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
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"
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
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
Main Perspectives in IR

REALIST
Struggle for Power

IDENTITY
Ideas & Identity

Interactions & Institutions
LIBERAL