

Science, Scientific Discovery and Statistics
Seminar 1: Introductions and Discussion Activity

James Rice

POLS0060

Who I am

- ▶ **James Rice** (Seminar Leader)
- ▶ Email: `james.rice@ucl.ac.uk`
- ▶ PhD Candidate in political science at the University of Essex
- ▶ Research focus: climate change misinformation — how it spreads, who it affects, and how it shapes business, politics, and policy
- ▶ Background in philosophy of science, social science, and economics

Office hours

- ▶ Office hours: Tuesdays 10:30-11:30am, B.17, 29-30 Tavistock Square
- ▶ Booking details are available on SPPBOOK on Moodle
- ▶ Booking on SPPBOOK is essential - 15 minute slots.
- ▶ Use office hours for:
 - ▶ Questions about the course material
 - ▶ Help thinking through research ideas
 - ▶ Clarifying statistics or methods you're unsure about

Today's discussion

- ▶ No formal exercise this week
- ▶ Instead, we'll start by discussing some foundational questions about science and politics
- ▶ You'll work in small groups, then we'll discuss as a class

Small-group discussion (5-7 minutes per question)

Instructions

- ▶ Form groups of 3-4
- ▶ Nominate one person to take notes
- ▶ Be ready to share 1-2 key points back to the class

Discussion Question 1

What does “science” mean to you?

Prompts (if useful):

- ▶ What makes something scientific?
- ▶ Is science a method, a body of knowledge, or an institution?
- ▶ Where do evidence, measurement, and explanation fit in?

Discussion Question 2

Can we study politics / IR “scientifically”?

Prompts (if useful):

- ▶ What would count as evidence in politics or international relations?
- ▶ Can we test theories, or only interpret events?
- ▶ What are the limits of measurement, prediction, and causal inference here?

Discussion Question 3

Should we explore questions in politics / IR that cannot be studied “scientifically”?

Prompts (if useful):

- ▶ Are some questions inherently normative (about what *ought* to be)?
- ▶ What might be lost if we only ask measurable questions?
- ▶ How should non-scientific inquiry relate to scientific inquiry?

Whole-class discussion

- ▶ Each group: 1-2 key takeaways
- ▶ Where did groups agree or disagree?
- ▶ What do these differences imply for doing political science?

End Seminar 1