

# International Relations in the US Academy<sup>1</sup>

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Using two new data sources to describe trends in the international relations (IR) discipline since 1980—a database of every article published in the 12 leading journals in the field and three surveys of IR faculty at US colleges and universities—we explore the extent of theoretical, methodological, and epistemological diversity in the American study of IR and the relationship between IR scholarship and the policy-making community in the United States. We find, first, that there is considerable and increasing theoretical diversity. Although US scholars believe and teach their students that the major paradigms—realism, liberalism, Marxism, and constructivism—define and divide the discipline, most peer-reviewed research does not advance a theoretical argument from one of these theoretical traditions. There is no evidence, moreover, that realism and its focus on power relations among states dominate, or since 1980 ever has dominated, the literature. Second, although three times as many IR scholars report using qualitative methods as their primary approach, more articles published in the top journals currently employ quantitative tools than any other methodological approach. Third, there exists little epistemological diversity in the field: American IR scholars share a strong and growing commitment to positivism. Finally, there is a disjuncture between what American scholars of IR think about the value of producing policy-relevant work and the actual research they generate: few articles in top journals offer explicit policy advice, but scholars believe that their work is both prescriptive and useful to policymakers.

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Scholars of international relations (IR) periodically reinterpret the history of the discipline, assess current trends in the field, and speculate about or advocate particular directions for future research, but they rarely use systematically collected evidence to do so. To explore the content and trajectory of previous research, scholars typically look for patterns across prominent books and articles. To determine scholars' attitudes, they attend professional meetings, discuss papers, and converse with colleagues and former students. Waever (1998:692) got it right when he concluded, "The articles on the history of the discipline, slowly growing in number, are usually not based on systematic research or clear methods. They are, at best, elegant restatements of 'common knowledge' of our past, implicitly assuming that any good practitioner can tell the history of the discipline. However, without looking systematically at the past, we tend to reproduce myths."<sup>2</sup> Casual empiricism often produces interesting and insightful assessments of the discipline—especially when the scholar is widely read, open-minded, well connected, and experienced—but it also may lead to biased and inaccurate conclusions.<sup>3</sup>

Our approach to describing the IR discipline, as it is understood by scholars in the United States, employs several methods of political science research.<sup>4</sup> To gather evidence on the type of research published in the leading peer-reviewed journals, we use systematic coding criteria and scientific sampling techniques. To assess scholarly opinion about research, teaching, and the discipline, we surveyed all IR scholars in the United States.

The Teaching, Research, and International Policy (TRIP) Project is the most extensive data-collection effort to date on the subfield of IR, empirically analyzing relationships between pedagogy, scholarship, and international policy. In this paper, we draw from two major TRIP data sources to describe trends in the IR discipline from 1980 to 2007. First, we employ a new journal article database that includes every article published in the field's 12 leading journals. We categorize each article in terms of 29 distinct variables, including methodology, epistemology, issue area, substantive focus, author's gender, paradigm advanced, region under study, and many others.<sup>5</sup> Second, we analyze results from three surveys of IR faculty conducted in 2004, 2006, and 2008.<sup>6</sup> The journal article database allows us to track changes in the type of research published in the field,<sup>7</sup> while

<sup>2</sup> This problem is more acute when discussing teaching and curricula, where careful analysis is even rarer.

<sup>3</sup> For previous examples of research that uses systematically collected data to analyze the field, see Waever (1998); Martin (1999); Vasquez (1999); Bennett, Barth, and Rutherford (2003); Walker and Morton (2005); Blythe (2009).

<sup>4</sup> In this paper, we examine the discipline of IR as it is understood and practiced by scholars at US universities. We do so by looking at publications in leading journals (which are overwhelmingly published in the United States and populated by US-based authors) and by surveying faculty at US universities and colleges. Eight of the top 12 journals are published in the United States, and 76% of all articles published in those journals from 1980 to 2008 were written by authors affiliated with US institutions.

<sup>5</sup> For a complete list of variables, see the TRIP journal article database codebook (Peterson and Tierney 2009).

<sup>6</sup> The 2004 survey included all faculty at US colleges and universities who teach or conduct research in IR; the 2006 survey covered both US and Canadian IR faculty members; and the 2008 survey included faculty in 10 countries. We report only US responses in this paper. For a comparison of US and Canadian results, see Lipson, Maliniak, Oakes, Peterson, and Tierney (2007), and Maliniak, Oakes, Peterson, and Tierney (2007a). For a 10-country comparison, see Jordan, Maliniak, Oakes, Peterson, and Tierney (2009) and Long, Maliniak, Peterson, and Tierney (2010).

<sup>7</sup> A complete picture of IR research would include an analysis of books. The TRIP journal article database captures major trends in IR research and is probably more representative of the field than a random sample of books. First, the ideas, evidence, and methods used in most university press books often are published first in article form. Second, articles provide a larger number of observations, which minimizes random error. Third, and most important, the peer-review process for journal articles is arguably more rigorous than is the book-review process and so will more accurately reflect the type of work conducted in the field. For a similar argument, see Waever (1998). That said, books are an important outlet for IR research, and we are expanding the TRIP project to include a book database. These data will allow us to assess whether there are systematic differences between books and articles published in IR. As we show below, most scholars say they use qualitative methods, but top journals publish more quantitative than qualitative research. If a higher proportion of books than articles use qualitative methods, inferences about research practices in the field that ignore book publications might be inaccurate.

the surveys are useful primarily as contemporary snapshots that document the opinions and practices of IR scholars—their research, teaching, views of the discipline, and positions on contemporary policy issues.

These databases allow us to address at least two key questions regarding the state of the IR discipline in the United States. First, we explore whether there are open debates on theory, methodology, and epistemology or, alternatively, whether there are dominant approaches or even a single hegemonic approach to the study of IR. In recent years, several prominent scholars have issued a clarification call for a greater diversity of theoretical, methodological, and epistemological approaches. In this view, if a variety of approaches are represented in the major journals, IR research will produce richer, more “compelling analyses of empirical puzzles” (Katzenstein and Okawara 2002:177; see also Hirschman 1981; Sil 2000; Dunne, Smith, and Kurki 2007; Katzenstein and Sil 2008). In particular, these authors urge IR scholars to move away from treating the study of IR simply as a contest between the dominant theoretical traditions of realism, liberalism, Marxism, and constructivism and toward producing scholarship that explicitly draws from a wide range of theories (Katzenstein and Sil 2008:109).

At the same time, other scholars, mainly positivists, have argued that while methodological pluralism should be encouraged (for example, Martin 1999; Walt 1999; Bennett et al. 2003; Tarrow 2004), progress in the field is achieved, at least in part, by using rigorous (positivist) rules of evidence to winnow out failed theoretical approaches (for example, King, Keohane, and Verba 1994; Vasquez 2003; Brady and Collier 2004; Bennett and Elman 2006). Many contenders enter the ring, but fewer fighters should prevail; those survivors are the theories that best explain the largest slices of IR. In this view, there is less value placed on epistemological diversity. A narrowing of the theories in the field may be a cause for celebration rather than fear, just as we might welcome a narrowing of the theories about the causes of lung cancer as a precursor to a possible cure.

We find that there is considerable theoretical diversity within the American IR community and that diversity has grown over time. Interestingly, realism does not have the hold on the field it often is thought to have and, perhaps more strikingly, our data suggest it never did. IR scholars in the United States generally believe and teach their students that a handful of paradigms—specifically, realism, liberalism, Marxism, and constructivism—define and divide the discipline of IR, but most research published in peer-reviewed journals is what we label “non-paradigmatic.” That is, it advances theoretical arguments but not ones that fit neatly within one of the major paradigms. Indeed, the percentage of non-paradigmatic research has steadily increased, from 30% in 1980 to 50% in 2006.

In contrast, there is less methodological and virtually no epistemological diversity. We find, for example, that since 2002 more articles published in the major journals employ quantitative methods than any other approach. And when we compare this publication pattern with our survey data, we see evidence of bias: the percentage of articles using quantitative methods is vastly disproportional to the actual number of scholars who identify statistical techniques as their primary methodology. Similarly, there is a strong commitment to positivist research among American IR scholars; in each edition of the survey, a majority of scholars at US institutions described their work as positivist. Even more striking, when we look at the research that is published by the major journals, 90% of articles in 2006 were positivist, up from 58% in 1980.

Second, the TRIP databases allow us to explore the relationship between IR scholarship in the United States and the policy-making community. Many scholars have observed with dissatisfaction the limited influence of IR research on the practice of foreign policy. As Walt (2005:23) remarked: “Policy makers pay relatively little attention to the vast theoretical literature in IR, and many scholars

seem uninterested in doing policy-relevant work. These tendencies are unfortunate because theory is an essential tool of statecraft.” Others are less concerned by the scholar-practitioner divide. Hill (1994:16) writes, for example, that “[t]he more we strain for policy relevance, even if only to justify our existence in the eyes of society at large, the more difficult it becomes to maintain intellectual integrity.”

Here, our results confirm that there is a disjuncture between what American scholars of IR think about the importance of producing policy-relevant work and the research they generate. Many scholars believe that their work is both prescriptive and useful to policymakers, yet relatively few published articles offer explicit policy advice (and these are declining in number over time). Over the period covered in this study, for example, only 12% of articles offered explicit policy recommendations.

Following a discussion of our methodology for this study, we present our findings regarding major trends in theory, methodology, epistemology, and policy relevance within the US field of IR. We conclude with a brief discussion of the importance of our findings for the discipline.

### **A Brief Note on Methodology**

The data presented in this paper come from two main sources: faculty surveys and IR journal articles. For the 2004, 2006, and 2008 faculty surveys, we sought to identify and survey all faculty at 4-year colleges and universities in the United States who do research in the IR subfield or who teach IR courses. The overwhelming majority of our respondents have jobs in the departments of political science, politics, government, social science, IR, international studies, or professional schools associated with universities. Given our definition of “IR scholar”—individuals with an active affiliation with a university, college, or professional school—we excluded many researchers currently employed in government, private firms, or think tanks.

For the 2008 US survey, we used a list of 1,406 4-year colleges and universities compiled by *U.S. News and World Report (USNWR)*.<sup>8</sup> We then added the Monterey Institute and nine military schools that were not rated by *USNWR* but have a relatively large number of political science faculty who teach courses on IR broadly conceived. We aimed to include any scholar who teaches or researches transborder issues as they relate to some aspect of politics. For example, our population includes political scientists specializing in American politics who study trade and immigration. We adopt this broad definition because we seek to survey those scholars who create knowledge, teach students, and provide expert advice to policymakers about transborder issues—whether they adopt the “IR” moniker themselves or not.

We located IR faculty members at these schools through a systematic series of web searches, emails, and communications with department chairs, staff, and individual scholars. We identified 4,126 individuals who appeared to research and/or teach IR.<sup>9</sup> In all, 1,719 scholars responded to the US survey, either online or through the mail. Because there likely are additional individuals who were misidentified by our selection process but never informed us, our response rate of 41.7% is a conservative estimate.

<sup>8</sup> On the 2004 survey, see Peterson, Tierney, and Maliniak (2005a,b). On the 2006 survey, see Maliniak et al. (2007a), Maliniak, Oakes, Peterson, and Tierney (2007b).

<sup>9</sup> Of the 4,673 individuals originally contacted, we learned that 547 respondents did not belong to the sample because they had been misidentified or had died, changed jobs, or retired. These individuals were not included in our calculation of the response rate.

For the TRIP journal article database, we include data from articles in the 12 leading journals in the field. The journals selected were the most influential based on Garand and Giles's (2003) "impact ratings": *American Political Science Review* (APSR), *American Journal of Political Science* (AJPS), *British Journal of Political Science* (BJPS), *European Journal of International Relations* (EJIR), *International Organization* (IO), *International Security* (IS), *International Studies Quarterly* (ISQ), *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (JCR), *Journal of Peace Research* (JPR), *Journal of Politics* (JOP), *Security Studies* (SS), and *World Politics* (WP). *Foreign Affairs* and *Foreign Policy* were ranked higher than some of the journals on our list, but we did not include them because neither is peer-reviewed. In the IR-specific journals—*EJIR*, *IO*, *IS*, *ISQ*, *JCR*, *JPR*, *SS*, and *WP*—we code every article in every issue for every year of publication between 1980 and 2007.<sup>10</sup> In the general political science journals—*APSR*, *AJPS*, *BJPS*, and *JOP*—we code only those articles that fall within our broad definition of the IR subfield.

We collected data from the first and third issues of each journal for each year.<sup>11</sup> Our sample of 2,806 articles therefore comprises about 50% of the population of articles published in the 12 leading journals from 1980 to 2007. All statistics reported in this paper represent 3-year rolling averages to more easily discern trends and smooth out spiky data that result from a limited number of observations, quirks in the publication schedules of some journals, and the publication of special issues of journals, in which the articles tend to be more homogeneous than in typical issues.

To ensure intercoder reliability, we conducted two initial test rounds of coding, in which all researchers coded the same sample of articles. We compared our results and identified any discrepancies, which allowed us to clarify our rules and procedures. Two researchers then coded each article. If both coders independently agreed about the value of a particular variable within an article, we accepted the observation as part of the final data set. If the coders disagreed on the value of any observation, a senior coder independently coded that observation.<sup>12</sup>

### Paradigm Wars and the Study of International Relations

US graduate seminars are littered with readings that advance and critique the various "isms" in IR theory, most prominently, realism, liberalism, constructivism, and Marxism. Similarly, introductory IR courses and textbooks for undergraduates are often organized around these various paradigms.<sup>13</sup> For a time in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it seemed impossible to publish an article or successfully defend a Ph.D. dissertation at a US university if the researcher did not situate the work within and choose a side in the ongoing paradigm wars. Perhaps unsurprisingly, US scholars of IR today perceive a discipline that is largely defined by these major theoretical traditions and present this view of the field in the classroom (see Katzenstein and Okawara 2002:154).

<sup>10</sup> We code all articles in *WP*, categorizing it as an IR journal. We recognize that an increasing proportion of *WP* articles fall within the comparative politics subfield, but coding all articles nevertheless allows us to explore the waxing and waning of IR-related articles within the pages of this journal over time.

<sup>11</sup> We collected data for half of 2007, but because we calculated rolling averages, the last year reported in the paper is 2006.

<sup>12</sup> Overall intercoder reliability between the first two coders was over 80%.

<sup>13</sup> Some scholars have argued persuasively that constructivism is not a paradigm in the same way that realism, liberalism, and Marxism are (Waever 1998). Others maintain that constructivism is compatible with either realism or liberalism (Barkin 2003, 2010). We chose to adopt the language most often used in the discipline to describe the four major theoretical paradigms. In a 1998 special issue of *IO*, Peter Katzenstein, Robert Keohane, and Stephen Krasner asserted that constructivism had replaced Marxism as the most prominent alternative to realism and liberalism. This argument has since been repeated in numerous articles, books, and syllabi, becoming a social fact.

At the same time, many scholars bemoan the existence and reification of the major paradigms (see Lake and Powell 1999; Katzenstein and Okawara 2002; Buena de Mesquita 2005; Dunne et al. 2007; Katzenstein and Sil 2008), and several have recommended that the field of IR branch out from, or even abandon, paradigm-driven research. Instead of focusing on how to defend a preferred paradigm against potential challengers, they urge academics to produce “fresh theoretical perspectives” that consciously borrow insights from multiple paradigms—a practice some have termed theoretical synthesis or “eclectic theorizing” (Katzenstein and Sil 2008:109). By “trespassing” across research traditions, they argue, IR scholars are more likely to build compelling answers to important questions (Hirschman 1981).

Our analysis of IR research published in the scholarly journals does not support the perception that the major paradigms dominate the field. Instead, we find that most research is “non-paradigmatic,” meaning that the author advances a theory (for example, cognitive psychology, strategic choice, feminism, the English School, prospect theory), but it does not fit neatly within the major theoretical traditions. That said, only a small number of published articles qualify as synthetic—meaning that the author advances a theory that explicitly integrates variables or hypotheses from more than one paradigm. After examining the extent to which US IR scholars see the field as dominated by paradigms, the rest of this section addresses how these perceptions compare to the content of research published in general political science and IR field journals.

In the 2004 TRIP survey, we asked respondents to estimate the percentage of the IR literature devoted to each paradigm in the 1980s and 1990s. In the 2006 and 2008 surveys, we asked US scholars to estimate what percentage of the literature was devoted to each paradigm today.

Figures 1 and 2 reveal that IR scholars believe the literature is dominated by work that fits within one of the major paradigms. This is not surprising, since we have been telling each other and our students for years that realism and liberalism (and to a lesser extent constructivism and Marxism) are the organizing paradigms of the discipline.

Of the four major paradigms, the conventional wisdom holds that realism, which we define to include approaches in which power is the key explanatory variable, is the primary theoretical approach in IR.<sup>14</sup> Michael Doyle reflects this commonly held view when he claims, “Realism is our dominant theory. Most IR scholars are either self-identified or readily identifiable Realists” (Doyle 1997:41). Similarly, Legro and Moravcsik (1999) call realism “the oldest and most prominent paradigm in IR.” The IR scholars we surveyed also believe that around 30% of the literature fits within the realist paradigm, although the importance of realism has eroded since the end of the Cold War.

US IR scholars estimate that the percentage of literature devoted to other paradigms is smaller than that dedicated to realism. These students of the discipline believe that liberalism—which employs international institutions, interdependence, and/or domestic politics to explain international outcomes<sup>15</sup>—comprises

<sup>14</sup> More specifically, realist articles make the following assumptions: (i) states are the dominant actors in international politics; (ii) states are unitary, rational actors; (iii) states pursue their interests, which are defined in terms of power; and (iv) the international system is anarchic. For further discussion of how we define and measure realism (and all other variables), see Peterson and Tierney (2009).

<sup>15</sup> We code an article as liberal if its argument is built on the following assumptions: (i) the primary actors in IR are individuals and private groups, who organize and exchange to promote their own interests; (ii) states are comprised of societal actors (domestic and, sometimes, foreign), which transmit their demands to government officials authorized to act in the name of the state via domestic political institutions; (iii) the nature of the international system (including state behavior and patterns of conflict and cooperation) is defined by the configuration of state preferences rather than, for example, the distribution of power or the dominant system of economic production; and (iv) states may create institutions and develop shared norms, which serve some of the functions typical of institutions within domestic polities.



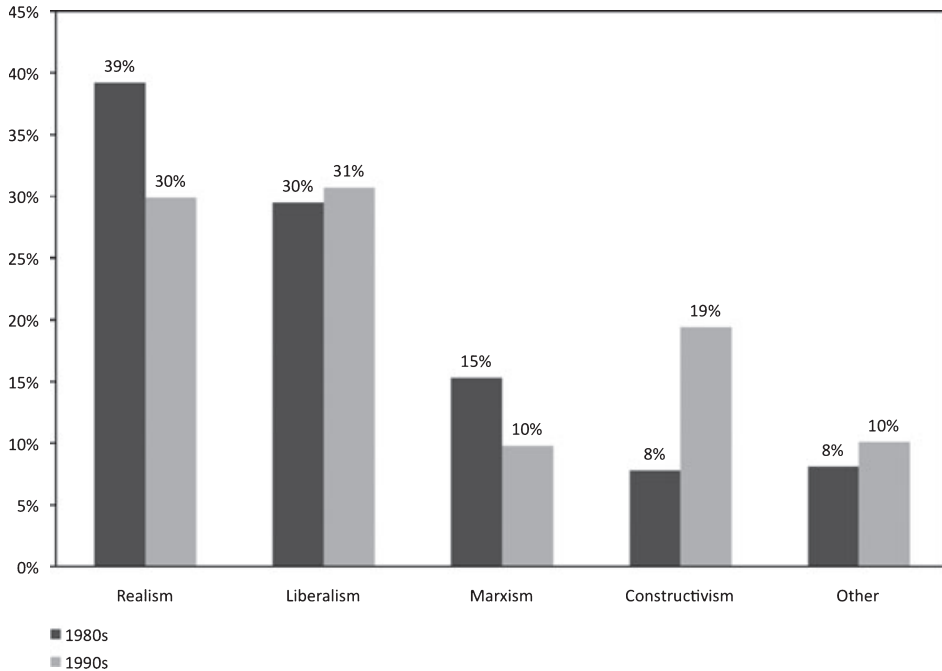


FIG 1. 2004 Survey Respondents' Perception of Literature Devoted to Each Paradigm in 1980s and 1990s

(Notes. The *N* for this question varies depending on which paradigm respondents were asked about. For the 1980s, realism *n* = 786; liberalism *n* = 786; constructivism *n* = 769; Marxism *n* = 771; and other *n* = 161. For the 1990s, realism *n* = 792; liberalism *n* = 792; constructivism *n* = 777; Marxism *n* = 778; and other *n* = 179.)

27% of today's IR literature.<sup>16</sup> The proportion of constructivist literature, which explores the social construction of reality and the role of norms and identity in international politics,<sup>17</sup> has risen over time, according to faculty respondents, who in 2008 believed that it comprised 17% of the literature. US scholars believed Marxism to be quite prominent in the 1980s, but it declined

<sup>16</sup> Although it appears in Figures 1 and 2 that the percentage of literature devoted to realism, liberalism, and constructivism declined considerably from the 1980s and 1990s to the first decade of the twenty-first century, a direct comparison of the 2004 data with the 2006 and 2008 data is difficult. In 2004, we asked respondents to indicate how much of the literature they believed was allocated to each paradigm in the 1980s and 1990s by choosing from the following answers: 75–100%, 50–75%, 25–50%, 10–25%, 1–10%, and 0%. We multiplied the number of respondents who chose each answer by the midpoint of our percentage range. We then averaged these values over all respondents, producing the average amount of time spent on each paradigm. Because respondents were allowed to pick whatever values they thought best described the literature and were not limited to a total of 100%, and because of the question wording, it was possible for the average value of the range to be higher than 100%: the total summed to 126%. We also included an open-ended question that allowed respondents to suggest another theory and evaluate the percentage of literature devoted to that approach. In 2006 and 2008, we asked respondents to estimate a percentage for each paradigm and averaged those responses over all respondents. We also included “feminism,” the alternative most often mentioned by 2004 respondents, and “English School” as options on this question. This addition allowed us to assess whether permitting respondents to write in a response under “other” meant that we had undercounted some theories. This does not appear to have been the case, since the way respondents who wrote in “feminism” in 2004 evaluated the feminist literature was statistically indistinguishable from how all respondents evaluated the feminist literature in 2006. Since the total of our average of midpoints does not add to 100 in any given year, we normalize the data to 100 to make them more comparable, but the normalization cannot alter the fact that the question was worded differently on different surveys.

<sup>17</sup> We code an article as constructivist if its authors assume that the identity of agents and the reality of institutions are socially constructed. While the term “constructivism” does not enter the IR lexicon until the 1990s, articles that make these claims but were published prior to the use of the term “constructivist” are still coded as constructivist.

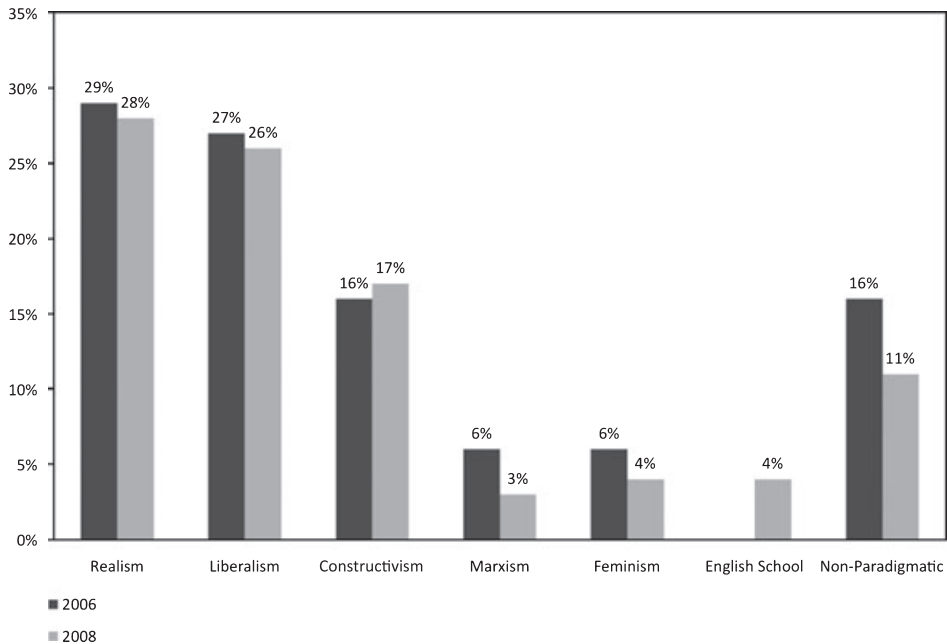


FIG 2. Survey Respondents' Perception of Literature Devoted to Each Paradigm Today

precipitously in the 1990s and beyond. In 2008, IR scholars thought that Marxism was less prominent than either feminism or the English School.<sup>18</sup>

The view of the field as organized largely by paradigm is replicated in the classroom. As Figure 3 illustrates, realism and liberalism feature prominently on the syllabi of introductory IR courses. While its share of class time may have declined, realism still dominates IR teaching within the United States: 24% of class time in 2004, 25% in 2006, and 23% in 2008 were devoted to this paradigm. These percentages are larger than for any other paradigm. Similarly, IR faculty in the United States spend a sizable proportion of their class time—21% in 2004, 22% in 2006, and 20% in 2008—on liberalism. Not surprisingly, the amount of class time devoted to Marxism and constructivism is considerably smaller. Marxism declined from 13% in 2004 to 8% in 2008, while constructivism's share of class time held relatively steady (10% in 2004 and 2006 and 11% in 2008). Together, realism and liberalism still comprise more than 40% of introductory IR course content at US universities and colleges today, according to the people who teach those classes.

Our data reveal that many beliefs held by US IR scholars about the theoretical topography of the field are incorrect. Figure 4 displays the change over time in the percentage of articles advancing each paradigm in the 12 major journals publishing IR articles. At least six patterns emerge:

1. The steady increase in non-paradigmatic articles from 30% in 1980 to 50% in 2006.
2. The relatively small and declining proportion of realist articles in the literature.
3. The complete collapse of Marxist work beginning well before the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of the changing role of Marxism in the IPE literature in the United States and the United Kingdom, see Maliniak and Tierney (2009) and Cox (2009). For our definition and measure of Marxism, see Peterson and Tierney (2009).



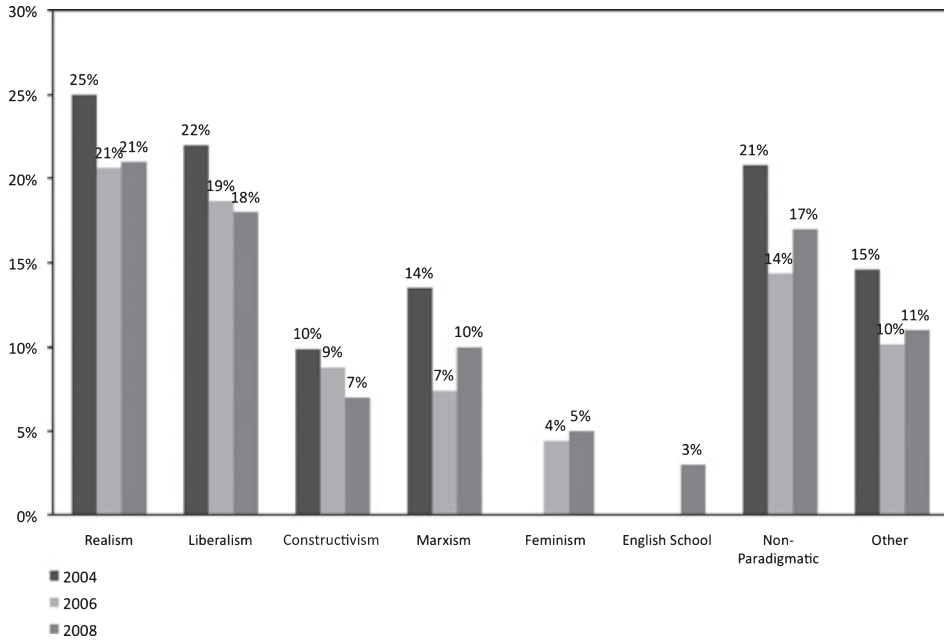


FIG 3. Time Devoted to Each Paradigm in Intro IR Classes, 2004–2008

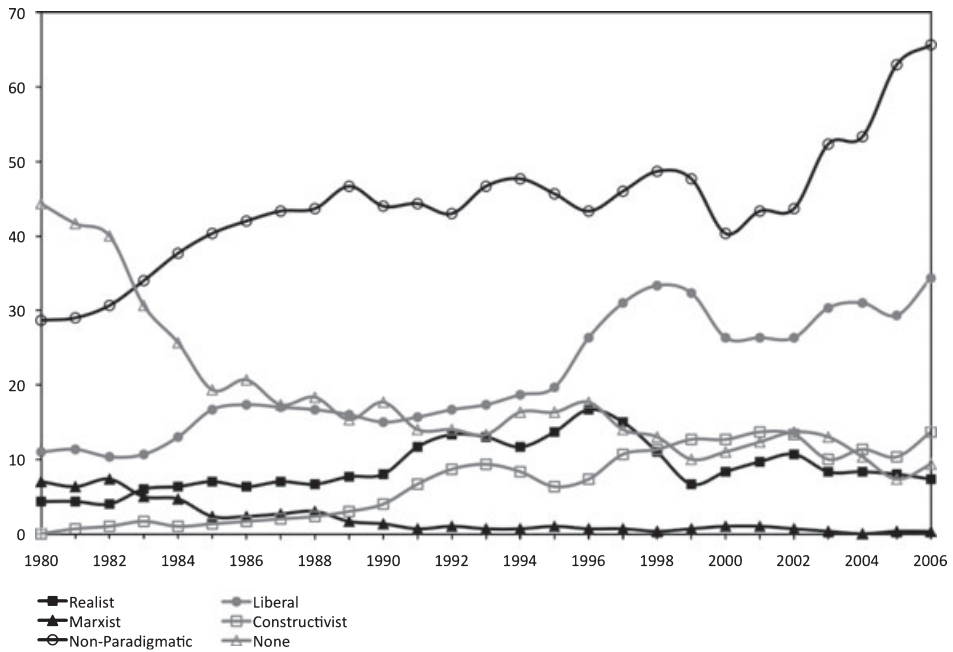


FIG 4. Percentage of Articles by Paradigm: 1980–2006

4. The prominence of liberalism throughout the time series.
5. The emergence of constructivism in the early 1990s.
6. The dramatic decline of atheoretic work from 47% in 1980 to 7% in 2006. (These works are generally descriptive or test inductively derived hypotheses that do not advance any theory or paradigm.)

Perhaps most striking is the finding that the field is not dominated by paradigmatic analysis. IR professors continue to introduce students to the discipline through the big “isms.” Moreover, three of the scholars deemed by US respondents to the 2008 faculty survey to have had the greatest influence on the field in the last 20 years—Robert Keohane, Kenneth Waltz, and Alexander Wendt—all made their careers developing and advocating one of the major theoretical paradigms.<sup>19</sup> The influence of these scholars likely creates powerful incentives for other IR students to situate their own work within a major paradigm. Nevertheless, our analysis of peer-reviewed articles in the field’s leading journals suggests that much of the published theoretical work does not fall within one of the four major paradigms. Indeed, the vast majority of contemporary published research takes place outside these paradigms. Even more surprisingly, it always has.

In no individual year do the four paradigms (realism, liberalism, Marxism, and constructivism) total more than 50% of all IR articles published in the 12 leading journals. The peak years for “paradigmatic” research were 1992, 1997, and 2000, when just under half of the articles advanced a particular paradigm. These results change very little when we narrow the sample of journals to the top five in the field: *IO*, *ISQ*, *IS*, *WP*, and *APSR*.<sup>20</sup> In this subset of journals, the “big four” isms reach a pinnacle in 1997 and again in 2000 at 49% of published articles, but they still only constitute a plurality of articles published in six of the 27 years.

Most peer-reviewed research in the major journals is what we call “non-paradigmatic,” and the proportion of work classified as non-paradigmatic has risen over the past two decades. By non-paradigmatic research, we mean hypotheses or theoretical frameworks that are not deduced from the core assumptions of one or more of the four paradigms. Instead, these arguments are based on different sets of claims about the nature of IR, usually with distinct ontologies.<sup>21</sup> Because of the large percentage of atheoretic articles in the 1980s, it is unsurprising that most articles published in that decade did not fit within one of the paradigms. By definition, after all, an atheoretic article cannot advance a particular paradigm or theory. In more recent years, an increasing number of articles have advanced a theoretical framework, just not one associated with one of the paradigms. By 2005, roughly 94% of all published articles advanced some theoretical perspective, but most were non-paradigmatic. One conclusion follows directly from this finding: there is a great deal of theoretical diversity throughout the entire time period examined in this study and especially in the most recent years.

Skeptics might claim that just because an article is published in a leading journal does not mean that it becomes part of our collective knowledge within the field. That the median number of citations for articles in the *Social Sciences Citation Index* is zero suggests that many published articles have little influence on the way scholars think about IR.<sup>22</sup> In fact, paradigmatic articles *are* cited far more

<sup>19</sup> Marxism is the only paradigm that lacks a champion ranked in the top 10 among respondents in the United States. Robert Cox is the highest ranked (at number 19) scholar in the US survey who we would call a Marxist. Cox is ranked significantly higher among IR scholars in other countries (first in South Africa and fourth behind Keohane, Waltz, and Wendt in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada). See Jordan et al. (2009).

<sup>20</sup> These are the top five peer-reviewed journals publishing IR research according to US scholars surveyed in 2004, 2006, and 2008. See Maliniak et al. (2007a) and Jordan et al. (2009).

<sup>21</sup> In practice, many of these arguments are imported from other fields and adapted to explain events in IR, as with prospect theory and other cognitive approaches that are borrowed from psychology, and strategic choice, which is heavily indebted to economics.

<sup>22</sup> Since we code articles in the leading journals, the likelihood of any individual article being cited is higher than those in lower-ranked IR journals. The median number of citations for articles in our sample is 5, the mean number is 13.2, and the standard deviation is relatively high at 26.7.

frequently than non-paradigmatic ones, perhaps explaining the IR subfield's persistent attachment to "isms." Using the *Social Science Citation Index*, we see that articles advancing one of the four paradigms are more likely than non-paradigmatic articles to be cited. For example, constructivist articles receive on average 16.4 citations, considerably more than the non-paradigmatic articles in our study (11.1) and more than twice the citations of atheoretic works (7.9). Realist articles receive an average of 17.5 citations and liberal articles net 17.2 cites on average. Only articles advancing a Marxist paradigm are cited less frequently (8.2) than non-paradigmatic articles, although even works from this declining paradigm are cited more often than atheoretic research. This result holds even when we control for the prominence of the journal in which the article is published. In fact, the finding that paradigmatic articles are cited more frequently than non-paradigmatic ones is stronger in the top five journals. In these journals, articles that advance one of the major paradigms generated, on average, 22.6 citations, while articles advancing a non-paradigmatic approach generated only 15.1 citations. Of course, articles published in the top five journals, except for atheoretic and Marxist works, generally get cited more often than do articles in other, lower-ranked journals.<sup>23</sup>

The prominence of and increase in non-paradigmatic research may surprise IR scholars who organize the field in terms of paradigms, but the single greatest revelation, at least to the authors of this paper, is the relatively small share of published work that fits squarely in the realist tradition. As discussed above, the TRIP survey reveals that realism is believed to have been the most prevalent and influential approach in the discipline during the 1980s and a close second to liberalism in the 1990s. This perception is consistent with our previous analysis of a smaller sample (Keister, Long, Maliniak, Peterson, and Tierney 2005), as well as research by Vasquez (1999), both of which suggest that realism has dominated academic discourse in IR.<sup>24</sup> Based on the extant literature and the results of our survey, we expected a large, if declining, percentage of published articles to champion a realist theory. More specifically, we expected to see realism dominate scholarship in the 1980s and then slowly decline relative to liberalism and constructivism in the 1990s and 2000s.<sup>25</sup>

Instead, in the 1980s when conventional wisdom suggests it was dominant, realism was a distant second to liberalism. During the years in our sample, in fact, realism was never the most popular paradigm for journal authors, and in

<sup>23</sup> All statistics on citation counts are limited to articles published after 1990 due to data availability. We report *Social Science Citation Index* (SSCI) data only on articles that are in our sample for this paper. We recognize that the number of articles published within a particular paradigm is an imperfect indicator of that paradigm's influence. When a paradigm becomes dominant, as many argue realism did in the 1980s and 1990s, its major tenets and works may not need to be cited to be influential. This suggests that paradigmatic research may be more influential than the citation and journal article data suggest.

<sup>24</sup> According to Vasquez (1999), over 90% of the published quantitative studies from 1945 to 1970 were informed by the realist paradigm. He employed broader criteria than we do, identifying realist arguments by their assumptions, independent variables, and topics of inquiry (Vasquez 1999:47–59). We agree that realists tend to study topics like war, alliances, conflict and cooperation, and national power, but we do not classify articles within particular paradigms based on the dependent variables or subject area. Instead, we code substantive focus as a distinct variable. Realists, liberals, and Marxists all offer explanations for conflict and cooperation, so it is inaccurate to link a particular dependent variable with a particular paradigm. Hence, were we to examine the same sample, we likely will recognize fewer realist articles than Vasquez identifies.

<sup>25</sup> This is roughly consistent with what Walker and Morton (2005) find in their study of paradigmatic research in journal articles from 1970 to 2000. Their sample of articles is smaller (the 515 "data-based" articles published over the 30 years in *IO*, *WP*, *ISQ* and *JCR*), but they find that realism was dominant in the 1980s (38% from 1980 to 1984, 48% from 1985 to 1990) and declining in the 1990s (36% from 1990 to 1994 and 22% from 1995 to 2000). Walker and Morton use the same coding scheme as Vasquez, which may explain why the absolute percentage values are higher than ours. For other paradigms, however, Walker and Morton's findings are largely consistent with ours. Because they did not code articles using qualitative methods, though, Walker and Morton did not capture the surge of qualitative realist research published in *SS* and *IS* in the 1990s.

1999, it fell to third behind constructivism. Realism peaked at 15% in the mid-1990s, still a full nine points behind liberalism. By 2006, realist articles accounted for only 6% of all the IR articles published. In 1999, Legro and Moravcsik asked, “Is anybody still a realist?” Even when we employ a more expansive definition of the realist core than Legro and Moravcsik employ, the answer appears to be: relatively few realist arguments are advanced in the 12 major journals, and the number has declined over the past 10 years.<sup>26</sup>

The number of realist articles published is lower than expected, but realism is “taken seriously” as a competing explanation more often than any other paradigm. In the journal article database, we constructed a variable that identifies when paradigms are treated as alternative explanations. A simple “straw-man” depiction of an alternative paradigm does *not* qualify as “taking seriously.” Instead, the reader needs to learn something about the utility, internal logic, or scope conditions of the alternative paradigm (or a specific model following from some alternative paradigm). Throughout most of our time series, realism is taken seriously more often than any other paradigm, including non-paradigmatic theoretical approaches.<sup>27</sup> Thus, realism still looms large in the minds—and research designs—of non-realist IR scholars. Figure 5 displays these results.

Despite a growing enthusiasm in IR for synthesis or “eclectic theorizing” (see, for example, Legro 1996; Sterling-Folker 2000; Fearon and Wendt 2002; Jupille, Caporaso, and Checkel 2003; Moravcsik 2003; Kelley 2004; Checkel 2005; Nielson, Tierney, and Weaver 2006; Katzenstein and Sil 2008; Thompson, Tierney, and Weaver 2010), only a small number of articles advance theories that explicitly marry elements of two or more distinct paradigms. The overwhelming majority of articles engage in competitive theory testing, where hypotheses derived from two or more competing theories are pitted against each other to see which better explains an empirical pattern.

Our measure of “theoretical synthesis” is quite demanding.<sup>28</sup> An article is synthetic if the independent variables are drawn from two or more distinct paradigms and there is conscious bridge building between or among the theories. Simply including control variables in a regression model is insufficient to make the article synthetic. The argument must integrate assumptions and concepts from at least two paradigms in order to be coded as synthetic. In most cases, this means borrowing explanatory variables from different paradigms and integrating them into a single explanation. Thus, the use of an imported methodology (an econometric technique or formal model) does not make an article synthetic, as it does not alter the theory advanced by the article.<sup>29</sup> Using this measure, we coded only 163 articles out of 2806 as synthetic.

The percentage of articles that synthesize two or more paradigms varies across journal and subfield. Perhaps surprisingly, given the journal’s reputation for realist work, *SS* published the highest percentage of synthetic articles in the

<sup>26</sup> The two journals with the strongest reputation for publishing realist work, *IS* and *SS*, include more realist research than most other journals. We anticipated, however, that the percentage of realist articles in those journals would be higher than what we actually observed. Between 1992 and 2006, the percentage of *SS* articles that were realist ranged from a low of 15% to a high of 59%. From 2000 to 2006, 30% of articles in *SS* were realist. The proportion of realist articles in *IS* rarely equaled *SS*. The range of realist work for *IS* runs from a low of 2% in 1986 to a high of 31% in 1995 and 2000. Since 2000, about 20% of the articles published in *IS* employed a realist approach.

<sup>27</sup> In every year but one, realism was the most common alternative paradigm “taken seriously” by authors. The exception is 2002, when 18% of articles took liberalism seriously, while 17% took realism seriously.

<sup>28</sup> Our measure of “synthesis” closely approximates what Katzenstein and Sil refer to as “eclectic theorizing.” For further discussion, see Katzenstein and Sil (2008:118–119).

<sup>29</sup> Intraparadigmatic synthesis is also possible, such as when a scholar combines the insights into offensive realism with neo-classical realism or liberal institutionalism with democratic peace theory. We do not code intraparadigmatic synthesis. However, our measure does include instances where non-paradigmatic theories are “taken seriously” as an alternative explanation or are “synthesized” with one of the four paradigms.

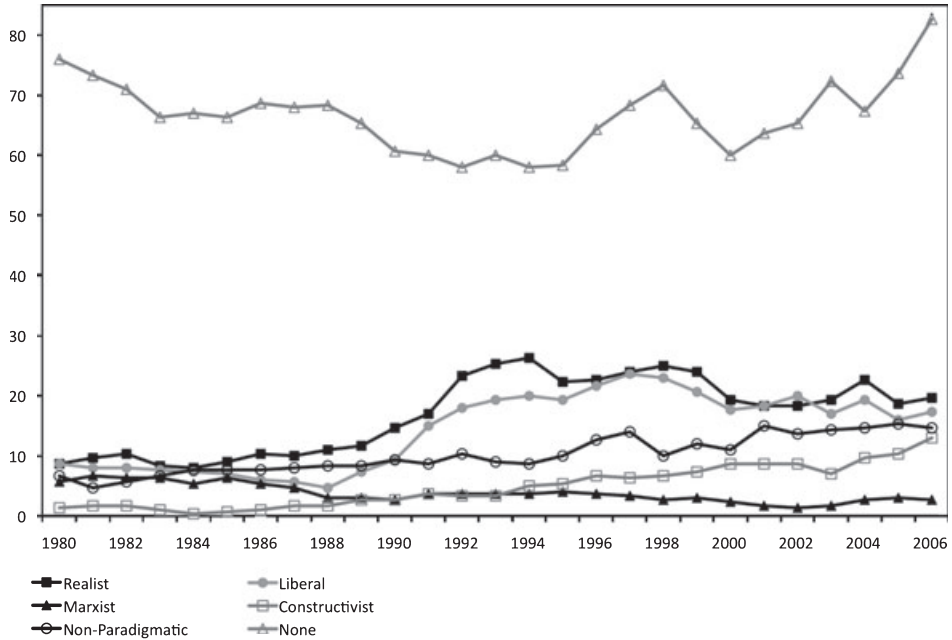


FIG 5. Percent of Articles Taking an Alternative Paradigm Seriously

sample: 22% of all synthetic articles in our sample appeared in that journal, while 17% of articles appeared in the pages of *APSR* and another 17% in *EJIR*. Synthesis is most likely in the IR theory subfield—19% of all synthetic articles fall within this subfield—followed by international organization, which claims 14% of integrative articles, and international security at 12%.

The TRIP survey also reveals that US IR scholars are not universally enthusiastic about theoretical synthesis—and whether respondents value synthesis depends upon their paradigmatic commitments. In the 2004 survey, we asked the following question: “Recently, much IR scholarship has been categorized as either ‘rationalist’ or ‘constructivist’. How should we conceive of the models developed within these broader categories [of constructivism and rationalism]? As alternatives to be tested against each other; as complementary explanations that should remain distinct; or as two approaches that could be usefully synthesized to create a more complete theory.” Marxists were the most skeptical of synthesis with only 18% responding that the approaches could be usefully synthesized. Realists also were more pessimistic than average with 30% favoring synthesis. Liberals, constructivists, and non-paradigmatic scholars were about equally enthusiastic at 41%, 40%, and 42%, respectively.

Figure 6 displays the difference between the expected value of a respondent favoring synthesis (assuming no correlation between a respondent’s paradigm and his or her answer) and the actual count for each paradigm as a fraction. So, while 365 respondents out of 1,000 choose the answer “paradigms that could be usefully synthesized,” if you asked 1,000 realists, only 309 would say that we can synthesize these approaches. Among Marxists fewer than half as many respondents as might be expected, if there were no correlation between paradigm and ideas about synthesis, say that different theoretical approaches can be usefully synthesized. The most enthusiastic advocates of synthesis are those who classified themselves as non-paradigmatic or other; if you asked 1,000 scholars who describe their work as non-paradigmatic or falling within the “other” category,”

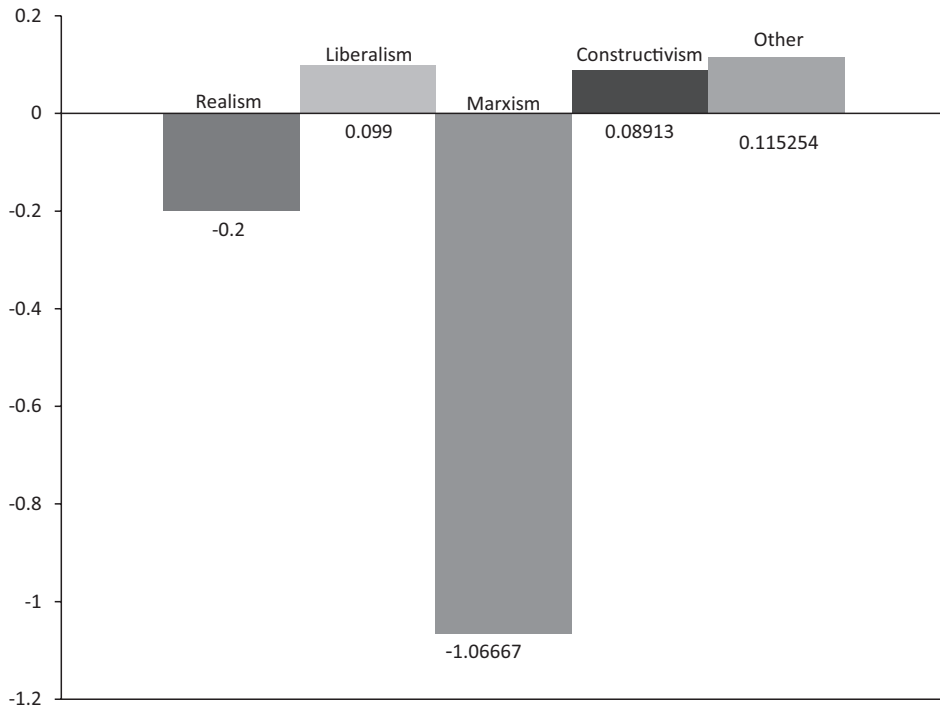


FIG 6. Impact of Paradigm on Enthusiasm for Theoretical Synthesis

412 would reply that constructivism and rationalism can be usefully synthesized to explain outcomes in IR.

What emerges from our research is a field characterized by significant theoretical diversity. Certainly, some theories have fallen by the wayside (Marxist theory has all but disappeared), and others have experienced a relative decline (realism). These developments may be interpreted, especially by positivists, as a sign of the health of field: the process of competitive theory testing has enabled scholars to spot and set aside weak theories (see Elman and Elman 2003). In general, however, the study of IR in the United States is one in which a hundred flowers still bloom.

### **Methodology and the Study of International Relations**

In the last decade, many political scientists have lamented the “mathematization” of the field, calling for greater methodological pluralism or, as John Mearsheimer once put it, “filling the zoo with all kinds of animals” (Miller 2001). In 2000, a now famous email from someone calling himself “Mr. Perestroika” claimed that formal and quantitative methods have come to dominate the profession and that the general political science journals are biased against IR research because of the qualitative nature of many IR scholars’ work. Similar questions about whether IR field journals favor formal and quantitative work also have surfaced (for example, Walt 1999). With data from the TRIP survey and journal article database, we can directly assess these claims. Our research reveals a strong preference for quantitative methods, though not formal modeling, in the major journals. But in at least one leading journal, *APSR*, there are signs of a greater methodological heterogeneity in recent years.



In the TRIP database of journal articles, we measure whether authors use quantitative methods (statistical techniques used to test hypotheses on the relationship between two or more variables with numerical values),<sup>30</sup> qualitative methods (primarily case studies but also including textual or interpretive analyses), formal modeling (game theory, spatial modeling), descriptive approaches (which use quantitative or qualitative information to describe contemporary or historical trends or events and make no attempt to test a hypothesis or develop broader theoretical generalizations), or some other research method.<sup>31</sup> We also identify articles that are analytical/non-formal conceptual; they illuminate features of IR or IR theory without reference to significant empirical evidence or a formal model.

These data do not support claims that formal methods are overtaking the field. Martin (1999) coded seven journals from 1994 to 1998 and found that formal modeling comprised only 13% of the security studies literature. Similarly, Sprinz and Wolinsky-Nahmias (2004:7) examined six political science and IR field journals between 1975 and 2000 and reported that 9% of articles used formal methods in the 1970s, while 14% did in the late 1990s. Our research supports and reinforces these conclusions: 13% of all IR articles in 12 journals and over 27 years employed formal methods. In security journals, specifically, we find that formal modeling is on the decline, peaking in 1987 at 21% before falling to its lowest point of 7% around the height of the perestroika debate in 2000.<sup>32</sup> The subfield of IPE is a modest exception, where there has been a growth in the use of formal methods. In 2006, formal modeling became the second most often used method at 18% of the IPE literature—and it was used twice as often as qualitative methods (9%).<sup>33</sup>

Since 2002, however, we find that quantitative techniques are the most frequently used method in published articles. As Figure 7 shows, in the first 3 years of our sample (1980–1982), a plurality of articles were descriptive.<sup>34</sup> Beginning in 1983, this approach began a steep and steady decline that continues today. Descriptive approaches were overtaken in 1983 by qualitative research methods, which led the field (with the exception of 1 year, 1999) until 2002, when quantitative overtook qualitative as the most frequently employed methodological approach. The rise of quantitative methods has been swift and dramatic. The percentage of published articles employing quantitative methods increased every year from 1992 to 2006, with the exception of small declines in 1996 and 2001. In 2006, more than half of articles (53%) were quantitative.<sup>35</sup>

The growing dominance of statistical methods is also evident in data from the *Social Science Citation Index*. As Figure 8 demonstrates, beginning in 1996, articles employing quantitative methods are cited more often than qualitative works.<sup>36</sup> These findings are even more striking considering that two journals with

<sup>30</sup> Articles containing only descriptive statistics do not qualify.

<sup>31</sup> Additional categories of this variable included counterfactual, experimental, and policy analysis. Articles may be coded as having multiple methods, but we do not code an article as either descriptive or analytical/non-formal conceptual if it employs any of the other empirical methods described here.

<sup>32</sup> For the analysis of security journals, we examined *IS*, *JCR*, *JPR*, and *SS*. When we included in our analysis articles on international security issues from *APSR*, *IO*, and *WP*, the finding holds: over the entire sample, an average of 13% of articles include a formal model (with one peak of 24% in 1987).

<sup>33</sup> Bennett et al. (2003) find that the use of formal modeling in IR has declined since the mid-1980s—and that statistical and formal methods are more common in American politics than in IR.

<sup>34</sup> For a figure that includes results for all methodological approaches in the study, see [http://www.irtheoryandpractice.wm.edu/projects/trip/data/MPOT\\_2010/](http://www.irtheoryandpractice.wm.edu/projects/trip/data/MPOT_2010/).

<sup>35</sup> There are also indications that the rise of quantitative methods has come at the expense of qualitative research, particularly in some subfields. Qualitative work among American IPE scholars has dwindled (Cohen 2007). From its peak of 68% in 1992, qualitative IPE work fell to just under 10% of the literature in 2006. During the same period, quantitative research has increased more than two and a half times to 71%. For more detailed discussion and evidence, see Maliniak and Tierney (2009).

<sup>36</sup> The average number of citations per article is similar for quantitative (9.91) and qualitative (9.83) work.

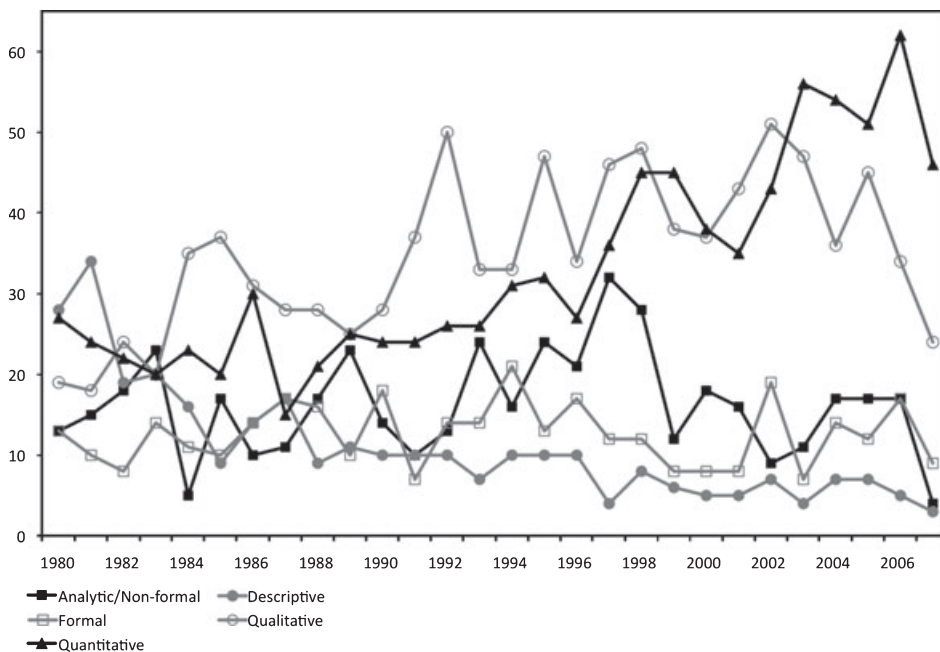


FIG 7. Methodology by Year

reputations for publishing qualitative and analytical/non-formal conceptual research, *SS* and *EJIR*, began publishing in the early and mid-1990s, respectively.<sup>37</sup>

Non-quantitative IR scholars may be more disadvantaged in their attempts to publish in the general political science journals than they are in IR-specific outlets. Our data reveal a particularly strong preference for quantitative research in *APSR*, *AJPS*, *BJPS*, and *JOP*. The overall linear trend since 1980 is positive, with strong growth between 1988 and 1996. In 1993, for example, 83% of IR articles published in these journals used quantitative methods. However, in *APSR*, the flagship journal of political science, efforts to encourage methodological pluralism seem to have borne fruit. Since 2002, 29% of IR articles published in *APSR* used analytic/non-formal methods, 32% employed formal theory, 25% included qualitative analysis, and 39% used quantitative methods. No other journal in our sample showed greater methodological pluralism than *APSR* over the past 6 years.

The top-ranked IR field journals (*IO*, *IS*, *ISQ*, *WP*, and *APSR*) also favor quantitative work, although less strongly. Overall, articles using descriptive approaches comprise a plurality for the first few years of the time series, but they fall to and remain below 10% after 1983. Qualitative methods are most prevalent between 1983 and 2002, peaking at more than 50% between 1991 and 1993. In 1988, quantitative techniques were the third least used methodology, employed more often than only experimental and counterfactual approaches. By 2006, however,

<sup>37</sup> In fact, these journals' reputations are well founded. Sixty-three percent of *SS* articles and 48% of *EJIR* articles employ qualitative methods. In both cases, qualitative is the predominant method employed. Analytic/non-formal conceptual work is the second largest methodological category in both *SS* (23%) and *EJIR* (41%). Note that the number of analytical/non-formal conceptual articles generally declined over the 27-year sample, except for 3 years in which there were small upticks: 1982, 1989, and 1997. The introduction of *SS* and *EJIR* helped to slow, but not halt, the fall of analytic/non-formal conceptual methods. This trend is fascinating given the concurrent decline of descriptive articles. In short, articles introducing a theory without supporting evidence and articles using evidence with no theoretical grounding are on the decline.

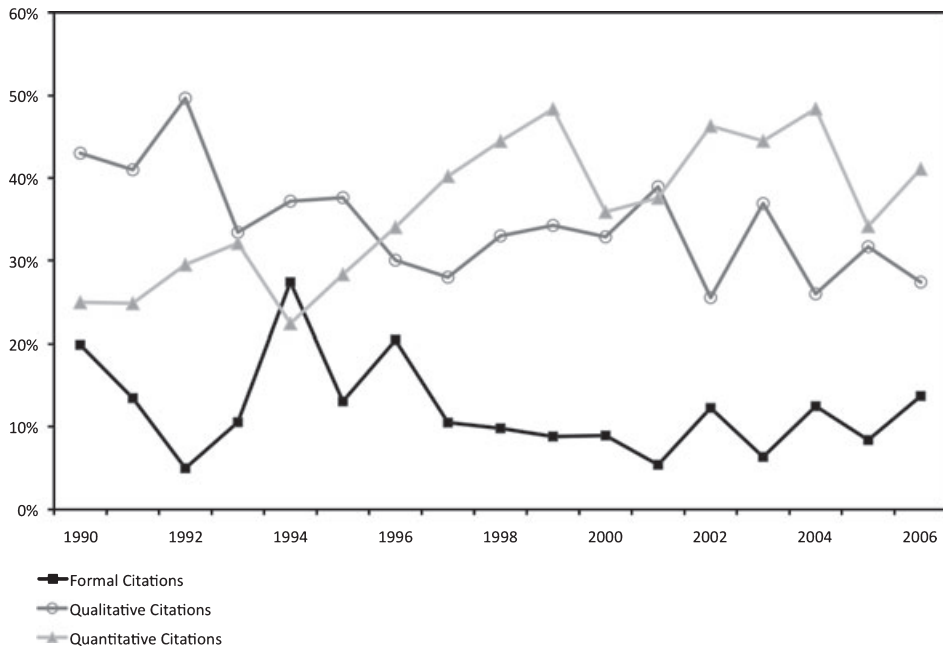


FIG 8. Methodology Citations by Year

49% of articles included quantitative methods. The upward trend is even more striking for *ISQ*: about one-quarter to one-third of all articles in the 1980s used statistical approaches, before hitting a low of 14% in 1989. In 2005 and 2006, respectively, 69% and 67% of all *ISQ* articles were quantitative. These findings are particularly intriguing, as they show the relatively late adoption of quantitative methods by the most prestigious IR field journals relative to the general political science journals in the TRIP journal article database.

When we compare the prevalence of quantitative research in the major journals with the results of our scholar survey, we can see what appears to be a strong bias against other methods, in particular qualitative work. More than three times as many respondents described their work as primarily qualitative (68%) as said they primarily used quantitative methods (23%). We also asked scholars what other methods beyond their primary method they employed in their research. When those responses are included along with the primary method employed, fully 95% of scholars claim to use qualitative methods in their research.<sup>38</sup> Whether any bias exists, the number of articles published using quantitative methods is disproportional to the number of IR scholars who say they use quantitative methods. In 2006, 60% of IR scholars in the United States reported that their primary methodology was qualitative, and in 2008, 68% said the same, but only 29% of articles published in 2006 used qualitative methods. It is perhaps no surprise then that 35% of respondents in 2008 chose methodology as the principal divide among IR scholars,<sup>39</sup> and 77% placed it among the top three sources of division, above paradigm (55%) and epistemology (67%).

These findings may explain why junior scholars are increasingly trained to use statistics as their primary methodological approach. One half of IR scholars

<sup>38</sup> Only 2% of IR scholars listed formal methods as their primary method.

<sup>39</sup> This was the largest number by far: 11% higher than the next highest category—epistemology—and 16% higher than paradigm. These findings are almost identical to the 2004 and 2006 survey results, except that epistemology is now seen as a greater source of division among IR scholars than paradigm.

under the age of 30 report that statistical techniques are their primary method, while only 8% of those over 65 claim statistics as their primary approach to the study of IR. Fourteen percent of respondents who volunteered a primary methodology did not offer a secondary method. Of that group, the vast majority (85%) employed only qualitative methods.

In sum, quantitative approaches are the most frequently used method in journal articles. At the same time, IR specialists appear deeply divided over how best to study IR. In particular, as the publication of statistical works continues to increase, even relative to the percentage of faculty who report using quantitative approaches in their research, large numbers of IR faculty believe that methodology is the principal fault line in the discipline.

### **Epistemology: How Do We Know What We Know?**

Barnett and Sikkink (2008:73) recently claimed that US IR scholars increasingly have moved “beyond a narrow conception of the ‘scientific’ enterprise” and adopted “a diversity of epistemological positions.” Our data show that this is not, or not yet, the case, nor is it likely to be any time soon. We find a remarkable and growing consensus within the US academy that a positivist epistemology should guide IR research. If IR scholarship in the United States is characterized by significant theoretical and less, but still considerable, methodological diversity, there is clearly a hegemonic epistemology: positivism.

For most positivists, of course, this represents progress (see, for example, King et al. 1994:38). Agreement on the standards of scientific research provides a common language and a means for observers, inside or outside the profession, to appraise IR research. For others, the continued dominance of one epistemological approach is deeply worrying. Steve Smith (2002:81), for example, asserts that, outside of the United States, there is greater epistemological diversity, “a far more lively, vital and exciting IR community, one that can offer a variety of responses to the major problems and features of the contemporary global political system.” Smith (2008:728) further cautions: “Unless the [American] discipline accepts that there is a wide set of legitimate [epistemological] approaches to studying world politics, then it will become more and more restricted in its ability to relate to other disciplines and it will become a besieged academic fortress validated and legitimized only internally.”

In the 2004, 2006, and 2008 TRIP surveys, we asked American IR scholars: “In general, how would you characterize your work in epistemological terms? Positivist; Non-Positivist; Post-Positivist.”<sup>40</sup> Sixty-four percent (2004), 70% (2006), and 65% (2008) of scholars at US institutions described their work as positivist.<sup>41</sup> These numbers varied by age, paradigm, method, and issue area. In general, younger IR scholars were more likely to call themselves positivists. Sixty-five percent of scholars who received their Ph.D.s before 1980 described themselves as positivists, while 71% of those who received their degrees in 2000 or later were positivists. Realists were most likely to call themselves positivists—fully 74% of realists embraced the label. In contrast, only 42% of constructivists and 22% of feminist scholars described their work as positivist.<sup>42</sup> Women were less likely than men to call themselves positivist, with 42% saying their work is non-positivist or

<sup>40</sup> We did not define these terms in the survey question.

<sup>41</sup> In 2006, we asked the same question of IR scholars at Canadian universities, and in 2008 we asked it of scholars in 10 countries. A majority of respondents in the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa describe their work as non- or post-positivist. These findings suggest that there is not a single international IR discipline. See Lipson et al. (2007); Jordan et al. (2009); and Long et al. (2010).

<sup>42</sup> Although constructivists are less likely to adopt a positivist epistemology than scholars advancing other paradigms, most of the leading constructivists in the United States, unlike their European counterparts, identify themselves as positivist. See, most famously, Wendt (1999), but also Legro (1996) and Finnemore and Sikkink (1998).

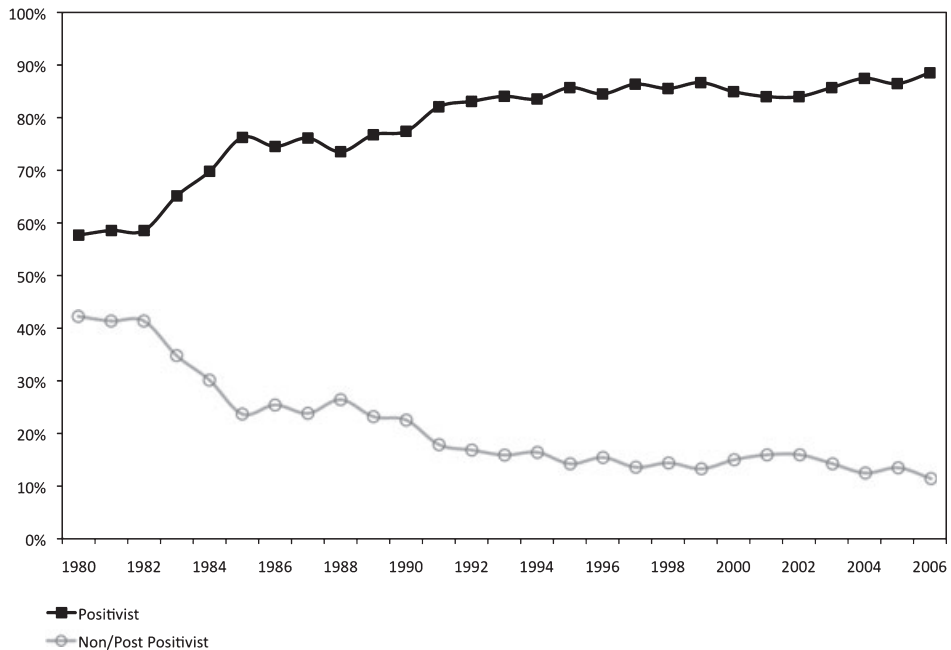


FIG 9. Epistemology Employed in Journal Articles, 1980–2006

post-positivist.<sup>43</sup> IPE was the most heavily positivist subfield at 79%, followed closely by international security at 78%.

The TRIP faculty survey provides strong evidence that IR in the United States is overwhelmingly positivist, and the demographic data suggest that it may become even more positivist as older scholars retire. That said, the survey data might lead us to *underestimate* the extent to which the positivist epistemology dominates journal publications. We code as positivist articles that implicitly or explicitly assume that theoretical or empirical propositions are testable, make causal claims, seek to explain and predict phenomena, assume that research is supported by empirical means, and aspire to the use of a scientific method.<sup>44</sup> In 1980, about 58% of all articles published in the major journals were positivist. By 2006, that number had climbed to almost 90%.<sup>45</sup> Figure 9 illustrates these trends.

Much of the increase in positivist research is associated with a decline in the 1980s of atheoretic articles. We did not distinguish between non- and post-positivism in our coding of journal articles, but it is likely that the majority of

<sup>43</sup> For a detailed discussion about how gender affects epistemological choices, see Maliniak, Oakes, Peterson, and Tierney (2008).

<sup>44</sup> Generally, positivist articles present a theory, derive testable hypotheses from that theory, and evaluate it using data (that is, empirical observations). We also code an article as positivist even if it does not explicitly employ the scientific method: if the authors use scientific principles to judge the validity of another study, or if they defend a concept of social science that is consistent with positivism, the article is positivist. Positivist articles also include pieces that describe a scientific research project—such as POLITY, COW, KEDS, or TRIP—and explain coding rules and evidence collection procedures. We recognize that there may be differences between our definition and those of respondents completing the faculty survey, but we believe our definition captures how most IR scholars use the term. Most importantly, the transparency of our coding procedures permits other scholars to replicate or interpret the meaning of our results.

<sup>45</sup> Recall that the last 12 years of data include articles published in *EJIR*, which tends to publish European scholars in higher proportions. In *EJIR*, between 30% and 60% of articles are positivist throughout the time series. In 2006, when all other journals combined are over 90% positivist, only about 43% of *EJIR* articles employed a positivist epistemology.

articles that do not fit the criteria for positivism are non-positivist rather than post-positivist. There are good reasons to think that an analysis of books or additional journals would produce a greater proportion of non- or post-positivist research.

The US IR community is strongly positivist. When we compare the results of the TRIP survey with the journal article database, though, we see that non-positivist research is under-represented in the major journals. Sixty-five percent of IR scholars described themselves as positivists, but nearly 90% of journal articles employ a positivist methodology. The apparent bias against non-positivist research in the major journals is particularly conspicuous in the case of constructivism. Only 42% of US constructivists call themselves positivists, but 68% of published constructivist articles are positivist. Constructivists have broken into mainstream journals in recent years, but only when they conform to mainstream standards of social science.

### **The Policy Relevance of the IR Scholarly Community in the United States**

In a recent issue of *The American Interest*, General David Petraeus and Retired Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Peters clash over whether military officers gain from earning a Ph.D. Petraeus, who has a Ph.D., outlines the benefits of a civilian education, concluding that “we cannot become competent warfighters unless we are as intelligent and mentally tough as we are aggressive and physically rugged” (2007:19). Peters counters that political science research is irrelevant for making day-to-day policy: “I know of not a single troop-leading general—not one—whom I believe is a more effective combat commander because he holds a doctorate. On the contrary, too much formal education clouds a senior officer’s judgment, inhibits his instincts, and slows his decision-making....When we begin to theorize, we begin to lose” (Peters 2007:25; see also Ignatieff 2007). Peters and Petraeus’s argument reflects one part of a much larger debate about the policy relevance of IR research within political science. This debate may be played out in military and policy-making circles, but it also is hotly contested within the academy (see Zelikow 1994; Lepgold 1998; Feaver 1999; Lepgold and Nincic 2001; Jentleson 2002).

What do the TRIP survey and article database reveal about the relationship between IR scholarship and foreign policymaking—what Petraeus (2007:17) describes as the “cloister” and the “grindstone”? Our research suggests that there is a divide between what scholars think about the importance of policy-relevant research and the research they actually produce. The results depict a discipline that rarely links its research to current policy debates—except after a major international event—but also one comprised of large numbers of scholars who consult for the US government, believe that IR scholarship is useful to policymakers, and intend their research to be prescriptive.<sup>46</sup>

The most striking finding here is that while 33% of scholars in the 2008 TRIP survey said that they had an immediate policy application in mind when conducting their research, only a very small percentage of published IR articles actually included policy recommendations. In no year included in the journal article database did the percentage of articles offering specific advice for policymakers exceed 20% of the sample, and for the entire time period, only 12% of articles offered a policy recommendation.<sup>47</sup> That said, there were small increases in the

<sup>46</sup> For a fuller treatment of this question, see Bennett and Ikenberry (2006). Their findings regarding articles published in the APSR cover 68 years and are broadly consistent with our results.

<sup>47</sup> It is possible that scholars *are* conducting policy-relevant research, but they simply choose not to publish that work in the peer-reviewed scholarly journals. They may prefer outlets, such as *Foreign Policy*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Washington Quarterly*, and *The National Interest*, which have a wider readership in the policy community. This research also may be distributed in reports commissioned by government agencies, think tanks, or NGOs.



percentage of articles offering suggestions to foreign policy decision makers in 1980–1981, 1988, 1993–1994, and 2002–2003. These increases may be connected to the election of President Reagan and the escalation of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the 9/11 terrorist attacks. That is, major events may prompt IR scholars to try to link their research to the practice of foreign policy. The 2006 TRIP faculty survey supports this interpretation; a large majority (72%) of respondents said that they regularly or sometimes adjusted their research program in response to international events. When major events like 9/11 or the fall of the Berlin Wall were mentioned, the number jumped to 84%. Similarly, 54% of respondents said they regularly or sometimes adjust their teaching to events. This number rose to 79% when major international events were mentioned. Large numbers of IR faculty specifically reported that 9/11, the end of the Cold War, and the current Iraq war significantly affected their research and teaching practices.

There are some differences across IR subfields. It is more common in the two journals focusing on international security for authors to offer explicit policy recommendations. For each of the first 4 years that *SS* was published, around 30% of its articles included advice for policymakers. Thereafter, the effort to reach out to leaders dropped by half and was more in line with other IR journals. In *IS*, policy recommendations are de rigueur; between 30% and 60% of articles address current and/or future policy. In contrast, around 10–20% of the articles in *IO*, *ISQ*, *WP*, and the major political science journals (for example, *APSR*) specifically discuss policy. Ironically, the security subfield, which Peters thoroughly dismisses in his polemic against the academy, is, in fact, the most eager to engage the policy community.

International relations scholars do not routinely identify the policy implications of their published research, but they are active in the policy-making process. In 2006, 47% of the respondents in the TRIP survey said that they had consulted for the US government, a foreign government, an NGO or IO, or a think tank, and this number grew to 51% in 2008.

As a group, American IR scholars believe that their research, despite its lack of explicit policy prescriptions, provides guidance to practitioners. As Figure 10 reveals, large majorities report that policymakers find area studies, policy analyses, and contemporary case studies “very useful” or “somewhat useful.” More surprisingly, at least to some practitioners, somewhat smaller majorities of IR scholars also report that theoretical models, quantitative studies, and historical case studies are very or somewhat useful. By and large, policy-making experience has a limited effect on scholars’ beliefs about the utility of various methodologies. Those who said they have done consulting work in the past 2 years were 7% more skeptical about the utility of quantitative studies and 4% more positive about the usefulness of historical case studies, compared with those without recent consulting experience.<sup>48</sup> In addition, scholars who consulted were more likely to believe contemporary cases studies (7%) and policy analysis (9%) were “very important” to the makers of foreign policy.

International relations scholars tend to study contemporary issues and events, which presumably are of significant concern to policymakers. Figure 11 illustrates this point.<sup>49</sup> Sixty to eighty percent of articles in the last decade of the Cold War studied the time period covered by that conflict, which we defined as September 1945 to November 9, 1989. Beginning in 1989, the percentage of articles devoted to the post-Cold War world (coded as November 9, 1989, to September 10,

<sup>48</sup> Although scholars with consulting experience were less positive about the utility of quantitative research, a majority of all respondents (62%) maintain that it is “very useful” or “somewhat useful.”

<sup>49</sup> For a figure that includes our results for all time periods, see [http://irtheoryandpractice.wm.edu/projects/trip/irus\\_data/](http://irtheoryandpractice.wm.edu/projects/trip/irus_data/).

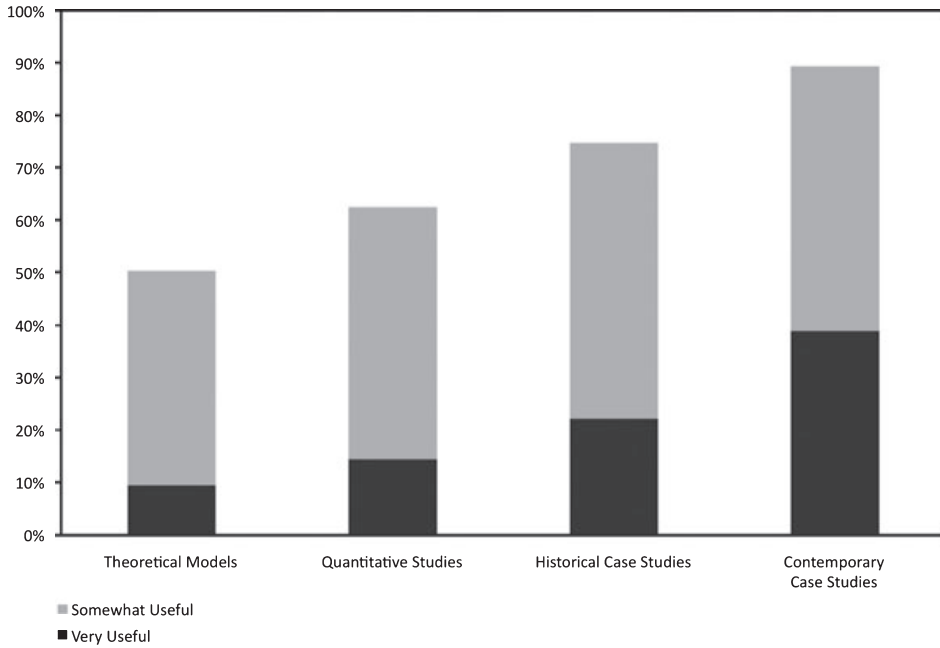


FIG 10. Usefulness of Political Science Research to Policymakers

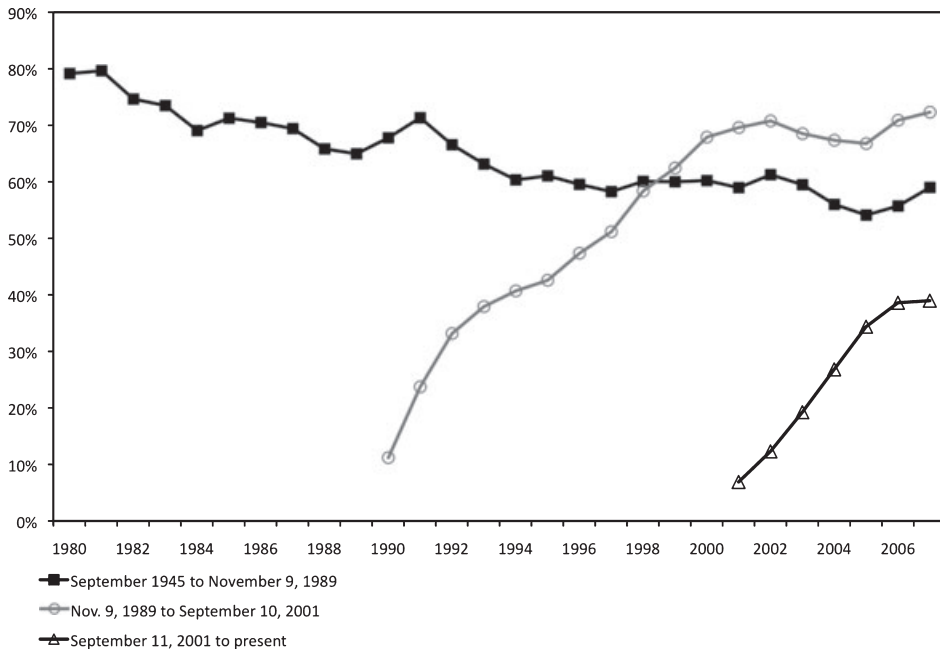


FIG 11. Time Period under Study

2001) began a sharp rise, surpassing Cold War studies and leveling off at about 70% in 2000 and beyond. Articles that explore empirical cases from the post 9/11 period (coded as September 11, 2001, to the present) began a similarly steep climb immediately after the event that opened this historical period, and

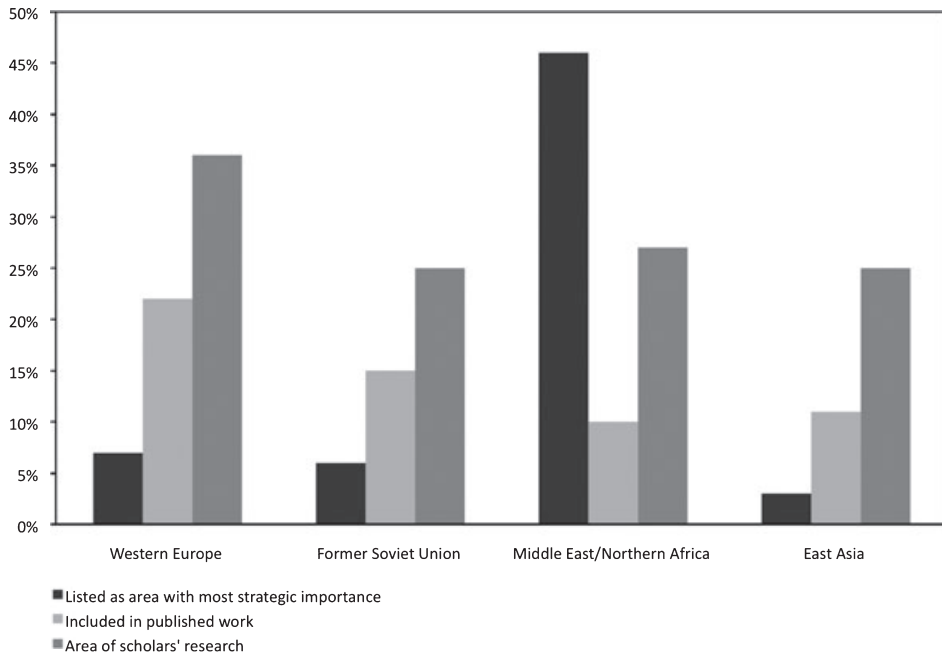


FIG 12. Geographic Regions Studied

they already comprise 40% of the literature from 2002 to 2006. These findings are supported by the fact that 63% of all articles published in the past 27 years use empirical evidence from the 10 years prior to their publication. Only 37% used only historical data that were more than 10 years old.

International relations scholars overwhelmingly study the recent past, but a relatively small percentage of the literature actually focuses on today's geographic hot spots. In fact, there is a dramatic disparity, illustrated in Figure 12, between the perceived strategic importance of a region and the amount of attention it receives in the major IR journals. The fewest articles are written about the two regions deemed by scholars to be the most strategically important to the United States: East Asia and, especially, the Middle East. Indeed, the former Soviet Union receives far more attention than it deserves according to IR scholars' assessments of the strategic importance of this region.

These results are consistent with the reported research interests of IR scholars. In the 2008 TRIP survey, only 9% of respondents said that the Middle East was their main area of study, although 18% indicated that it was a secondary area of study. Only 10% of respondents listed East Asia as their main research interest, with 18% including it as a secondary research interest. The data on IR journal articles suggest that even fewer scholars publish articles on these regions in the major journals.<sup>50</sup> Only 7–15% of articles over the last 27 years examined events in the Middle East, while 9–16% examined East Asian cases. The largest region of focus remains the United States, followed by Canada and Western Europe.

One of the strongest trends, however, is the increase beginning in the 1990s of "global" work, those articles that include data from all regions of the world. This increase is likely correlated with the rise of quantitative research and better availability of data from less developed countries. Articles including a global

<sup>50</sup> If work published in the major journals roughly mirrored the results of the survey, 27% of articles should have included a case drawn from the Middle East and 28% should have included one from East Asia.

component now comprise a plurality of all published articles. Articles that study no geographic region still comprise a sizable minority of the literature, although they have fallen to below 13% of the literature today from a high of 28% in the mid-1990s.

Our results depict a discipline comprised of large numbers of scholars who believe that IR research is useful to policymakers and who say that they intend their own work to inform foreign policy. At the same time, we see a discipline that rarely links its research to current political debates, except after a major international event, or focuses on regions of interest to policymakers. IR scholars should debate the importance of theoretical, methodological, and epistemological diversity for creating a discipline more relevant to and driven by real-world problems. Addressing the lack of methodological diversity in the field may be important for generating work that is useful for policymaking. Unless or until more scholars consciously derive policy implications from their research, however, their ability to speak to real-world problems will remain limited. Walt (2005:34–35) frames the issue well when he writes, “[W]hy doesn’t theoretical IR scholarship play a larger role in shaping what policy makers do? ... [Academics] rarely offer concrete guidance for how policy makers might create a better world.”

### Conclusion

Using two new sources of data—the TRIP survey of IR scholars in the United States and the TRIP journal article database—we are able to move beyond speculation about the direction of the IR field as practiced in the United States and use systematically gathered evidence to test many commonly held beliefs about the field. These data reveal a discipline that is open to a wide range of theoretical approaches but less accepting of methodological diversity and even less receptive to epistemological diversity. They also show a field whose members believe that their work is more policy relevant than it actually is. We briefly summarize each of these main findings before exploring avenues for further research and the implications of our findings for the IR discipline and beyond.

First, research in the theoretical traditions of realism, liberalism, Marxism, and constructivism does not dominate the major peer-reviewed journals. In particular, realism, often thought to be the leading paradigm in IR, is on the decline. More strikingly, realist research has never made up more than 15% of published articles even at its height. The perception that realism dominates the field may be a product of the fact that realist articles are more likely to be cited than other research, including non-paradigmatic work. Realism also is a popular foil for non-realist scholars, who often pit their own theories against the claims and findings of realist research. Most journal articles are non-paradigmatic, however, meaning that the author advances a theory that does not fit within one of the four major paradigms. These results will be good news for scholars who believe that “more is better” when it comes to theoretical diversity (Dunne et al. 2007:vi).

Second, we find evidence that the major journals favor quantitative methods over other approaches. Nearly all US IR scholars identified qualitative methods as their primary or secondary method. In stark contrast, a large and growing percentage of journal articles—around half in recent years—use statistical techniques. Research employing quantitative methods likely will comprise an even larger share of published articles in the future, given the percentage of young scholars now trained in this approach. If we accept that “taking advantage of the relative strengths of different methods can help advance important debates in IR,” this is a worrying trend (Sprinz and Wolinsky-Nahmias 2004:372). Still, advocates of methodological pluralism may take some comfort in the successful efforts of the *APSR* to increase the range of methods featured in its articles.

Third, published IR scholarship is almost entirely positivist. This may not be surprising, given the quantitative turn in IR, but the trend toward the use of scientific methods in the field is far more dramatic than the mathematization of the discipline and belies many analysts' claims of increasing epistemological diversity (for example, Barnett and Sikkink 2008). Sixty-five percent of scholars at US universities and colleges describe their own work as positivist, and the trend is deepening as larger percentages of younger scholars call themselves positivists. The considerable minority of IR scholars who self-identify as non-positivists or post-positivists may experience increasing challenges publishing their work if current trends continue: nearly 90% of all the IR articles published in the top general political science and IR field journals today is positivist in its epistemological orientation. Positivists likely will call these trends scientific progress, while non-positivists may see the near victory of a hegemonic epistemology that has nearly silenced all contenders.

Finally, despite many IR scholars' continuing frustration at their relatively limited influence on foreign policy, these experts consistently produce research without specific policy applications or prescriptions. IR scholars believe, however, that their work is both more prescriptive than it actually is and useful to policymakers. The trend toward increasing methodological and, especially, epistemological conformity could produce more policy-relevant research, although continued theoretical diversity may pull in the opposite direction.

The results presented in this paper only scratch the surface of the TRIP research effort. When the journal article database is complete, it will include data from the approximately 6,000 articles published since 1980, and it will be updated yearly. We also will continue to implement the biennial—now triennial—faculty surveys and to add new questions to address changes in the discipline and the world. These data provide a wealth of information on the IR field in the United States and particularly on the connections among teaching, research, and international policy. In 2008, we conducted the survey in 10 countries (Jordan et al. 2009; Long et al. 2010), and in 2011, we will add Asian, Latin American, and continental European countries to the sample. Over time, our cross-national time-series data will illuminate similarities and differences across regions and countries in the way IR is studied and taught and in the foreign policy views of IR scholars.

The TRIP data project would be an important contribution to the IR field, even if our findings had no significance outside the IR discipline. Understanding the history of the discipline helps us craft interesting and important research that more fully and accurately explains the world around us. This study also demonstrates that efforts to change the direction of the field can be—indeed, have been—successful. Finally, there may be more parochial reasons for IR specialists to heed to these results. Scholars who produce non- and post-positivist research, as well as those whose work is largely qualitative, may find it difficult to get published, since their work is significantly under-represented in the major journals.

There are also good reasons—reasons that extend beyond the walls of the academy—to turn the spotlight on ourselves and our work. Ultimately, the academic discipline of IR seeks to understand and influence the world around us, whether by training future policymakers or informing effective policy that benefits from and avoids the mistakes of the past. Faculty beliefs about the field and the world around us affect what we teach our students, some of whom may end up in a position to make or influence foreign policy. The TRIP data may explain the much bemoaned lack of interest from the policy community in IR research. It suggests, in fact, that we may be largely to blame for policymakers' indifference: our research rarely offers detailed recommendations for addressing

major foreign policy challenges. The extent of theoretical, methodological, and epistemological diversity within the discipline highlighted by the TRIP survey and journal article data also may have important implications for our ability to produce research that is useful to policymakers. Many IR scholars fear the domination of the discipline by any single paradigm, methodology, or epistemology, because they believe that open debate creates a social science that is relevant to the problems of the real world. With diversity, however, often comes division. If, as a discipline, we become mired in paradigmatic or methodological wars, we may take our eyes off the prize—a better understanding of the events that shape our world. By contrast, the winnowing of IR theories and methods valued by positivists, like the scientific progress of the medical researcher seeking the causes of cancer, may move us closer to that understanding and an ability to prescribe foreign policy that advances national interests, preserves peace, and maintains economic stability.

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