



# Theory and Realism

POL3: INTRO TO IR

# I. Theories

- ▶ Theory: statement of relationship between causes and events
  - ▶ i.e. story of *why* a relationship exists
- ▶ Two components of theories
  - 1) Dependent variable, also called “outcome variable”
    - ▶ The *outcome* the model is trying to explain
    - ▶ e.g. war
  - 2) Independent variable, also called “explanatory variable”
    - ▶ The phenomena thought to explain the dependent variable
    - ▶ e.g. alliance commitments

*Theories model a proposed relationship*

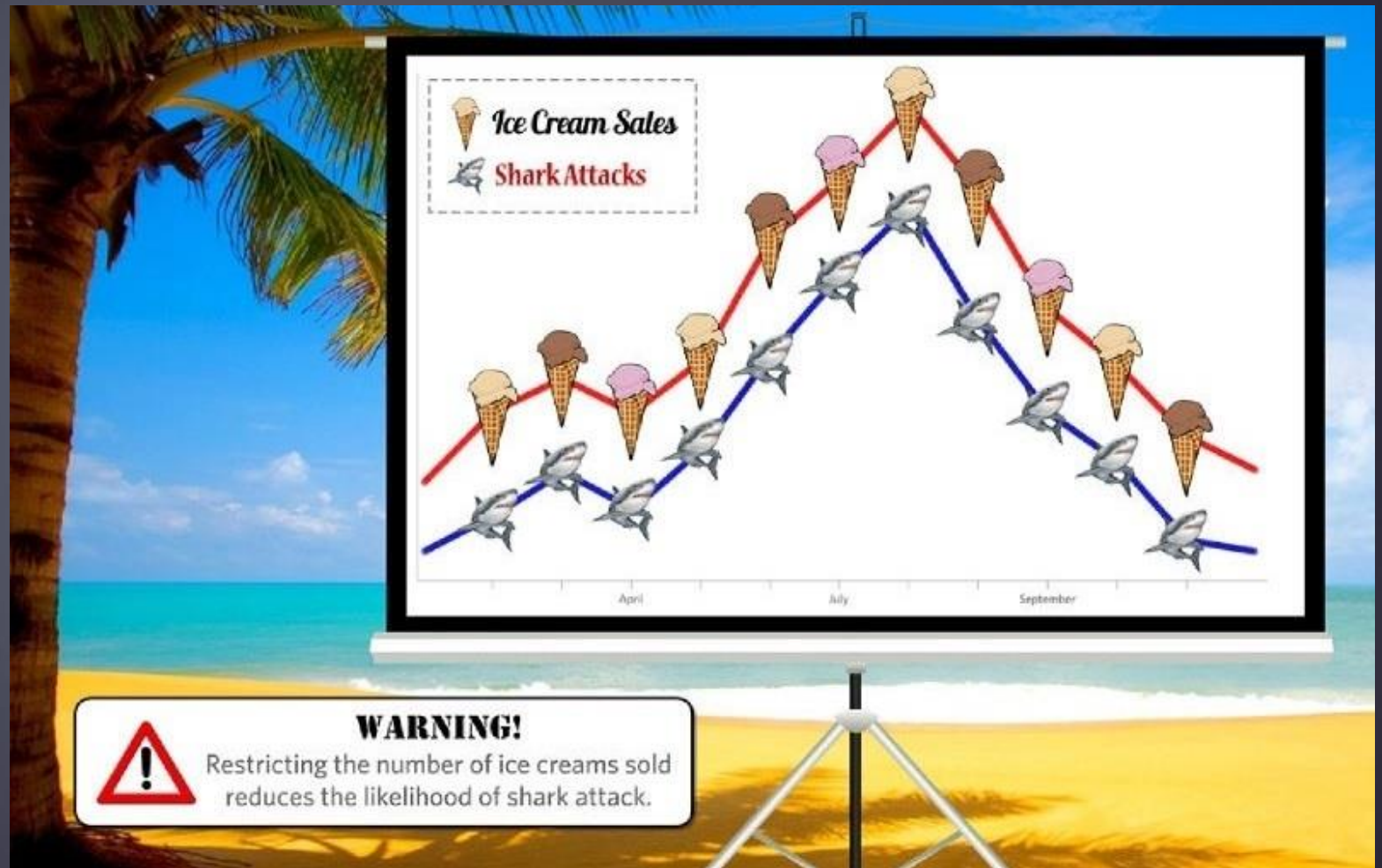
IV (concept)

causal theory →

DV (concept)

# Basic rules of Theories

- ▶ Causal
- ▶ NOT driven by data



# Testing theories

- ▶ Hypothesis: *falsifiable* statements questioning particular relationships among two or more variables
  - ▶ e.g. As a state signs more defense treaties, it is more likely to engage in war.
- ▶ “Empirical” Tests
  - ▶ *Qualitative* - look at specific cases
    - ▶ e.g. World War I
  - ▶ *Quantitative* – statistical analysis of large number of cases
    - ▶ e.g. all wars from 1945-2005 (CoW dataset)

# Theory: Making sense of IR

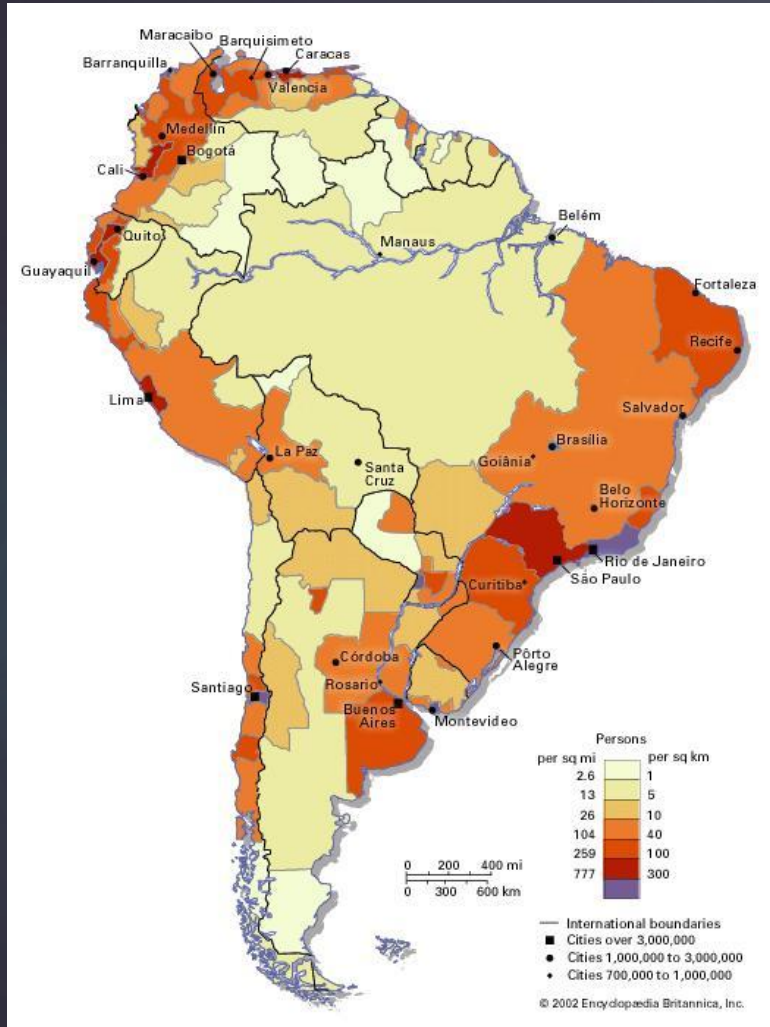
- ▶ What does theory tell us?
  - ▶ Explain why things happen and suggest best course of action in international relations
- ▶ A theory guides what/where to look for explanations
  - ▶ e.g. map choice - how we view the map affects what explanations we create

# Where to look for explanations? Physical vs. Political Maps

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# Where to look for explanations? Population vs. Resource Maps





# *Small Group Theory Building*

- ▶ On your own, briefly think of a theory to answer one of the following questions:
  - ▶ 1) Why do countries become democracies?
  - ▶ 2) What makes states trade with each other?
  - ▶ 4) What determines the intensity of a war?
- ▶ In groups of 2-3 who answered the same question:
  - ▶ 1) Individuals will share their theory with the group
  - ▶ 2) Groups will pick one theory
  - ▶ 3) What variables would you use to test the theory?
    - ▶ What level of analysis?

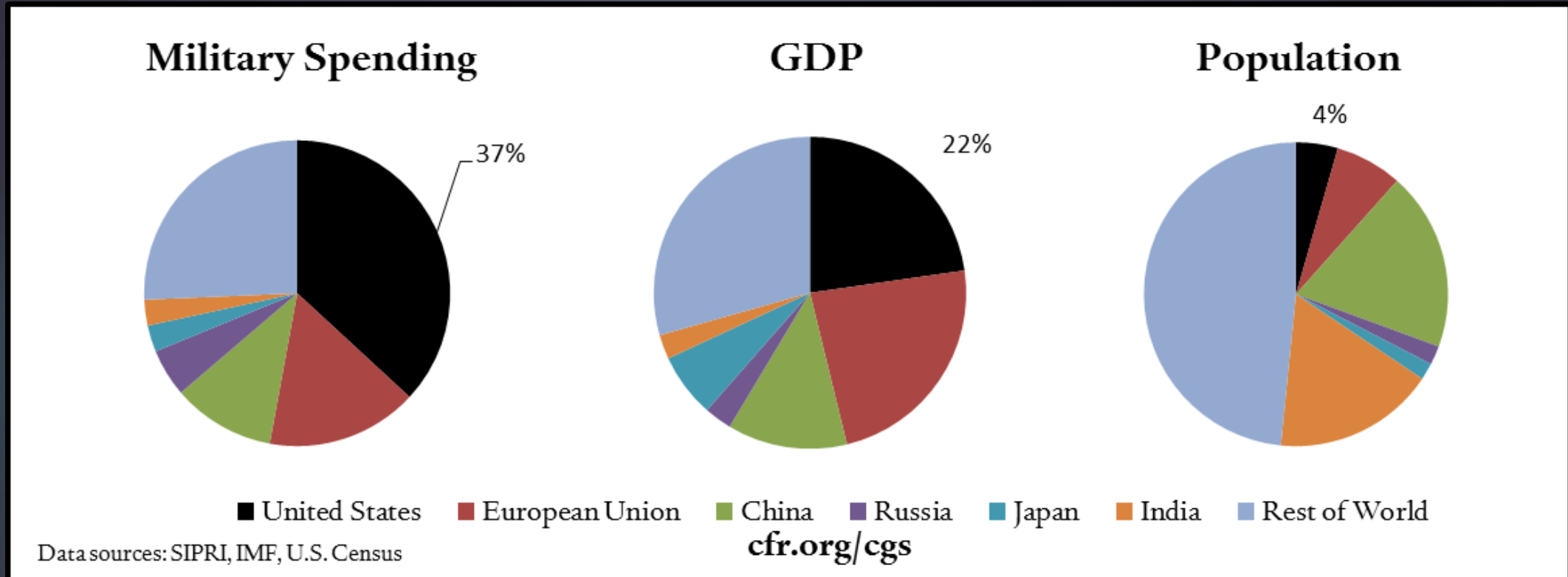
# II. IR Perspectives

- ▶ Main *perspectives* of International Relations
  - 1) Realism/Neorealism
  - 2) Liberalism/Neoliberal institutionalism
  - 3) Constructivism

# III. Realism/Neorealism

- ▶ Realism: explains IR in terms of power
  - ▶ Focus on how the world *really* is instead of how it *ought* to be
- ▶ Realist tradition
  - ▶ Individuals are selfish
  - ▶ States pursue their national interests through *power*
- ▶ Power: capability to get another actor to do what it does not want to do
  - ▶ Realists focus on material power
    - ▶ Long-term: GDP
    - ▶ Short-term: military
  - ▶ Geopolitics: use of geography as element of power

# Relative power capabilities



Share of world (1) military spending, (2) GDP, and (3) population in 2013

# The Melian Dialogue

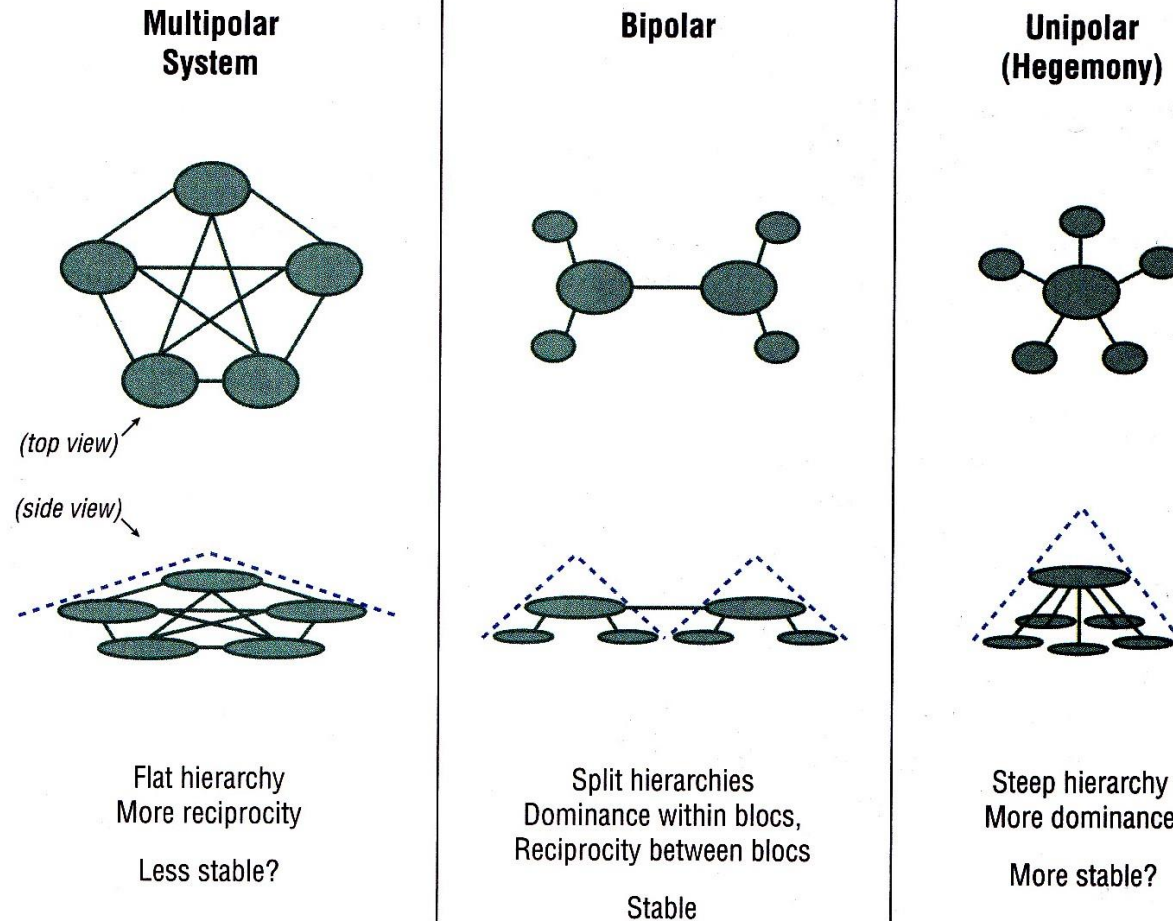
- ▶ “[T]he strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must”
  - ▶ Athenians to Melians - Thucydides, 431 BC

# (neo)Realism: Assumptions

- 1) Anarchy
  - ▶ No central authority in international system
- 2) States are *dominant* actors in world politics
  - ▶ States are *unitary* actors (i.e. act with one voice)
  - ▶ States are *rational* actors (i.e. maximize utility functions)
- 3) Force
  - ▶ Force is usable and an effective tool
- 4) Pessimistic view of human nature (classical realism)
- 5) Structure of international relations (neorealism)
  - ▶ Distribution of power
    - ▶ Multipolar, Bipolar, Unipolar (i.e. hegemonic)

# Distributions of Power

**FIGURE 2.4** Power Distribution in the International System



\*from Goldstein and Pevehouse, 6<sup>th</sup> Ed.

# (neo)Realism: Implications

- ▶ Constant threat of war
- ▶ State security is main interest of states
- ▶ *Self-help* system
  - ▶ No outside force can secure states
  - ▶ States must gain power to gain security
- ▶ States worry about relative gains
  - ▶ [Relative gains example](#)
- ▶ Security dilemma
  - ▶ Power for state A makes State B less secure...



# Relative gains example

- ▶ Absolute gains: benefit an actor receives
- ▶ Relative gains: benefit an actor receives *compared* to other actor
- ▶ Example
  - ▶ Player 1 receives \$50 while Player 2 receives \$100
- ▶ What situation would Player 1 select with a focus on *absolute* gains?  
What situation would Player 1 select with a focus on *relative* gains?
  - ▶ Situation #1: Player 1 gets \$50, Player 2 gets \$25
  - ▶ Situation #2: Player 1 gets \$100, Player 2 gets \$125
  - ▶ Situation #1: Player 1 loses \$10, Player 2 loses \$50
  - ▶ Situation #2: Player 1 loses \$5, Player 2 loses \$5
- ▶ Back to “[Realism: Implications](#)”

# (neo)Realism: Results

- ▶ Great Powers act to preserve and consolidate power
- ▶ Weaker states act to gain power and mitigate effects of more powerful states
- ▶ Strategies to respond to powerful states:
  - 1) Balance (defensive realism: conquest does not pay)
    - ▶ Mechanism = deterrence
    - ▶ Internal vs. External
    - ▶ “alliances of convenience”
  - 2) Bandwagon (offensive realism: conquest does pay)
    - ▶ States choose to ally with powerful state
- ▶ Propensity for war
  - ▶ Preemptive
  - ▶ Preventative



*Kenneth Waltz, 1924-2013*

# Balancing and Bandwagoning



- ▶ 1990 Iraq invasion of Kuwait
- ▶ International and regional powers allied to balance against Iraq



- ▶ 2003 renouncement of Libyan nuclear program
- ▶ In immediate aftermath of 2003 US invasion of Iraq, Libya and

# *Small group, small talk*

- ▶ With a partner, discuss:
  - ▶ Are country interactions best explained by material or ideas?
    - ▶ i.e. do military/economic capability or state characteristics/friendships and diplomacy best explain international relations