# POLS 318: Theories of IR

## Lecture 3 (01.27.2021): Issues in IR Theories

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Spring 2021

# Overview

# Review

## What we covered last meeting?

- Theory vs. History.
- Components: Assumptions.
- Variables and theory construction.
- Evaluation with evidence.
- Logical consistency and falsifiability.
- Competing explanations.

Questions?? Email me!

# Levels of Analysis

**Analytical Model - Requirements**

- Accurate, correlate with reality.
- Valid and simple explanation.
- Offer prediction.

**Multiple ways to explore issues**

- Multiple 'angles' to study events.
- Macro: system (economics).
- Micro: components (sociology, psychology).

# Levels of Analysis

## International System

# System level of Analysis

## Benefits

1. Comprehensive view of all interactions.
2. General explanation: coalitions, power shifts.
3. Study correlations within the system.
4. Parsimony.

# System level of Analysis

## Costs/Limitations

1. Underplay system components (nation-states).
2. Deterministic outcome (system-based).
3. Uniformity in states behavior (Realism $\rightarrow$ power).

*"By eschewing any empirical concern with the domestic and internal variation...the system-oriented approach tends to produce sort of "black box" or "billiard ball" concept of the international actors" (Singer, 1960)*

# Levels of Analysis

## Nation States

# Nation-state level of Analysis

## Benefits

1. Variation between actors.
2. In-depth study of states and general explanations.
3. Multiple factors lead to outcomes.

# Nation-state level of Analysis

## Costs/Limitations

1. Limit comparisons of actors.
2. Over-reliance on differences.
3. Goal-oriented behavior? (or compromise internal conflicts).

**Why Nation-state level?**

- More attention to *process* and goals.
- Internal effects: institutions, elections, etc.
- Richer, satisfactory explanations.
- Requires complex methodologies.

# Levels of Analysis

## Individual Leaders???

# Compare & Contrast

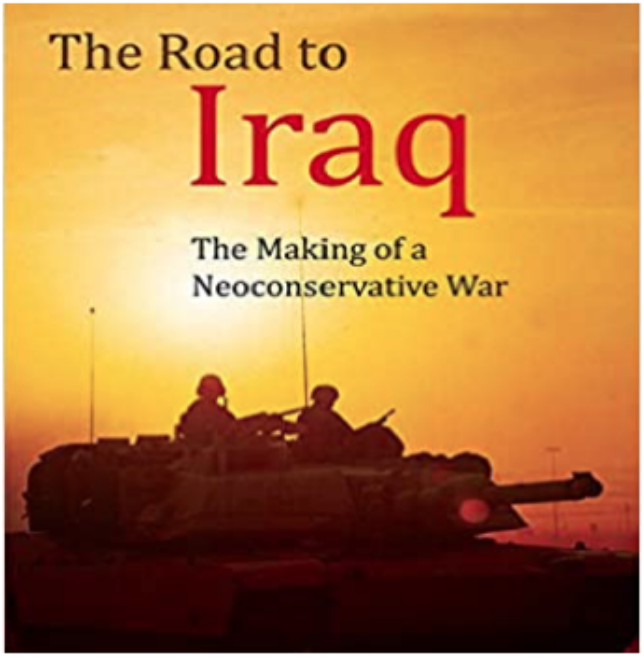
Theory construction:

- Description: comprehensive vs. depth and details.
- Explanation: state $>$ system.
- Prediction: Scholars vs. policymakers

**How war shapes different levels of analysis**?

- Two great powers collide $\rightarrow$ Bipolar system.
- Equal nation-states collide $\rightarrow$ Alliance dynamics.

# Apply Theories




# Practical IR Theories

**IR theories and foreign policy**?

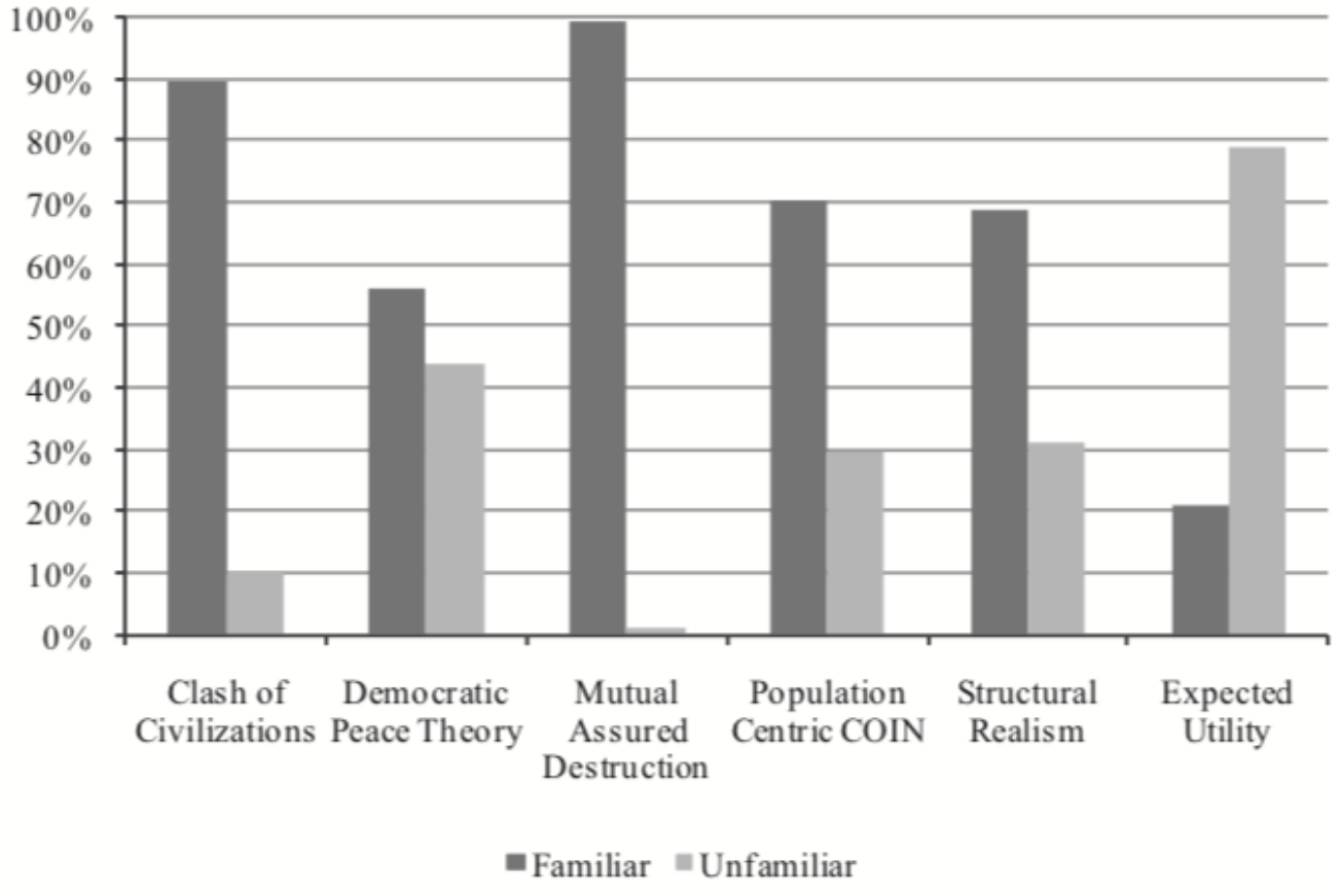
- Survey policymakers.
- General view - academic research as important
- Less useful when over-complicated.

**Avey & Desch (2014)**

- Survey policymakers' views of IR theory.
- 234 senior members of national security teams (Bush; Clinton, Bush).

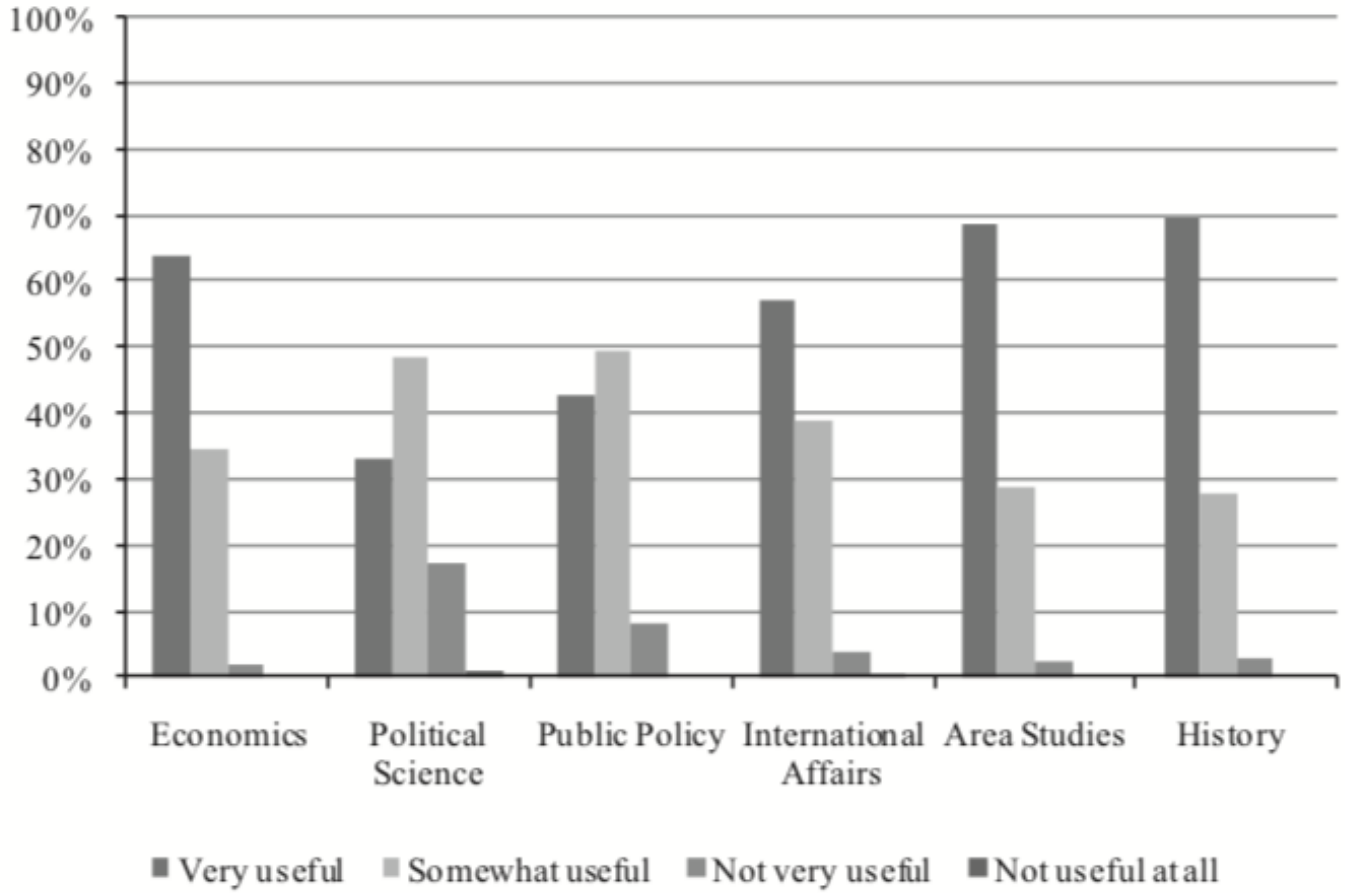
# Policymakers & Social Science Theories

## Knowledge



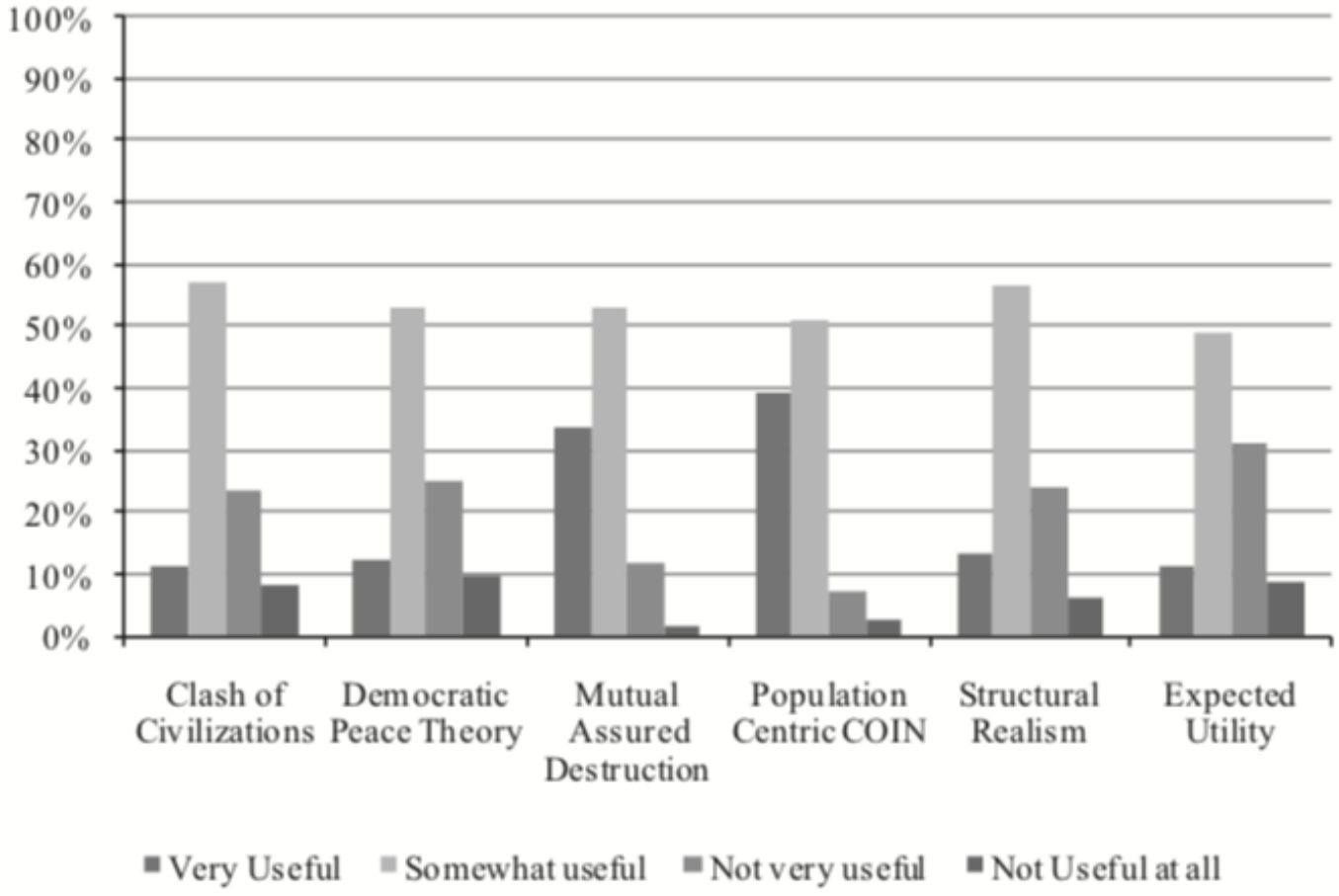
# Policymakers & Social Science Theories

## Useful - Disciplines



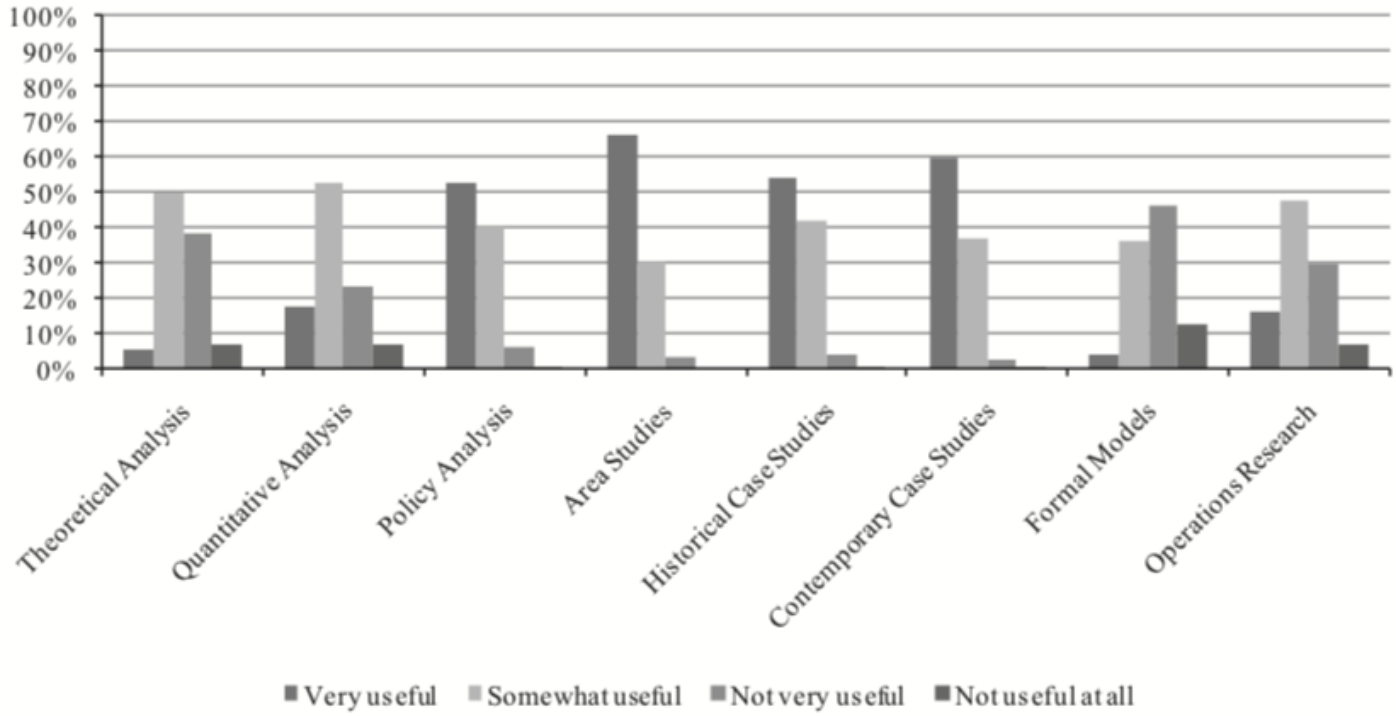
# Policymakers & Social Science Theories

## Useful - Theories



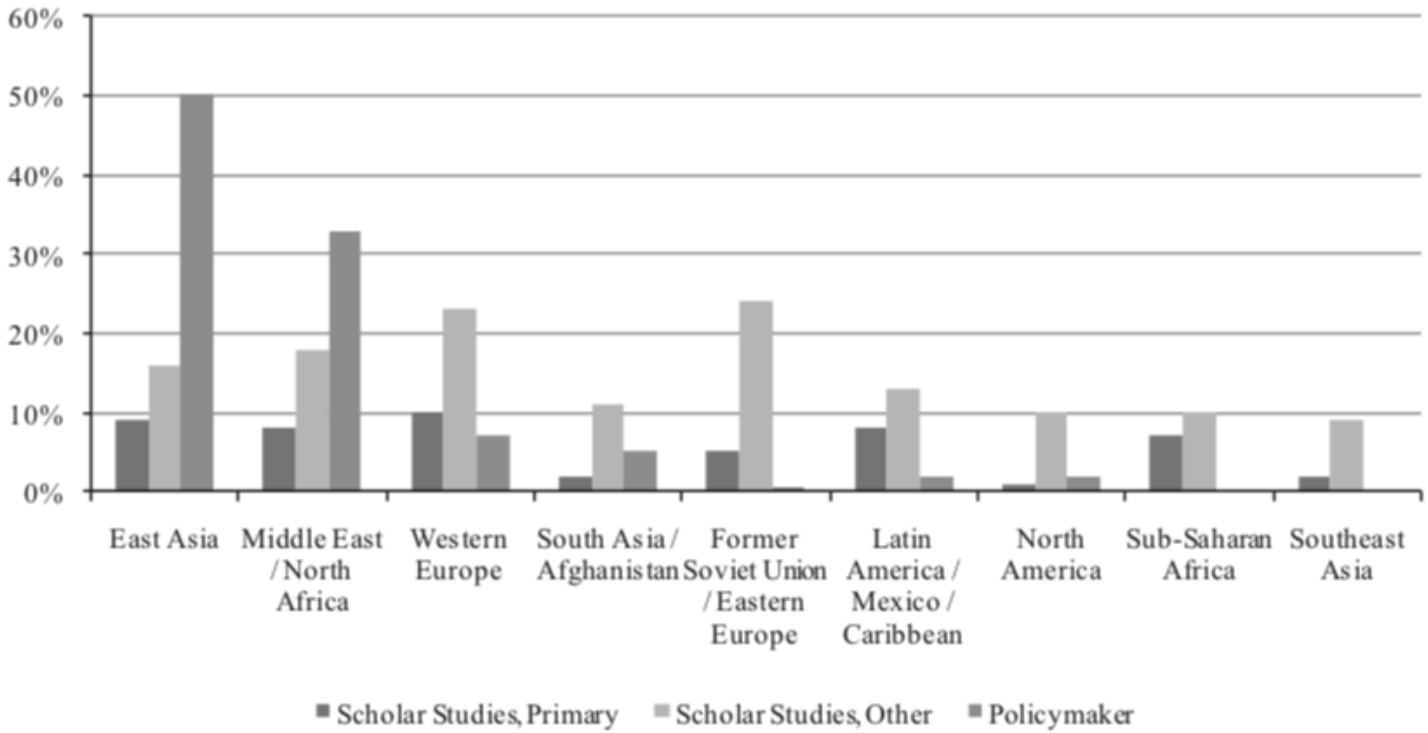
# Policymakers & Social Science Theories

## Useful - Methodologies



# Policymakers & Social Science Theories

**What is valued vs. what is studied**



# Policymakers & Social Science Theories

**When & how social science is used?**

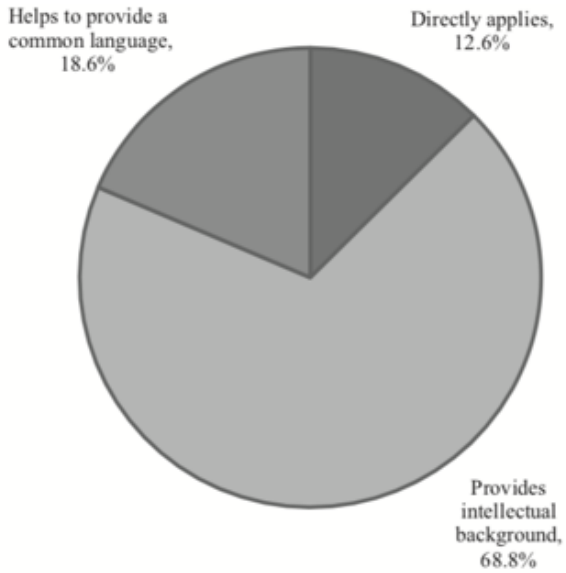



FIG 14. How Policymakers Relate Social Science Arguments to Their Work in the U.S. Government

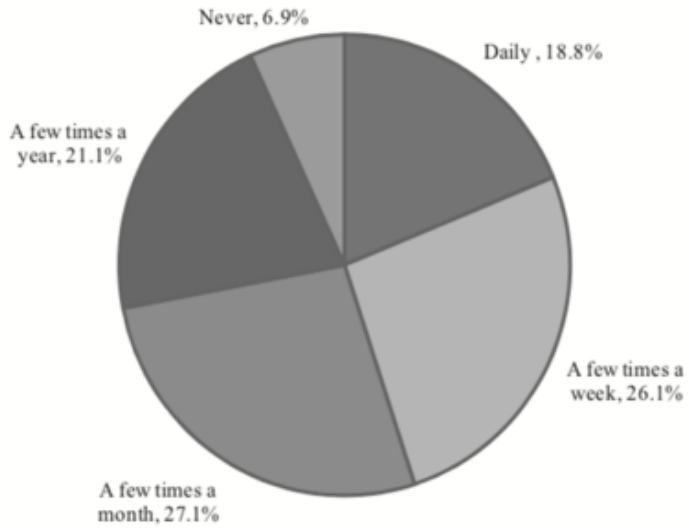
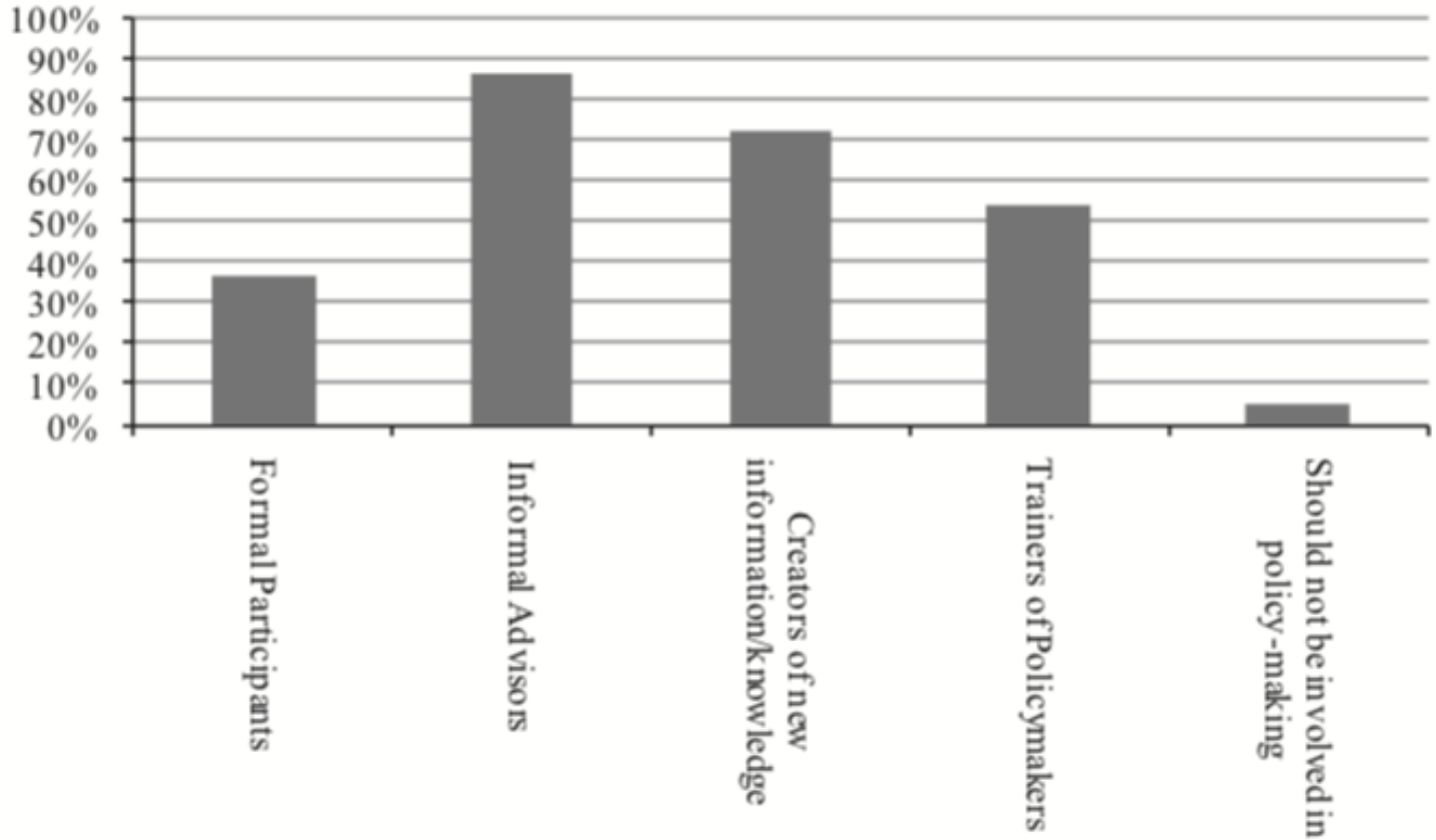



FIG 18. How Frequently Policymakers Relate Social Science Arguments to Their U.S. Government Work

# Policymakers & Social Science Theories

**Where scholars 'fit' in policy?**



# What can we do?

**Byman & Kroenig (2016)**

Suggestions for relevant IR research:

1. Practical and useful recommendations.
2. Focus - clarify certain situations.
3. Time relevant research.

**Steps to 'bridge the gap'**:

- Networking and personal connections.
- 'Inject' research into bureaucracy.
- Concise and clear reports in nonacademic outlets.

# Making IR theory useful

When will academic input be most relevant and accepted by policymakers?

- Shocks and Discontinuous events (Arab Spring, Soviet collapse).
- Policy failures (Iraq insurgency).
- Unexpected decisions - background knowledge (Somalia).

# Making IR theory useful

**Tamper expectations**

- What is being relevant?
- Policy set by senior officials.
- Low likelihood to substantially shape policy.
- Influence the *deliberation process*.

**Value for policymakers**

- Offer contrarian arguments to accepted view.
- Example: democratic peace.

# Recommended readings

More studies on IR theory and policymaking:


1. Hendrix, Cullen. (2020). "Do Policy Recommendations = Policy Relevance." *Duck of Minerva blog*, Link to post
2. Byman, D., & Kroenig, M. (2016). "Reaching beyond the ivory tower: a how to manual." *Security Studies, 25*(2), 289-319.
3. Jentleson, B. W., & Ratner, E. (2011). "Bridging the beltway – ivory tower gap". *International Studies Review, 13*(1), 6-11.