penalty defaults (Audits?)
- Experiment with **organizational procedures** (human review; decision support; mandatory protocols) and **mechanisms** (oversight, audits...).

5. Case Study: Risk Assessment in Child Protection Services

- Highly localized, high variability in outcomes; risk assessment is basic component in decisions.
- Recently, several counties started experimenting with Predictive Risk Modeling for call-screening.
- High variation in model development process, protocols (mandatory screen-in?)
- Governance – transparency, community engagement, independent evaluation.