Connecting the Dots for Democratic Accountability

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Washington, DC
Outline

- 9/11 and the problem of connecting the dots
- Connecting the dots for democratic accountability
  - The problem
  - Why focus on tracking humans vs. things
  - Timeliness of the problem
  - The connecting dots model for national security
    - Technology
    - Institutions
    - Disclosure norms & incentives
  - Setting priorities
“The lack of information sharing between federal, state, local authorities and the private sector, especially about individuals with ties to terror groups, was the cornerstone of the 9/11 Commission’s findings. It was apparent to the 9/11 Commission’s panel members that interconnected data bits of information regarding the looming 9/11 conspiracy resided within disparate government agency databases as well as private sector data sources. The fundamental problem was not a lack of information, rather that no primary agency or decision maker had enough integrated information about fledgling terror-related conspiracies to form a mosaic-like aggregate threat picture and act to prevent them.”

--Valledor, J. C., Fort Leavenworth, KA: School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College
“We propose that information be shared horizontally across new networks that transcend individual agencies.”

--9/11 Commission
Upon entry into the information sharing environment, information on watchlist persons is transferred to multiple stakeholders across both the private and public sectors.
Connecting the Dots: Driving Infraction

What is Information Sharing?

A police officer pulls you over with lights flashing

The officer asks you for your license and registration

You offer your excuses for the infraction

The officer is able to run your license and pull up identifiable information about you.

To no avail, the officer walks away to prepare the ticket

Arrest Warrants
DMV
Missing Persons
Criminal History

The Problem

- Representative democracy requires good data about representatives
- Hard to do when data is scattered across many different databases
- Semantic web technologies can help connect the dots
- Examples
  - Representatives
  - Those that seek to influence representatives
  - Those that receive large, particularistic benefits from the actions of representatives
- The National vs. Local Problem
“Under current law, enforcement of ethics and lobbying laws is spread widely among a variety of different agencies, which do not frequently work together, and do not provide the public information in an easily accessible format. As president, Obama will create a centralized database of lobbying reports, congressional ethics records, and campaign finance filings that is made available on the Internet in a searchable, sortable and downloadable format, and compiled and maintained by one agency and under one roof. This database will allow Americans to see easily and in one place who their legislators are meeting with; who they are collecting money from and how much money they are collecting; and to review their ethics records.”

--President Barack Obama, “Restoring Trust in Government and Improving Transparency”
Adding semantic meaning to data

**Metadata**
The Tree, The House, The Door, Shirt, Pants, The Cat, The Dog

**Ontology**
The Door is a part of The House
Adding semantic meaning to data

Metadata

FTC (Organization)
600 Penn. Ave. (Street)
Washington (City)
DC (State)
20580 (Zip Code)

Address Ontology

Organization
Street
City
Zip Code

Structured Text

Report a General Complaint

Your complaint, comment, or inquiry may help us spot a pattern of law violations requiring law enforcement action. It also may help us recognize and tell people about bigger trends affecting consumers. We do not resolve individual consumer disputes.

About a Company, an Organization, or a Business Practice

- **Online**: Use our secure complaint form.
- **Phone**: Call our toll-free helpline: 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261
- **Mail**: Write to: Federal Trade Commission Consumer Response Center 600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW Washington, DC 20580

About Identity Theft

- **Online**: Use our secure complaint form.
- **Phone**: Call our toll-free Identity Theft helpline: 1-877-ID-THEFT (1-877-438-4338); TTY: 1-866-653-4261
- **Mail**: Write to: Federal Trade Commission Consumer Response Center 600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW Washington, DC 20580

About Spam & Phishing

- **Email**: spam@uce.gov
  Forward unsolicited commercial email (spam), including phishing messages, directly to the FTC at spam@uce.gov. These messages will be stored in a database law enforcement agencies use in their investigations.

National Do Not Call Registry
Connecting the Dots for Elected Officials

Each type of database may contain many individual databases. For example, letters to agencies may be stored in dozens of different agencies.
Economic Advantages of Standardization

- **Non-Computer**
  - Weights & measures
  - Electrical plugs & voltages
  - Roads
  - Train tracks
  - Shipping containers
  - Product bar codes

- **Computer**
  - HTML
  - CSS
  - HTTP
For U.S. Sen. Richard Shelby, the largest earmark recipient for fiscal year 2009

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<th>Description</th>
<th>Bill</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Indivs</th>
<th>PACs</th>
<th>Lobbying</th>
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Source: Center for Responsive Politics, downloaded February 23, 2010
Arkansas State expenditures across all state agencies, FY2010

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<th>Agency</th>
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Why focus on tracking humans vs. things

- Tracking things
  - Budgets
  - Legislation
  - Conflicts of interest

- Tracking animate objects (people and organizations)
  - Humans hold political power, objects do not
  - Humans are the ultimate objects of democratic accountability
  - Humans are at the center of debates on fair information practices
Timeliness of the Problem

- Public records problems must be solved on a first-things-first basis
- The hierarchy of public records problems
  - File cabinet era
  - Computer era
  - Internet era
  - Semantic web era
- We are moving up the hierarchy
  - Examples from researching Congress
  - Examples from 9/11 and connecting the existing data silos
The Connecting Dots Model for National Security

- Technical Standards
- Institutions
- Disclosure Norms and Incentives
Technical Standards

- Technical standards for national security
  - NIEM
  - UCore (Who, What, When Where)
- Technical standards for democratic accountability
  - Keep UCore
  - Substitute DIEM for NIEM
NIEM Core and Domains

Universal Core (UCore)

UCore covers the most commonly agreed upon and universal concepts of Who, What, When, Where.

Institutions

• Connecting the dots for national security
  ○ Very complex, mixed network/hierarchical structure
  ○ At the top, as coordinator and catalyst: the Program Manager for the Information Sharing Environment located in the Executive Office of the U.S. President

• Connecting the dots for democratic accountability
  ○ Executive agency model (NIEM and ISE)
  ○ Commission/Checks & Balances Model (DIEM and DDC)
Linking NIEM and DIEM Around UCore

NIEM
- International Trade
- Immigration
- Person Screening
- Intelligence
- Emergency Management
- Justice

UCore

DIEM
- Gifts
- Travel
- Campaign Contributions
- Legislation
- Earmarks
- Budgets
- GAO Reports
Disclosure Norms and Incentives

- National security data tends to be confidential; democratic accountability data public
- Subject of national security data tend to have fewer means to view and correct faulty data
- National security users tend to be government employees, not investigative reporters and other private citizens
- Agents identified in national security databases tend to have a greater means and incentive to hide their identities
- National security databases need more contextual information about agents
- The politically powerful have more to lose from democratic accountability databases
- Reciprocity tends to be stronger for national security data sharing
- Trade secrets are a bigger issue for democratic accountability data
The capability to connect the dots means thresholds for data disclosure of the politically powerful should be rethought.

Technology may allow anonymization of identifiers in ways that transform the disclosure vs. privacy debate.

Technology may allow us to replace more privacy-invasive identifiers (such as addresses) with less invasive identifiers (such as political districts).
Setting Priorities

- **Start with:**
  - Least controversial
  - Least costly
  - Highest impact

- Unfortunately, these variables are weakly correlated

- Start developing the data standards with existing institutions such as OMB and the Congressional committees with jurisdiction over government reform.

- Add agencies with valuable connecting-the-dots data, such as the SEC and USPTO, to the democratic reform agenda
For more information

Web address:
www.isolon.org

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contact@isolon.org