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Defining the demos in the technological age: how biometrics can reshape the conception of ‘the people’

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Abstract

Biometric identification technologies are taking the world by storm in spite of its century-old history. Their inclusion in the democratic state however, raises a number of questions pertaining in part to privacy and the surveillance power of the state, but also increasingly to the fact that these technologies have an impact on the way that the democratic state interacts with and defines its subjects. Biometrics can be found to both further democratic inclusion and exclusion with some states seemingly more interested in exclusion whereas others apply these technologies to widen inclusion and access to civil, social, and political rights. These technologies are contributing towards a redefinition of citizenship. Biometrics have exacerbated many non-democratic justifications provided for the exclusion of some groups of people and has also offered conditional, and highly privileged, inclusion for others. In this way, it is contributing towards a reshaping of how we understand "the people" and, as I argue, the boundary problem of democratic theory.