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VOTER'S GUIDE

DATA
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TIME: NOW
PLACE: ONLINE

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HOW DO POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS USE MY DATA TO PERSUADE ME?

You probably see political advertisements everywhere: from the websites you visit, to your social media feed, to leaflets on your doorstep. It seems everyone is talking about the issues that are most important to you! And it's not by chance.

The more political campaigns know about you, the better they can influence you — whether that means recruiting you as a volunteer, encouraging you to donate, swaying your vote, or getting you out to the polling station on election day.

Luckily for them, information about who you are and how to target you is easy to find. Political advertisements are increasingly shaped by the information you leave behind in your life, both online and offline. Political campaigns gather this data about you from lots of different places and use it to create a profile of you. This profile helps them figure out which candidates or issues you would find most appealing, in order to target you with messages tailored to you.

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HOW DO POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS USE MY DATA TO PERSUADE ME?

Based on your profile, a campaign might send you personalised political messages via:

- a flyer delivered to your house
- an exclusive Snapchat filter
- a prompt to download an official campaign app
- an advertisement on YouTube or your Smart TV
- an email, text message, or phone call
- a version of a candidate's website

You might be thinking: 'Aren't more specific, relevant adverts better for me?' Keep in mind that today's digital campaigning methods might use information about your habits and interests that you would prefer to keep private. This might include details that don't even seem political, like the websites you browse or what you buy in shops.

You have the right to know how your information is being used, especially if it is being used to persuade or influence you before an election. Tactical Tech has researched some of the most popular data-driven campaign techniques to reach, profile, and persuade voters in elections around the world.

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WHERE DO CAMPAIGNS GET INFORMATION ABOUT ME?

Politicians, political parties, and political campaigns are interested in your spending habits, your lifestyle, your online activity, and much more. How do they get access to this data? A number of ways: it can be provided by major data brokers, big tech companies, voter databases, and more.

Big Tech Companies: Companies like Google and Facebook are gateways to your data for political parties. Google and Facebook dominate the digital advertising industry because they have so much data about their billions of users. This rich data means that customers who want to advertise on Google or Facebook – including politicians and political parties – can buy adverts that are targeted to their preferred audiences. Political parties and candidates spend a lot of their budgets on these 'micro-targeted' ads.

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WHERE DO CAMPAIGNS GET INFORMATION ABOUT ME?

Data Brokers and Political Consultants: Political campaigns can also get data about you by purchasing it from data brokers. These are large companies that often possess incredibly in-depth data about millions of people around the world. Politicians can use this detailed data to find out more about their supporters or potential voters. Along with data brokers, political consultants also offer campaigns their own tailored data sets on voters.

Other Sources: Political campaigns can also get data about voters from lots of other sources including official voter registration records, supporter databases, polls and surveys done through canvassing and phone-banking, government records of turnout and winning candidates from past elections in your area.

Even things like where you shop, what you buy, what you post online, your credit score, and your education give political parties more information that can be used to understand and reach you.

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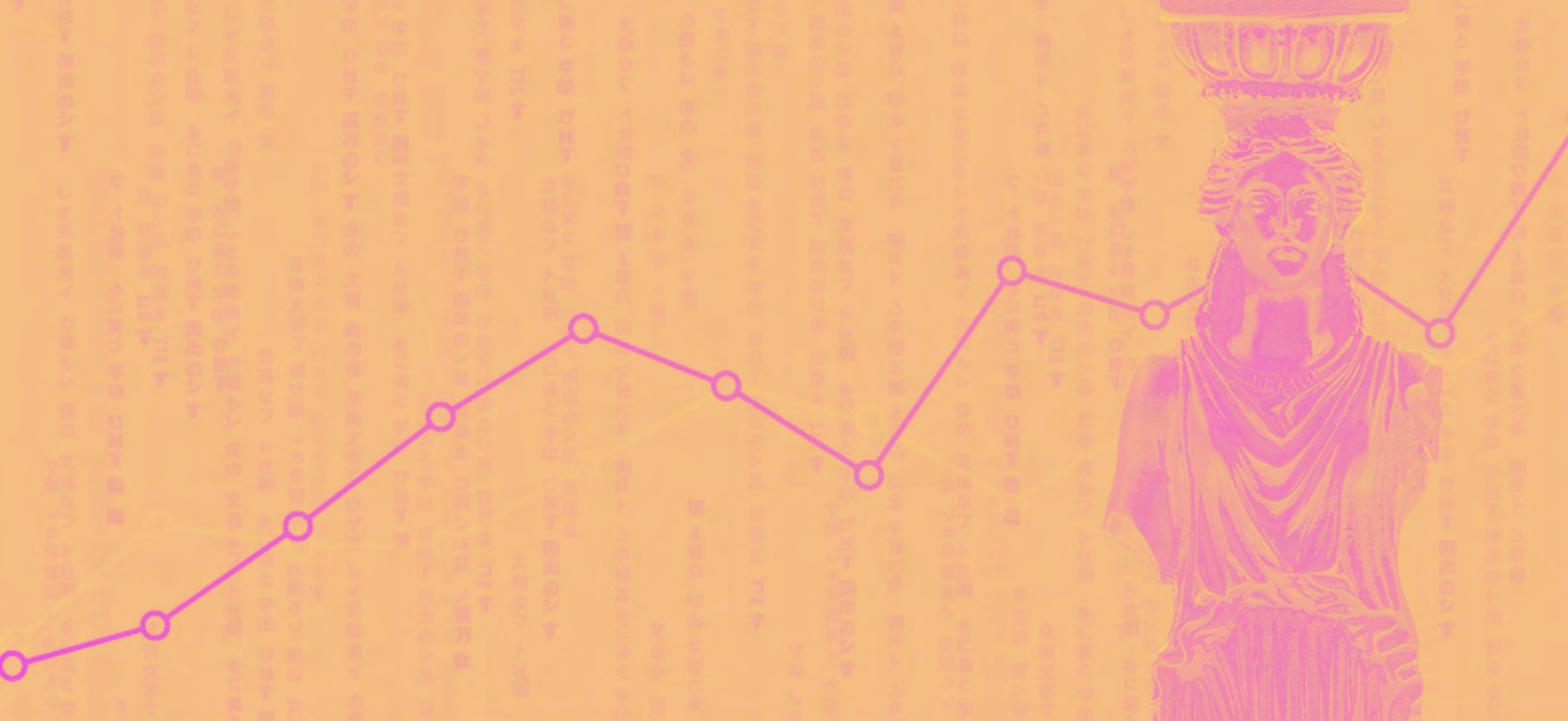
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SWITCH UP YOUR ROUTINES

If your consumer behaviour is so valuable to political campaigns, why not mix it up?

You could give your loyalty card a break, occasionally pay with cash in brick-and-mortar stores, or think twice before signing up for regular newsletters by giving up your contact details.

If you'd like to explore how consumer data is used to fuel campaigns, check out: <https://ourdataourselves.tacticaltech.org/posts/consumer-data>

TIP#1

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WHAT DOES MY SOCIAL MEDIA SAY ABOUT ME?

Did you Tweet about a climate change demonstration? Do you use exclamation marks in your Facebook posts to show your disbelief? These may sound like harmless details, but hints like these can reveal a lot about you to political parties who want to reach you. By analysing your posts on social media, there are companies that can decide what makes you tick and click – whether you like angry or sad messages, blue or orange colours, or how you feel about an issue.

This method of figuring out what you're interested in based on what you're saying on social media (and how you're saying it) is called digital listening. 'Listening' to people's social media can help candidates know what the public thinks about them. It can also assist campaigns in identifying the issues that voters care about, and can even pinpoint political influencers by learning who's shaping the political narrative.

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WHAT DOES MY SOCIAL MEDIA SAY ABOUT ME?

After analysing what people are saying on Twitter about anything from Brexit to marijuana legislation, a campaign might, for example, create three messages: one to target those who are tired of talking about it, and one each for those who have a strong opinion one way or the other.

Another way that campaigns can collect data on your online engagement is by testing different variations of an advert or email. This is called A/B testing. The campaigners can then analyse what content, colours, and headlines lead you to donate, like, or share on your social media.

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WHAT DOES MY SOCIAL MEDIA SAY ABOUT ME?

Companies or organisations are not always clear about whether they monitor social media behaviour, which makes it difficult to know whether you are being 'listened' to.

You should, however, assume that by talking in a public online space such as Twitter, or if you have a public Facebook account or contribute to public Facebook groups, your posts, clicks, and responses can be used to understand what political issues you want to talk about or how you feel about an issue.

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CUSTOMISE YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA PREFERENCES

There are a few steps you can take on social media platforms to try to reduce how much your data can be used to tailor the political adverts you receive.

Check your profile options and settings for ways to change the ad and marketing preferences and/or delete your activity history across different platforms to make them less linked to your online activities.

Read: <https://datadetoxkit.org/en/privacy/profile> to learn more about how to do this.

TIP#2

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DID I AGREE TO SHARE MY DATA?

Political parties have to ask your permission before collecting your personal data. But when you click 'I accept' on a website, app, or newsletter, it might not be clear exactly what personal data you're agreeing to give away. The small print in privacy policies or disclaimers that are unclear or hidden from sight can make it difficult to know exactly what data is being collected and how it is being used.

You might have seen the same advert follow you around everywhere you go on the internet. It's no coincidence! Companies use a combination of cookies and tracking pixels (along with other tools) to track users as they browse the internet or access services on a mobile phone. These tools also allow advertisers to pursue you with a targeted ad.

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DID I AGREE TO SHARE MY DATA?

A political party can follow your click on their Facebook advert linking to their website, for example, and then see what parts of their website you visit, such as their education policy or donations page. Using this information, they can then target you with an advert based on those subjects, and this same advert will appear on other unrelated websites you browse.

Whilst the organisations who run the websites must request your consent to do this, you most likely click 'accept all cookies' because this is often the only way to quickly access the information on the site. By doing so, you may lose control over how your personal data is used.

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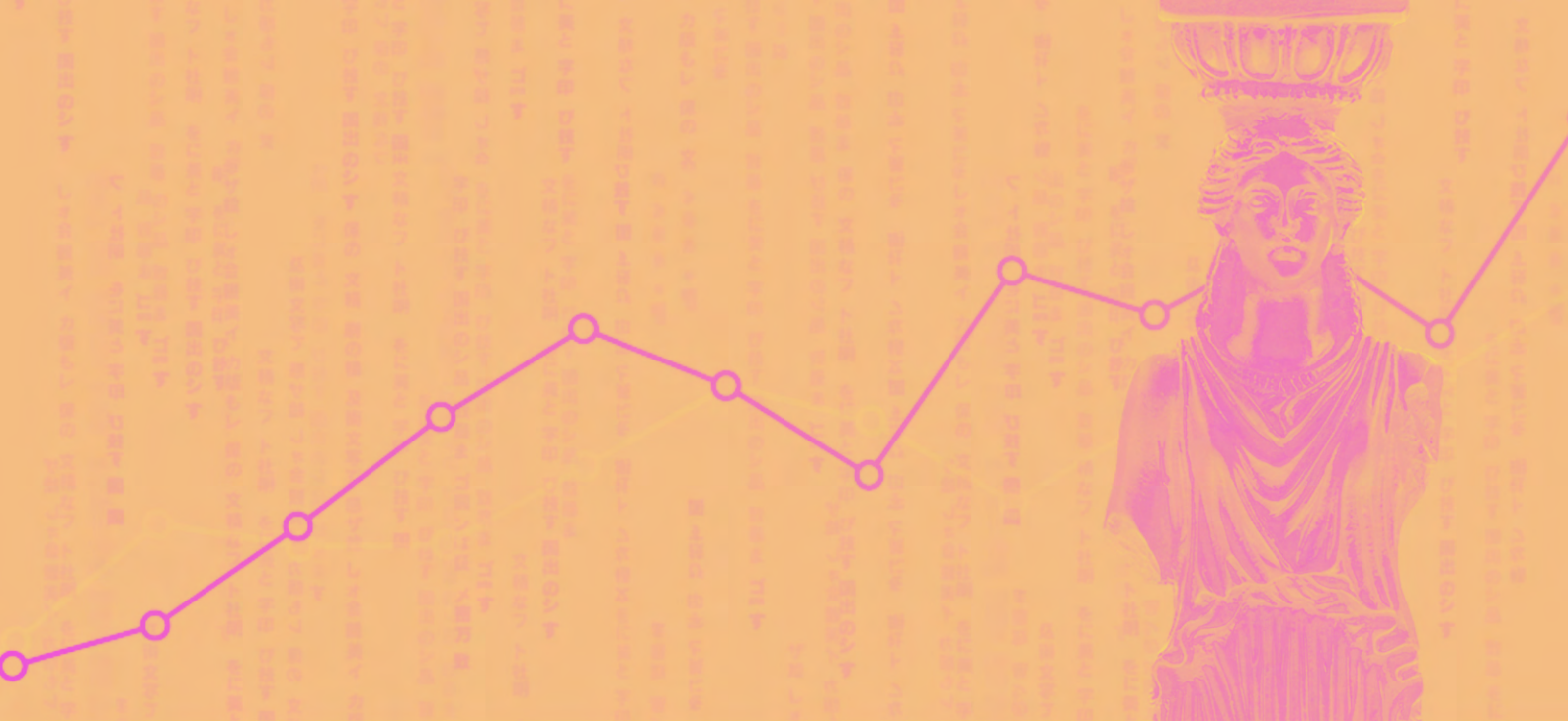
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LOCK DOWN YOUR MOBILE AND DESKTOP BROWSERS

To get ahead of some of those online trackers used by political parties:

Use Private/Incognito Browsing modes when possible

Install browser extensions like Privacy Badger: <https://www.eff.org/privacybadger> and uBlock Origin: <https://github.com/gorhill/uBlock#ublock-origin> to keep trackers in check. (As these are browser extensions, you will still see targeted adverts in apps you use.)

Enable “Do Not Track” in your browser settings (websites don’t have to comply with this, but it sends a signal that you’re not OK with being tracked)

Use the Data Detox Kit’s other resources to take control of ad tracking

TIP#3

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HOW ARE POLITICAL ADS TARGETED AT ME?

Social media platforms have access to all kinds of potentially useful data about voters, and this makes them great places for political campaigns to advertise. Political campaigns can use Facebook (which owns Instagram), Google (which owns YouTube and Google Search), and Snapchat to target you with specific ads based on categories like your age, location, and gender. But they can also use very specific information such as what kind of content you engage with on their platforms, including what you 'Like' or comment on.*

In addition, social media platforms offer special services specifically for political campaigns. You might not know that Facebook lets political campaigns upload their voter lists to Facebook so they can send personalised adverts just to the people on those lists. On top of that, Facebook even enables political advertisers to target people with similar profiles to the voters on their lists.

*Note: As of November 2019, many companies, including Facebook, Twitter and Google, are revising (or reportedly considering revising) their policies toward political advertisements on their platforms.

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Facebook has also helped political campaigns optimise and target their ads based on users' psychological traits. The Cambridge Analytica case showed how a data firm used large amounts of Facebook data to categorise voters into profiles based on how 'open, conscientious, extroverted, agreeable, or neurotic' they were thought to be. Whilst most people have heard of Cambridge Analytica, this technique, and others like it, are used by many other companies to profile you as a consumer or voter.

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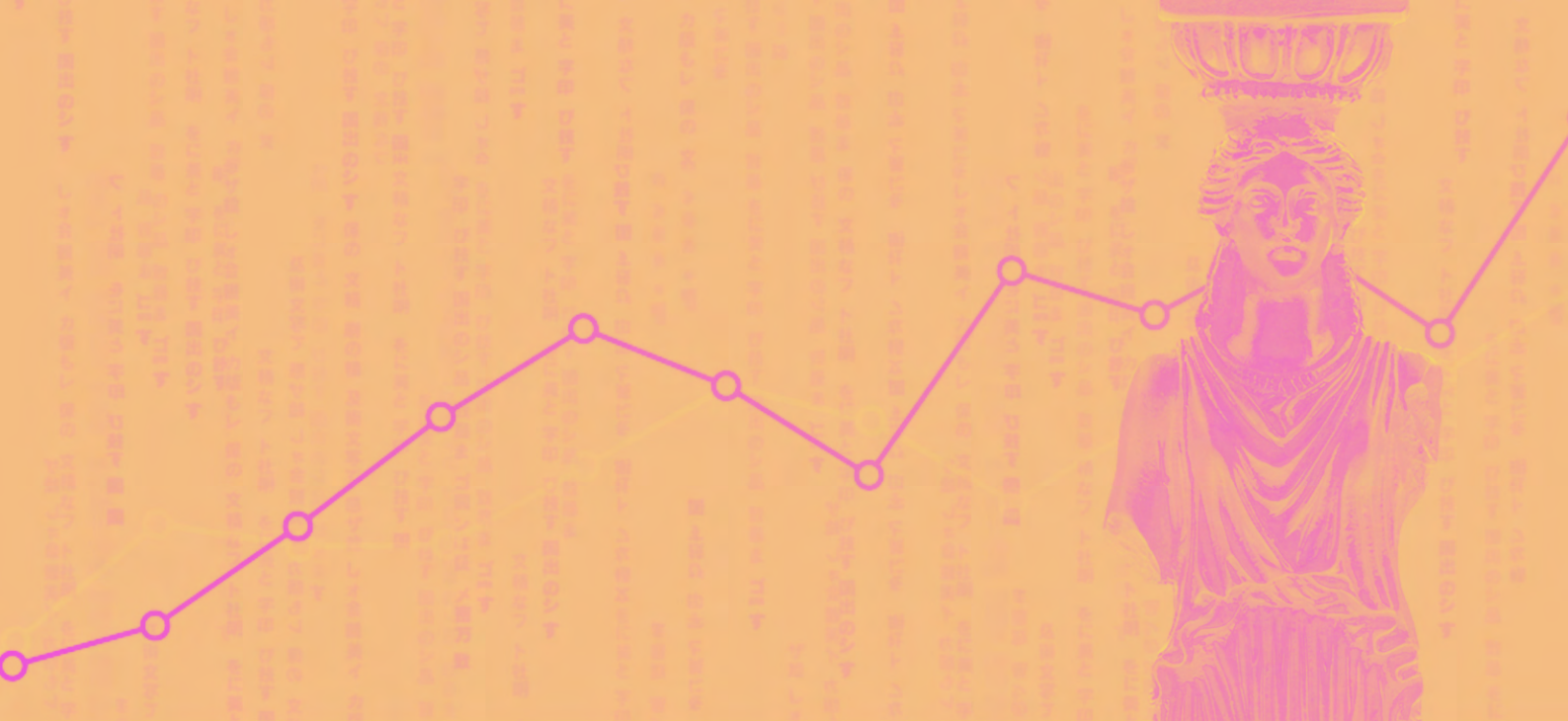
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STAY INFORMED

To gain more insight into the political ad landscape you can check out:

Facebook Ad Library:
<http://www.facebook.com/ads/library/>

Google Transparency Report:
<http://www.transparencyreport.google.com/political-ads/overview>

Snap Political Ads Library:
<http://www.snap.com/en-US/political-ads/>

You can use these resources to see how much money campaigns spent on which ads, in what locations, as well as some basic demographic targeting information. These transparency tools, however, are still not available in all countries where political ads are supported .

You can also explore the Ad.Watch: <https://ad.watch> project which provides a different take on Facebook's Ad Library, or consider installing the Who Targets Me: <https://whotargets.me/en> extension to help crowdsource political ads on Facebook.

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HOW DO CAMPAIGNS KNOW WHERE I STAND (LITERALLY)?

Your location says a lot about you. Just knowing which city and neighbourhood you live in can suggest which issues matter to you most. So, too, can information about where you go.

Your presence at a particular pub on a Friday night or a place of worship, for instance, may convey information about your attitude toward certain issues, which is valuable for campaigns pitching political platforms. By knowing where you stand, they can choose to target you with specific messages — or ignore you outright.

Location data isn't just information about where you are on a map. It also paints a picture of what you like to do and what you're interested in. Some form of location data is being used to target people in virtually every election campaign around the world.

Nearly all campaigns use big tech platforms to geotarget advertisements (based on where you are and where you go), whether it's in a particular city, district, neighbourhood, or even an individual household.

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HOW DO CAMPAIGNS KNOW WHERE I STAND (LITERALLY)?

Geotargeting can take many forms, but the three most common types are:

- Creating a virtual 'geofence' around a specific point in the real world (such as a specific building or event) which triggers political messages to appear when individuals pass through it
 - Identifying approximate locations of voters based on their IP addresses
 - Using demographic information, such as postal codes, to target political messages at voters
- It's not just companies that specialise in political campaign services that do this type of location-based targeting. Other companies that collect or have access to location information have been known to provide that data to political parties.

For example, The Weather Channel App provided location information for political ads, while Snapchat is a popular platform for political parties to target voters with ads based on their location.

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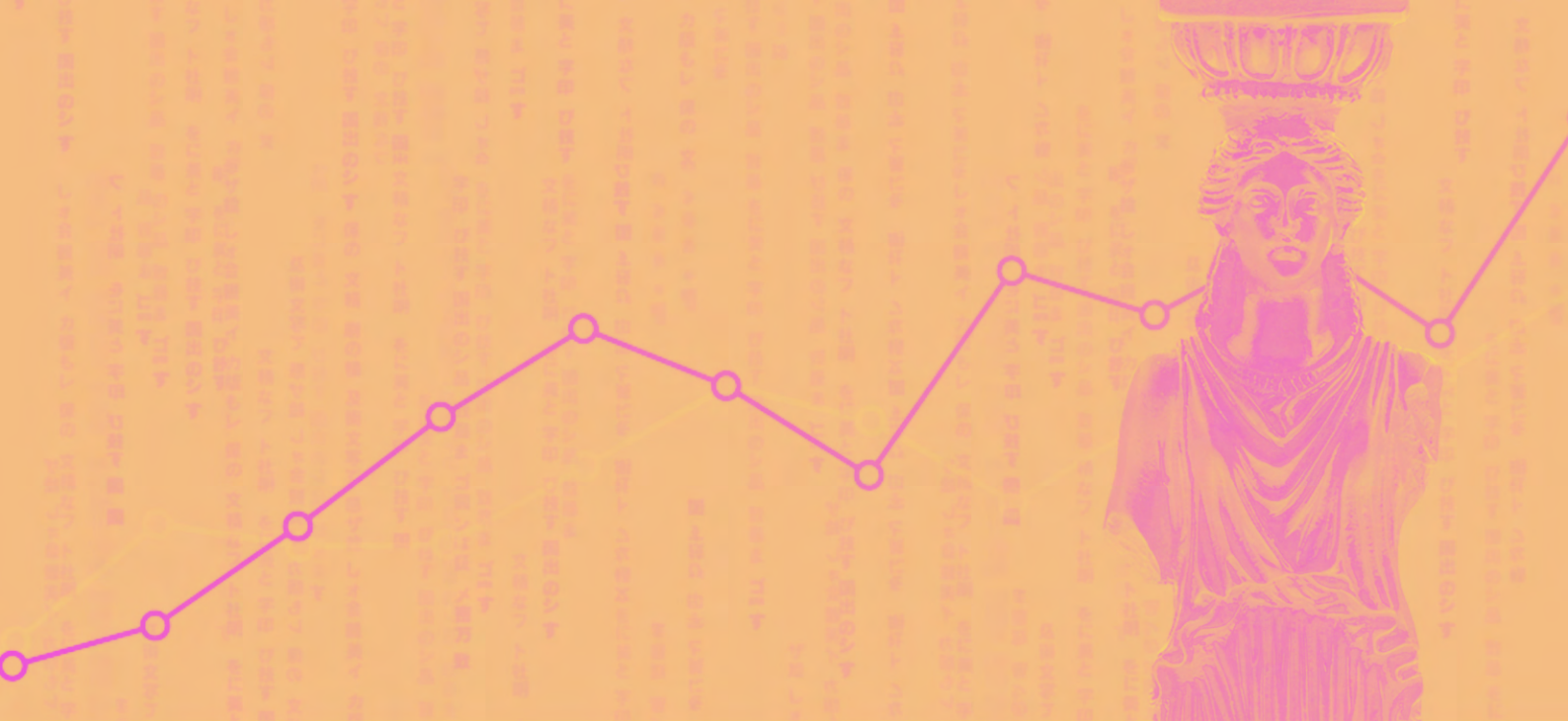
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LIMIT WHO KNOWS WHERE YOU ARE

Are you thinking about attending a political rally or demonstration, or simply going to your polling station?

Take some measures against location-based targeting by keeping your location data in check.

Clear your location footprints:
<https://datadetoxkit.org/en/privacy/essentials#step-2>
from your mobile devices.

TIP#5

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MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

If you want to do more to take control of how your personal data is used in elections, you can help by spreading the word.

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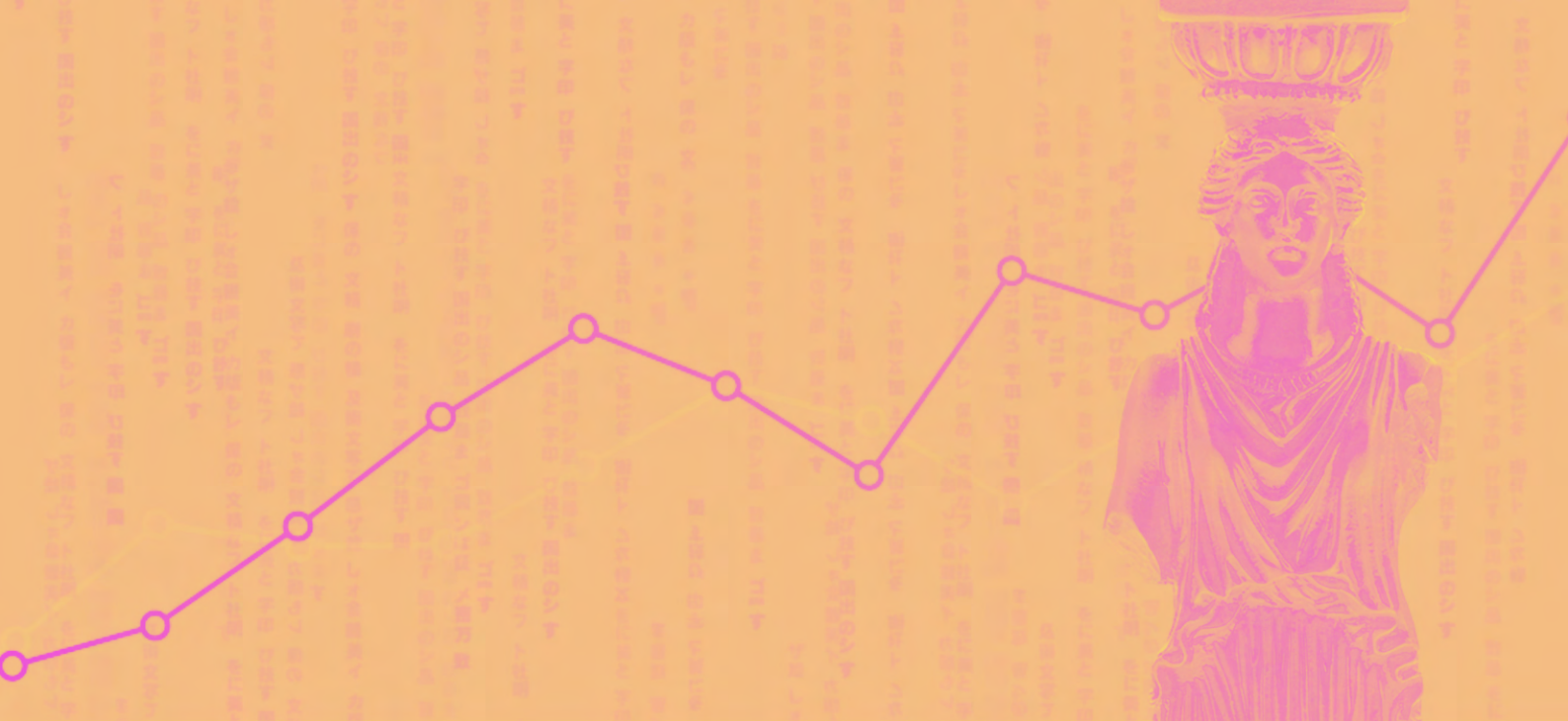
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SPEAK UP

Talk or write to representatives and political parties in your area and ask them how they are using your data in their political campaign.

If you're concerned about a particular practice, like location-based profiling for example, write or call electoral regulators to let them know how you feel.

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TAKE A STAND

The complex and unclear ways these campaign technologies are used can make you feel increasingly discouraged and disengaged from one of the most important processes in a democracy – the act of voting. When you understand how your data is being used to persuade you in an election, you can make more informed political choices. If you want to empower others to do the same, spread the word.

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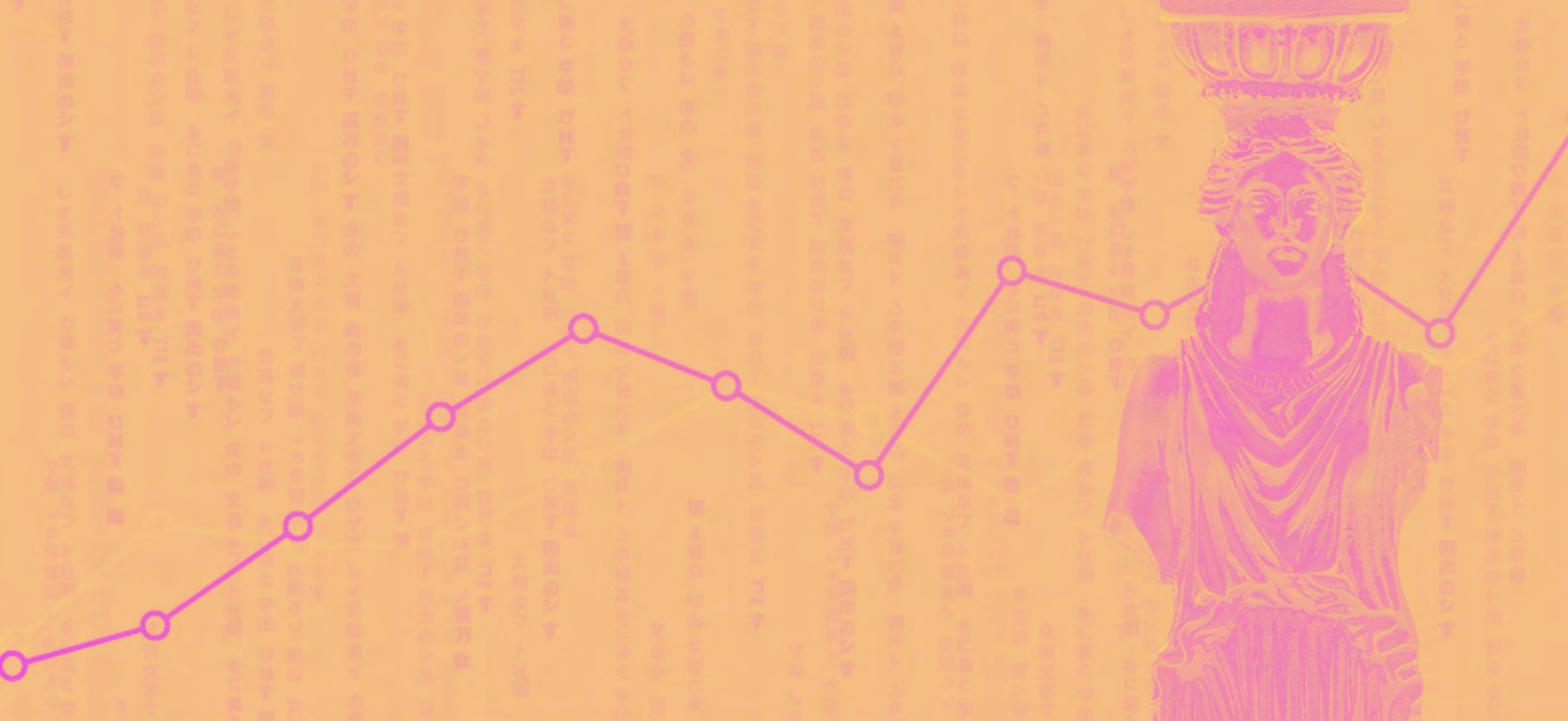
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TELL YOUR COMMUNITY

Talk to your friends and family about how your (and their) information is being used during campaign season and how it may change how they are being targeted.

The more people know and the more buzz is created around the topic, the more likely it is to be addressed, so please share this guide with others!

TIP#7

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