

What is IR?

I. A Policy Question

**II. Rationale for Theory in
International Relations**

III. Elements of Theory

IV. Types of Theory

**V. Main Factors in Dominant
Theories**





I. A Policy Question.....

Q: Would the spread of democracy in the Middle East make that region stable and more favorable to American interests?

Q: What would be the key factor(s) needed to determine your answer?

II. Rationale for Perspectives/ Theory in IR

- **Why Perspectives?**

- **Need to simplify to understand**
- **Generalizations and uniformity**

- **What are Perspectives?**

- **Key factors causing a particular class of events**
- **Start from important political questions**
- **Then posit HYPOTHESES**



Hypotheses

- **Hypothesis: a potential *but unproven* answer to one of these questions**
- **LOGICAL CHAIN: Problem → Hypothesis → Testing of Facts → Theory**
- EX: What causes terrorism?**

Hypothesis: Poverty causes terrorism.

THEORY: a set of concepts and hypotheses which posit *consistent* cause and effect relationships between various social and political factors
(NOTE: Perspectives generally don't rise to the level of theory)



III. Elements of Theory

- **DESCRIPTION**
 - **What type of phenomena? What is ‘terrorism’? What constitutes ‘poverty’?**
 - **EXPLANATION**
 - **Statements of causation (“Because of...” statements)**
 - **Proliferation of Poverty → Increased Terrorism**
 - **PREDICTION**
 - **“If poverty persists in the Third World, we are likely to have increased terrorism (more 9-11’s) in next few decades”**
 - **POLICY PRESCRIPTION**
 - **“Terrorism can be avoided through policies of economic development”**
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Limitations on Theory Development in Political Science

Q: What is 'science'?

● **Political Questions subject to:**

- **Multicausality**
- **Human unpredictability**

● **Methods in IR:**

- **Rationalist**
- **Constructivist**



Two Simple Rules....

- **Correlation does not equal causation**
 - **Spurious correlation**
 - **EX: Many tropical countries are poor, therefore tropical climates cause poverty**
 - **Necessary and sufficient causes**
 - **Plastic explosives**
 - **Germany and the Holocaust**
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IV. Types of Theory

- **EMPIRICAL:** theory which attempts to explain observed phenomena without value judgment (“WHAT IS...”)
 - **NORMATIVE:** theory that deals with values, norms, ethics, morals, etc. (“WHAT SHOULD BE...”)
 - Line between the two not always clear!!!
 - Key concern is with **EMPIRICAL** value of theories.
 - **Ethics in IR -- Universalism, Relativism, and Pragmatism**
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Main Perspectives in IR

REALIST

Struggle for Power

IDENTITY

Ideas & Identity



Interactions & Institutions

LIBERAL