Political Science 142A
International Relations
Outline

• Syllabus

• Lecture 1: What is International Relations?
  • Bits and pieces
  • A bit of history
  • Methods (to the madness)
What is International Relations?

- Units: Actors (countries, groups, individuals)
- Structure: System, subsystems
- Strategy: strategic interaction, constraints
- History
- Law
- Culture
Method

• The truth about a subject is largely or wholly independent of personal taste
• Want to look at what explains the world
  • Not at what one likes or dislikes (taste)
  • Change can only occur through real understanding of causes and effects
• Same thing is true about examples
  • There are examples of almost anything
  • Question is really about what is common
    • Modal tendencies
    • Knowledge of the population of cases
Seek truth from facts...

- Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping
- Which facts?
- Empirical subjects involve measuring things and estimating relationships.
  - Sampling - which cases?
  - Inference - what truths?
  - Impact - how much?
Problems of inference

- Tendencies and multiple or latent causality
- Social science phenomena are probabilistic
- Most behavior has latent or multiple causes
- Most common approach: case study
- Existence proof - something happened once
- Sampling - how representative is the case?
- Attribution - which factors matter, how much?
- Disprovability - when is a theory wrong?
- Circularity - theory --> case, case --> theory
Reducing things to Numbers

• “You cannot reduce human events, behavior, etc. to numbers on a spreadsheet.”
• We “reduce” human behavior to words which is literally “quantifying” (words are discrete units).
• Details may be lost, but things are gained, too.
• All knowledge is simplification of reality
• Most debates are about which simplifications are most interesting, effective, and elegant.
• How can we test probabilistic claims without an approach to testing that captures probabilities?