

Big-Data research in Public Administration

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Practitioners are increasingly using Big Data analytics to develop smarter policies, improve service provision, and advance internal (business) processes. In a similar vein, Big Data analytics has the potential to advance the discipline of public administration too. However, in analyzing (very) big data sets, public administration scholars face technical, ethical and methodological challenges that are unique to Big Data research. These challenges include, but are not limited to, problems with access and safe storage of the data, requirement of advanced programming skills, the need for different methods for data analysis and visualization, privacy concerns, and a need for alternatives to ‘standard’ hypotheses testing.

This panel aims to bring together public administration scholars that research very large data sets—let’s say, $n > 100.000$ —to discuss the potentials and challenges of big-data research methods for public administration. In particular, we welcome papers on:

1. The application of Big Data tools (e.g., data mining techniques; machine-learning algorithms; the Internet of Things; ...) in various areas of public management and policy analysis, their benefits and challenges, and the implications for future management and policy research;
2. The promises and limitations of Big Data tools in addressing the core questions of public management, policy analysis, and public governance issues;
3. The foreseeable challenges of data governance issues related to the use of Big Data and artificial intelligence;
4. The implications of the Big Data era for public administration teaching and MPA program development;

The common denominator in our panel will be the research of big datasets in the field of public administration. The panel will provide participants the opportunity to share their experiences and solutions regarding big data research and discuss potential collaborations (e.g., an edited volume). This panel is our first step towards establishing a global network of public administration scholars with a strong interest in Big Data analytics.