

PredictaGov

Interdisciplinary oversight panel – one proposal, four provisions, four experts

THE PROPOSAL

The government proposes eliminating traditional economic advisory boards. In their place, a centralized algorithm—"PredictaGov"—will analyze real-time mobile GPS tracking, credit card activity, and short-term market trends to automatically adjust economic regulations, healthcare funding, and public spending.

P1 · EXPERT 1, FRY

PredictaGov runs about 40,000 correlation tests each night and acts on any result at $p < 0.05$ within 24 hours. The pilot's headline finding: absenteeism down 0.3%, $p = 0.00001$.

P2 · EXPERT 2, KAHNEMAN

All 3,141 counties are ranked monthly on health outcomes. The best and worst 50 receive automatic funding changes, each with a published explanation of the result.

P3 · EXPERT 3, LUYENDIJK

The advisory board closes – its interviews, minutes and site visits end. Policy is optimized against one national index of GDP growth and headline inflation.

P4 · EXPERT 4, NATURE

GPS and card records for 38 million citizens are licensed from three private firms. Predictions are pushed back to citizens as app alerts – "your area is spending above trend."

Your task – fifteen minutes

1. Read the proposal and the four provisions together. *2 min*
2. Work alone: complete the three sentences on your own sheet, in writing. *6 min*
3. Round-robin: read your flag aloud, 30 seconds each, experts 1 to 4 in order, no interruptions. *3 min*
4. Decide as a panel: reject PredictaGov, or approve it with conditions? Write the one condition all four of you would sign. *2 min*
5. Whole class: the knowledge question at the bottom of your sheets. *2 min*

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Data & methods – your text: Fry, “What Statistics Can and Can’t Tell Us About Ourselves”

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P1 · THE PROVISION YOU ANSWER

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FROM YOUR TEXT · FRY’S POINT

A five per cent threshold means one test in twenty finds evidence for something that is not there. Run enough tests and flukes are certain – Peto’s aspirin “worked” for Capricorns, not Libras.

Your flag – finish each sentence

1. “Provision 1 will raise false alarms because...”

2. “Before acting on a flagged result, Fry would require...”

3. “The pilot finding is weak grounds for action because...”

Knowledge question: how does the use of numbers, statistics, graphs and other quantitative instruments affect the way knowledge in the human sciences is valued?

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Sampling & the mind – your text: Kahneman, “The Law of Small Numbers”

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P2 · THE PROVISION YOU ANSWER

All 3,141 counties are ranked monthly on health outcomes. The best and worst 50 receive automatic funding changes, each with a published explanation of the result.

FROM YOUR TEXT · KAHNEMAN’S POINT

Small samples yield extreme results more often than large ones. The kidney-cancer map put rural counties at both the top and the bottom – an artifact of population size, not a cause.

Your flag – finish each sentence

1. “The counties at both extremes of the ranking will mostly be...”

2. “That happens because...”

3. “Publishing an explanation for each result is dangerous because...”

Knowledge question: how does the use of numbers, statistics, graphs and other quantitative instruments affect the way knowledge in the human sciences is valued?

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Models & authority – your text: Luyendijk, on economics and the Nobel prize

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P3 · THE PROVISION YOU ANSWER

The advisory board closes – its interviews, minutes and site visits end. Policy is optimized against one national index of GDP growth and headline inflation.

FROM YOUR TEXT · LUYENDIJK'S POINT

Economics claims the authority of an exact science while skipping the fieldwork other social sciences do. Greenspan could not imagine bankers ruining their own bank. What GDP leaves out is a political choice.

Your flag – finish each sentence

1. "Closing the advisory board removes..."

2. "That kind of knowledge mattered in 2008 because..."

3. "Calling the national index neutral hides..."

Knowledge question: how does the use of numbers, statistics, graphs and other quantitative instruments affect the way knowledge in the human sciences is valued?

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Digital traces & ethics – your text: the Nature editorial on computational social science

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P4 · THE PROVISION YOU ANSWER

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FROM YOUR TEXT · THE EDITORIAL’S POINT

Digital traces are left disproportionately by wealthier people, were never collected for research, and algorithms change the very behavior being measured.

Your flag – finish each sentence

1. “The people missing from this data are...”

2. “Once citizens receive the alerts, the system is really measuring...”

3. “Consent and data ownership are a problem here because...”

Knowledge question: how does the use of numbers, statistics, graphs and other quantitative instruments affect the way knowledge in the human sciences is valued?