

# The Apparent Demise of IR Theory: Relative Gains or the Discipline is What We Make Of It

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## Abstract:

There has been much debate recently about trends in IR scholarship: that grand theory is fading away as hypothesis testing is now dominating the publications. These arguments are based on thin evidence, so this paper seeks to test these hypotheses about the state of the field. I rely on TRIP-related data. These datasets can be helpful in pursuing four distinct angles to address these questions: what is being published, how scholars see themselves and the field, what is being cited, and what is being taught. The findings suggest that there is more IR than before, so that it depends on whether one is a Realist or not. If one focuses on relative gains, then Grand Theory is in trouble as it is less prevalent than before. If one focuses on absolute gains, then there is no problem for grand theorists as the rise in non-paradigmatic work has not reduced how much Grand Theory there is. The trends also suggest that Grand Theory is not going away. The citation data does not support contentions that professionalization punishes those who do IR theory.

Acknowledgements: Much thanks to Michael Tierney and Sue Peterson and their crew at William and Mary for not just developing the datasets and helping me use them, but also their feedback at their conference.

Recently, we have had a series of claims made about the nature of international relations [IR] work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Most visibly, John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt (Mearsheimer and Walt 2013) made a key claim: there is not enough grand IR theory. They argued that grand theory is in decline, that too much work was on hypothesis testing, and that this was bad for IR. This article was part of a larger debate about the end of IR theory (EJIR 2013). The basic assertions about these avowed trends were based on very thin analyses of existing data. We need to consider these arguments more seriously because they reflect larger concerns about the state of IR.

The intent of this article is to ascertain whether these trends are actually happening—is the field moving away from Grand Theory? Are the “isms” dying as David Lake would like (Lake 2011)? Using data collected by scholars at the College of William and Mary,<sup>1</sup> I assess the state of IR scholarship and whether there are any trends. To be clear, the focus here is not to address whether hypothesis testing is devoid of theory or address the normative or meta-theoretical implications of the Great Debates and Grand Theory.<sup>2</sup> Instead, the primary objective is to examine what scholars are actually publishing, citing and teaching. The irony of the Mearsheimer and Walt article is that it contains many testable hypotheses which go untested. These hypotheses ought to be examined as the stakes may be quite high including the study of IR itself (Dunne et al., 2013, 419).

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<sup>1</sup> The data and codebooks are available at <http://www.wm.edu/offices/itpir/trip/data/index.php>. The data for this article will be available at the author’s website. For discussions and explorations of the TRIP datasets, see (Maliniak et al. 2011; Jordan et al. 2009; Maliniak et al. 2007).

<sup>2</sup> For more extensive critiques of the Mearsheimer and Walt article, see the special issue of EJIR (2013) as well as (Levine and Barder 2014).

In this article, I will first discuss the key claims and why they are important. I will then present the actual patterns of work, of perceptions, of citation, and of teaching to assess where the field stands now and how it has evolved over the past decade or more. I will then conclude with the implications for IR work.

## The Demise of Grand Theory?

Mearsheimer and Walt assert “the amount of serious attention IR scholars in the United States pay to theory is declining and seems likely to drop further in the years ahead” despite citing TRIP work that shows a tremendous drop-off in atheoretic work (2013: 428). They find this problematic because theory is the “lodestone” of the field. Yet their article does not document changes in the use of theory, especially grand theory, but instead focuses on the proportion of work that is quantitative. The editors of the special issue concur that Mearsheimer and Walt “focus the object of their critique on quantitative research (Dunne et al. 2013)419).” This is, of course, strange since quantitative work, just like qualitative work, can be informed by theory or not informed by theory. As Jackson and Nexon note, this “tends to conflate *substantive* and *methodological* concerns (2013, 544, italics in original).”

Even though grand theory and methodology can be distinct, the conflation is not unique to Mearsheimer and Walt. It is strange to see post-structural IR theorists concurring with Mearsheimer and Walt that IR is becoming too homogeneous and too focused on hypothesis testing:

With the professionalization of the discipline, standard measures of ‘quality’ have produced a sometimes welcome, sometimes depressing, homogenization of research. Ever-increasing numbers of graduate students are educated (better than:

‘trained’) according to a ‘quantitative-followed-up-by-qualitative’ (meaning small-*n*) research design in which all there is to theory is reached when some robust empirical generalizations can be made under specified scope conditions. (Guzzini 2013, 522)

The organizers of the special issue of EJIR support Mearsheimer and Walt as their review of articles published in EJIR indicates the focus is on theory testing and not theory development (Dunne et al. 2013): “theory still plays a role in almost all the articles published in the journal in the last five years, but it is (with a few exceptions) very much in terms of ‘theory testing’ as opposed to ‘theory development’ (406).” Given the reputation of EJIR as a journal more sympathetic to theory development pieces than, say, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, this is significant.

To address this debate, we need to figure out what is meant by theory or grand theory? The focus of Mearsheimer and Walt (2013: 428) is on: “A body of grand theories – or what are sometimes called the ‘isms;--has long shaped the study of international politics. The most prominent among them are constructivism, liberalism, Marxism and realism.” Most of the special issue of EJIR in which this article is published takes a roughly similar stance: considering grand theory to be referring to the isms even if the individual contributors wanted to move beyond them (Bennett 2013; Lake 2013). In this article, grand theory is taken to refer to the major approaches to IR: Realism, Liberalism, Marxism and Constructivism.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Feminism, in both the EJIR discussion and in the TRIP datasets, is not considered as a distinct grand theoretical approach, but see the contributions by (Tickner 2013; Sylvester 2013).

## Testing Hypotheses About Hypothesis Testing

To ascertain whether the grand theorists are correctly lamenting their demise or are not, I use the TRIP datasets to assess the claims as they apply to publishing, perceptions, citation and teaching. Besides the big question of grand theory versus everything else, I will also consider some complementary claims that can be tested in order to maximize the potential observable implications of whatever trends that might be occurring. The article will start by considering what is and has been published, relying on the *TRIP Journal Article Database*.<sup>4</sup> The second section will address what scholars value as measured by the various questions in the *TRIP Surveys of Scholars*.<sup>5</sup> The third section will consider what scholars are citing as an additional way to consider whether grand theory is valued today compared to the past.<sup>6</sup> Finally, to figure out the trends down the road, we need to assess what is being taught now.<sup>7</sup> So, I will rely on the *TRIP Surveys of Scholars* to determine whether grand theory is dropping out of the curriculum or not. Together, these sections should provide enough pieces to figure out the puzzle—is grand theory fading away or are grand theorists exaggerating their demise.

### 1. What IR Scholars Are Publishing<sup>8</sup>

The basic hypotheses emerge quite straightforwardly from Mearsheimer & Walt:

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<sup>4</sup> Available via the TRIP project at the College of William and Mary: <https://data.itpir.wm.edu/unity/trip2013/data/>

<sup>5</sup> Available via the TRIP project at the College of William and Mary. This section in part replicates and extends some of the findings in (Maliniak et al. 2011). The data will be mostly drawn from the 2011 survey as the most recent survey (2014) dropped many of the questions and makes some of the comparisons between previous surveys and the present ones far less straightforward.

<sup>6</sup> Dan Maliniak generously shared his dataset on cumulative citations. See (Maliniak et al. 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Again, this section builds on Maliniak et al (2011).

<sup>8</sup> The focus here is on articles and not books. While it might be the case that the trends in books are significantly different than the trends in articles, it is not clear why this would be the case. Still, this is an important caveat to keep in mind.

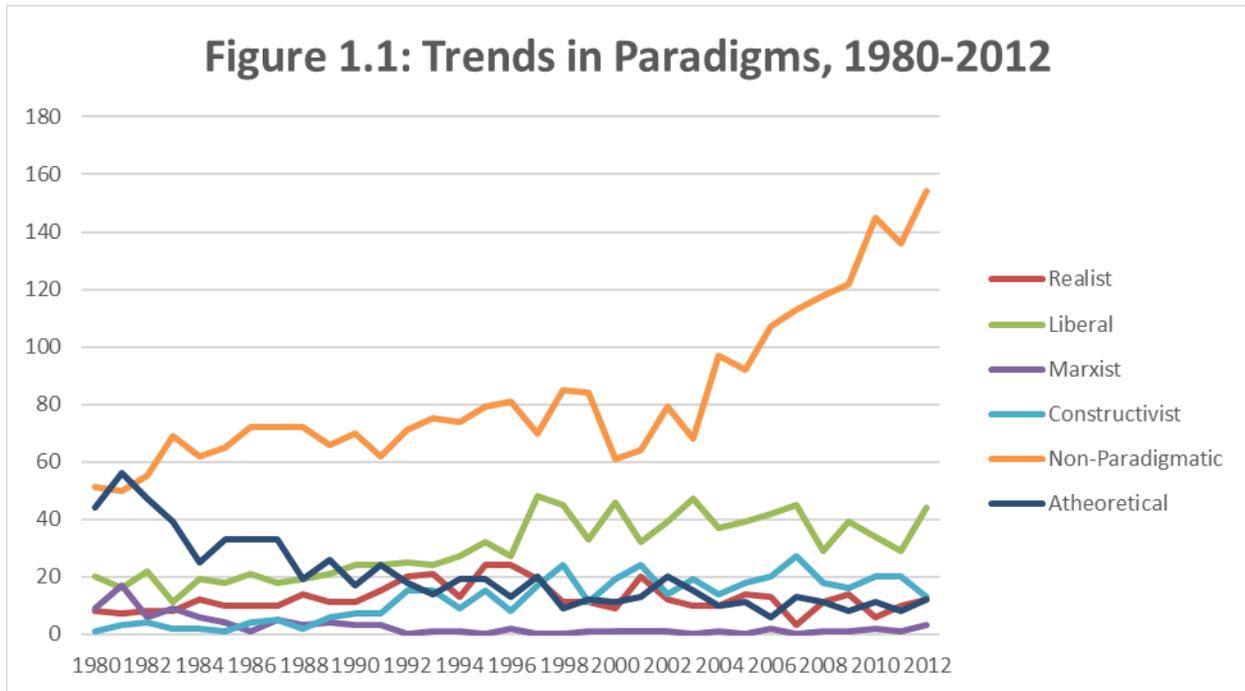
H1: There is less grand theory than there used to be.

The challenge, of course, is figuring out what grand theory is and is not. The TRIP Journal Article Database contains information about 5306 articles published in twelve major journals between 1980 and 2012.<sup>9</sup> Given the focus of Mearsheimer and Walt (2013) on the – isms, I use a variable in the dataset called *Paradigm*, which codes each article by which major school best applies: Realist, Liberal, Marxist, or Constructivist.<sup>10</sup> Other values include Non-paradigmatic or Atheoretic/None. “Paradigms are defined primarily by their core assumptions and secondarily by the independent variables they emphasize (TRIP JAD Codebook, p. 3).” If the article represents a synthesis, the Paradigm that gets more prominent is the one that is coded. Figure 1.1 presents the trends in Paradigms in articles in major journals over thirty years:

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<sup>9</sup> The journals are: American Journal of Political Science, Journal of Politics, World Politics, International Studies Quarterly, Journal of Conflict Resolution, American Political Science Review, International Security, International Organization, British Journal of Political Science, European Journal of International Relations, Security Studies and Journal of Peace Research. One may quibble about what is included or excluded as this is a fairly American-centric set of journals (BJPS, EJIR, JPR are the only European-based journals), but given that the contenders in this debate are mostly focused on American IR trends, this should not be problematic. See the Codebook and User’s Guide for TRIP Journal Article Database, April 2013.

<sup>10</sup> Critical IR theory is not one of the selections in the survey, perhaps perpetuating its peripheral status in American IR (Tickner 2013). It is not my intent to marginalize Critical IR, but the datasets provide constraints that would be too costly for me to overcome.



The most obvious trend here is that there has been quite a growth in non-paradigmatic work since 2000 (or perhaps after 9/11). This does not really tell us whether there is less grand theory, only that there is **more work that is not grand theory**. The other lines in Figure 1.1 do not go down in a way to suggest that Paradigms are becoming obsolete. If we collapse the categories, so that the paradigms are all coded as *Grand Theory* and non-paradigmatic and atheoretical/none are put into another category, we get the trends displayed in Figure 1.2

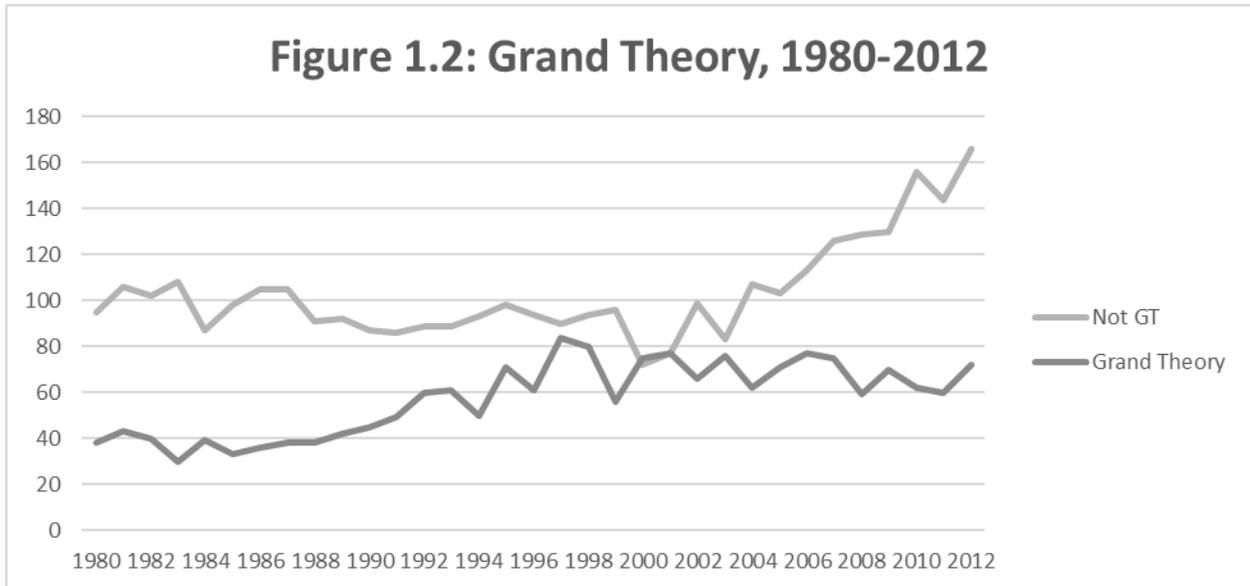


Figure 1.2 shows that the real trend is there has been a **growth in non-paradigm research** published in major journals but not a decline in grand theory. For the past few years the number of articles containing grand theoretical work remain well above the levels of 1980s and early 1990s. While there may be less grand theory the past few years, this is hardly a dramatic decline: the mean for 2006-2012 is 68, just below the means for the previous two year periods but well above the means before 1996.

**Table 1.1 Mean Grand Theory Articles, 1980-2012:**

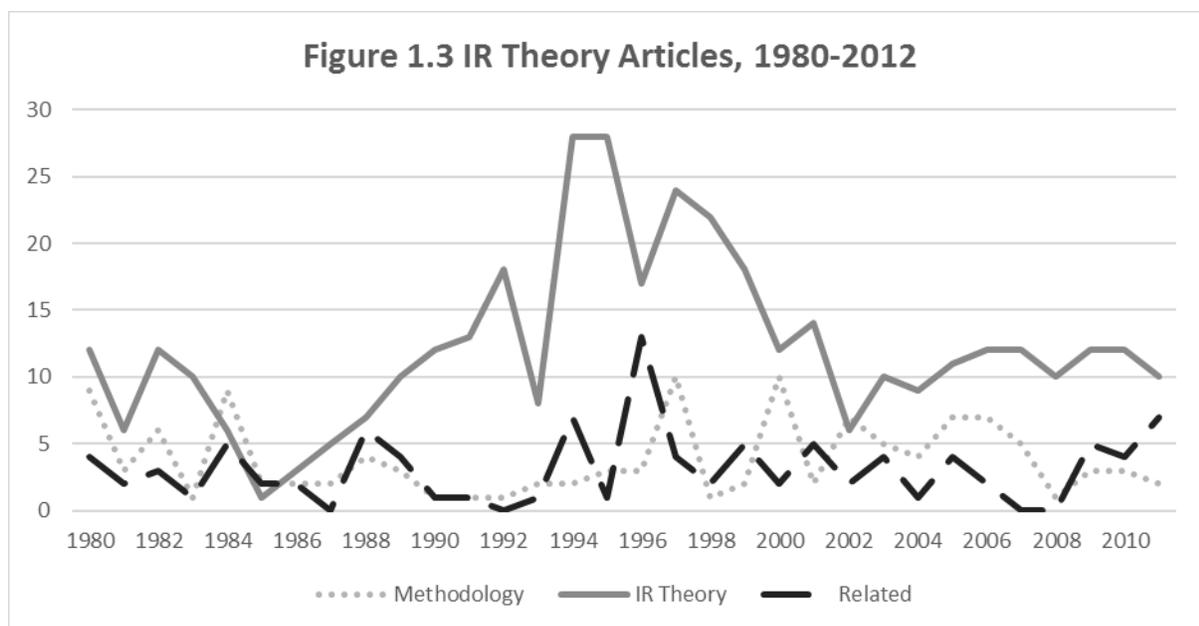
1980-1985	37.2
1985-1990	39.8
1991-1995	58.2
1996-2000	71.2
2001-2005	70.4
2006-2012	67.9

What these trends really demonstrates that there has been a **net gain in the number of articles published in IR** and more of those new article spots have gone to non-grand theory. So, given the 1990's debate between Realists and Liberals about relative versus absolute gains (Baldwin 1993; Grieco 1988; Powell 1991), it is ironic that grand theory may have encountered a relative loss but not very much of an absolute loss. Mearsheimer and Walt, as realists, are consistent in caring about the relative losses, but in terms of scholarship, Grand Theory is hardly dying out.

However, we have to be cautious in interpreting these results as coding of Paradigm may refer to papers that test the claims of a specific approach to IR and may not be an article that develops theory. A different way to get at that is to re-code the Issue Area variable that serves as an indicator of the focus of the article. Besides the usual issue areas, such as international security, international political economy and the like, there are distinct codes for IR Theory, History of the IR Discipline, Philosophy of Science and Methodology. We can use this variable then to see if there are trends in articles focusing on IR Theory as well as the meta-theoretical debates featured in the EJIR special issue. The results are in Figure 1.3.<sup>11</sup>

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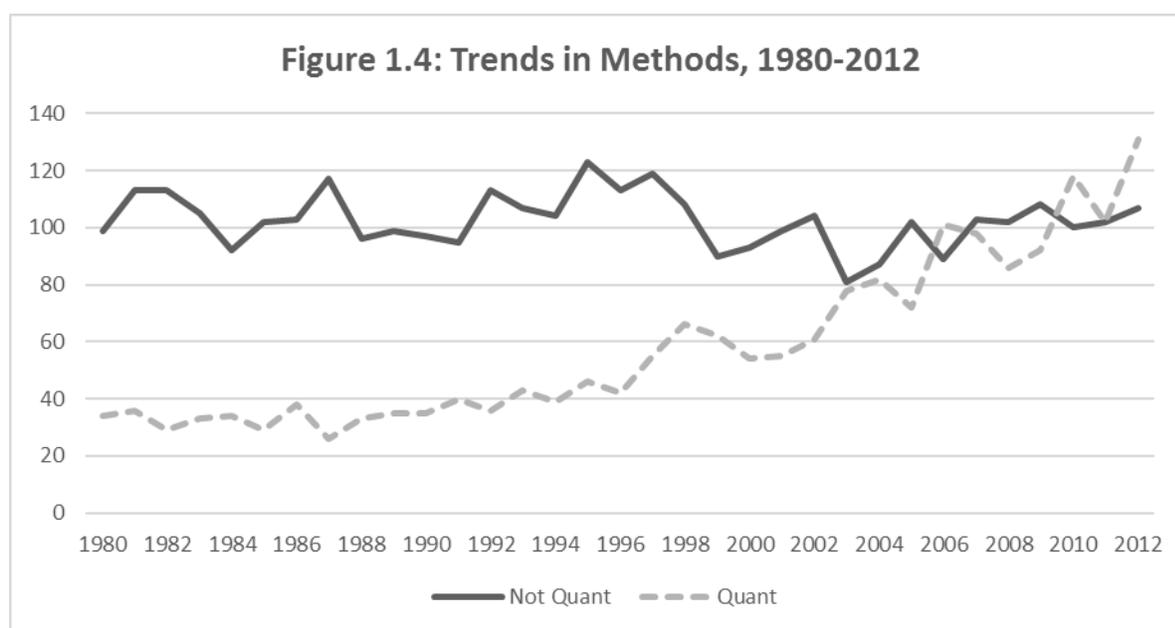
<sup>11</sup> Related refers to articles focused either on the History of the IR Discipline or on Philosophy of Science.



The figure demonstrates that IR Theory-focused articles were more prevalent in the 1990s than before or since, but that the level in the 2000's is generally as high as or higher than it was in the 1980s. So, the key is really one's point of comparison.<sup>12</sup> These results support the general perception of the 1990s as a time of Grand Theory Debates, but they also demonstrate that IR Theory is hardly dying out. I did not include the data for other Issue Areas, as the figure would get too cluttered, but the work that is on the ordinary issues is always far more prevalent. 90% of the articles in the 1980s and 2000's and 84% in the 1990s on security, international political economy, international organization, etc. compared to the IR Theory pieces: 5% in the 1980s, 12% in the 1990s, and 6% in the 2000's. Theory development has always been a niche within the field, having far greater visibility perhaps but never very prevalent, at least since 1980.

<sup>12</sup> Indeed, prospect theory might help explain the differing perceptions and reactions to these trends (Levy 1997).

As discussed above, Mearsheimer and Walt tend to conflate quantitative work with non-grand theory,<sup>13</sup> as they see statistical work as being more likely to be “mere” hypothesis testing. So, we can consider trends in methodology: is there more quantitative work?



<sup>13</sup> One might also consider Grand Theory to refer mostly, if not entirely, to theorizing at the systemic level, as the protagonists in this debate usually refer to the –isms of Waltz, Keohane and Wendt. Indeed, Kaarbo articulates well the disjuncture between what we think of as Grand Theory and much first and second analysis that she defines as Foreign Policy Analysis (Kaarbo 2015). TRIP has coded levels of analysis data for the articles in the dataset, but coding of third level analyses has changed over time, producing less than consistent coding. Still, a rough analysis of this data indicates that there is as much systemic work as in the past, but that there are more articles focusing on individual and state level variables.

Once again, the answer is mixed: there is more quantitative work but not less work by other methodologies. There is a steady rise in quantitative work, but, surprisingly, this means that quantitative work has only reached a rough parity with non-quantitative work very recently. This is hardly a trend of quantitative work wiping out its competitors. Indeed, Table 1.2 indicates that that non-quantitative work has remained largely the same—a little over 100 articles per year from the early 1980s to the end of the 2000s with a slight dip in the early 2000's.<sup>14</sup>

**Table 1.2 Means of Methods, 1980-2012**

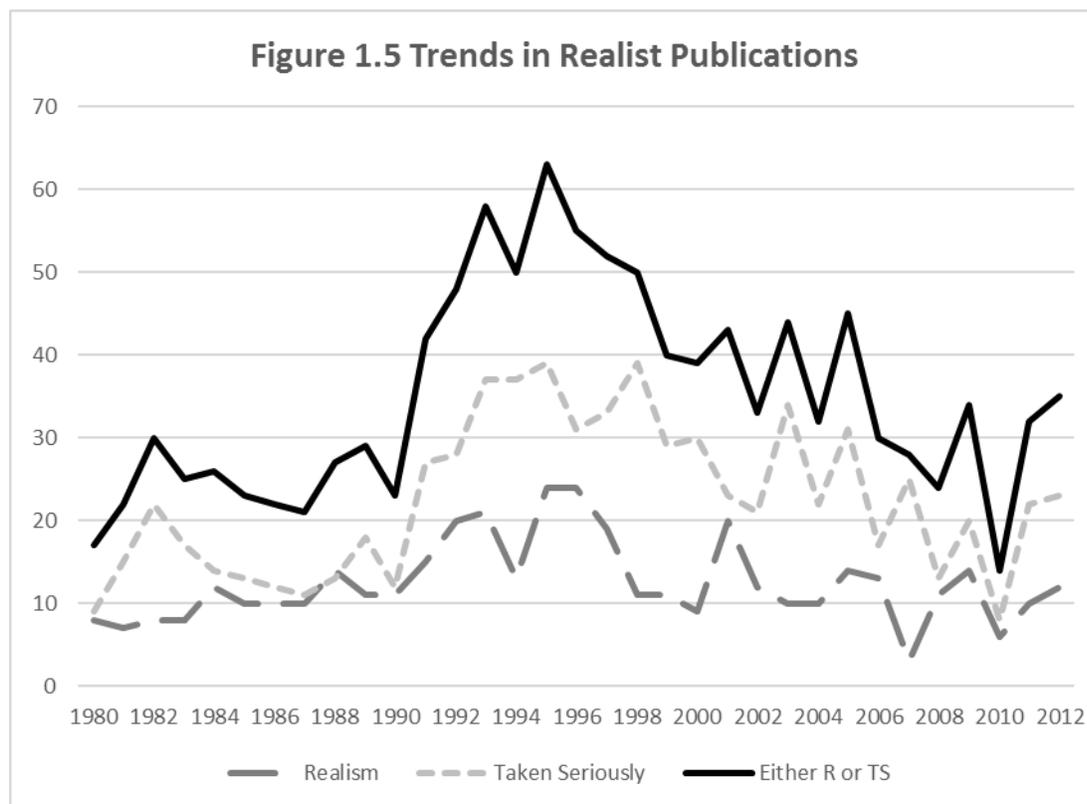
	Quant	Non Quant
Mean 1980-1985	32.5	104
Mean 1985-1990	33.4	102.4
Mean 1991-1995	38.6	103.2
Mean 1996-2000	55.8	104.6
Mean 2001-2005	69.6	94.6
Mean 2006-2012	104	101.6

Perhaps the complaint is not so much about the relevance of grand theory but the “right kind” of grand theory which would be Realism. Perhaps Mearsheimer and Walt think there is less grand theory today because scholars are taking Realism less seriously. Figure 1.5 suggests that they might have something to worry about.

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<sup>14</sup> A different way to get at the role of theory is to use the “analytic” category of the methodology codings:

“attempts to illuminate features of IR or IR theory without reference to significant empirical evidence or a formal theory.” (JAD codebook, 15-16). The basic trend remains the same: a relatively steady output across the time frame for analytic work with a bit of a peak in the mid-1990s and steadily increasing work of other kinds. See author’s website.



As Figure 1.5 illustrates, articles that are avowedly Realist or take seriously Realism boomed in the first half of the 1990s but have declined since then. Realist works are averaging the same output now as they did before the end of the Cold war. Ironically, Mearsheimer (1990) was wrong to suggest that we might miss the Cold war—the immediate post-Cold War was a great time for Realism. Alas, scholars are engaging realism less frequently now than any time since the Reagan administration. So, the complaint that there is less Grand Theory may be a product of cognitive biases: Mearsheimer and Walt see less Realism and infer that there is less Grand Theory. This, of course, raises the question of why there are less Realist articles being published, but that is not something that this dataset can address.

Before moving on, we ought to consider the correlates of Grand Theory. What factors might be associated with an increased or decreased probability of an article taking Grand Theory seriously? Does the year of publication decrease the probability of a Grand Theory article being published in a major IR outlet? Thus far, we have looked at trends, which can only tell us so much.

In the analyses below, I consider the year of publication, the type of journal, whether the work is quantitative or not,<sup>15</sup> and gender to assess what is associated with grand theory or grand theory taken seriously. The dependent variables from Figures 1.2, 1.3, and 1.5 respectively are dichotomous, so I ran logit and report the odds ratios, which means that numbers over 1 can be read as positive and numbers less than one are negative. Thus, each year increases the chances of an article focusing on a grand theory by two percent—that Mearsheimer and Walt are wrong as grand theory is becoming slightly more likely rather than less, once we control for other factors. The journals in which they have the greatest influence, *International Security* and *Security Studies*, are associated with a significantly lower probability of grand theory appearing or being taken seriously—one third less likely.

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<sup>15</sup> I drop this variable for the IR Theory analysis since there are very few cases of IR theory, as coded here, that are quantitative. Indeed, this lack of overlap provides some support for using this variable as an indicator of theory development as Mearsheimer and Walt conceive of it.

**Table 1.3: Multivariate Analyses of IR Articles<sup>16</sup>**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Grand</b>	<b>IR Theory</b>	<b>Realism</b>
<b>Year</b>	1.02***	1.00	0.99*
<b>Security (IS/SS)</b>	.67***	1.31***	3.39***
<b>European Journal</b>	.75***	1.34**	.72*
<b>Quant Methods</b>	.68***		.86
<b>Female</b>	.87*	.68**	.52***
<b>constant</b>	5.04e -15***	1.65e -10**	3.70e +7
<b>N</b>	5306	5300	5306
<b>Lr Chi2</b>	64.61	276.77	194.13
<b>Prob &gt; chi<sup>2</sup></b>	0.0000	.0000	0.0000
<b>Pseudo R<sup>2</sup></b>	0.0093	.0979	0.0671

\* =  $p < .1$ , \*\* =  $p < .05$ , \*\*\* =  $p < .01$

European journals (EJIR, JPR, BJPS) were a quarter less likely to contain IR articles with grand theory. M&W are correct in their perception that quantitative work is less likely to contain a grand theoretical claim. So, if there is more quantitative work, as the trends indicate, then there will appear to be less work that is grand theory, at least relatively. Gender does seem to matter

<sup>16</sup> None of the independent variables are highly correlated.

as well, as articles with at least one female co-author are thirteen percent less likely to make a paradigmatic argument.<sup>17</sup>

If we use the IR Theory variable from Figure 1.3, we can see some very different relationships. This, of course, suggests that the Grand Theory indicator may be problematic as it may indicate articles that do not push theory forward but are testing arguments derived from the paradigm. Strikingly, articles in the two Security journals are thirty percent more likely to be focused on IR theory. Articles written by women are thirty percent less likely to be focused on IR theory.

Again, the lament may be more about the apparent demise of Realism, so I ran a separate analysis with a dependent variable of whether article was Realist (dummy variable created from Paradigm). Articles in *International Security* and *Security Studies* are three times more likely to contain avowedly Realist articles, articles in European journals are less likely to contain Realist arguments, and articles with at least one female author are about half as likely to put forth a Realist argument.

To be sure, none of these analyses capture much of the variation (note the low pseudo  $R^2$ 's). From the analyses of the TRIP article data, what we know is that there are more IR articles, that qualitative work and grand theory have not really lost in any absolute sense but the new article spaces do seem to be going to non-paradigmatic work and to quantitative work. The basic perception that the 1990s were a period of peak Grand Theory Debates is verified, which might mean that comparing now to the mid-1990s might be problematic.

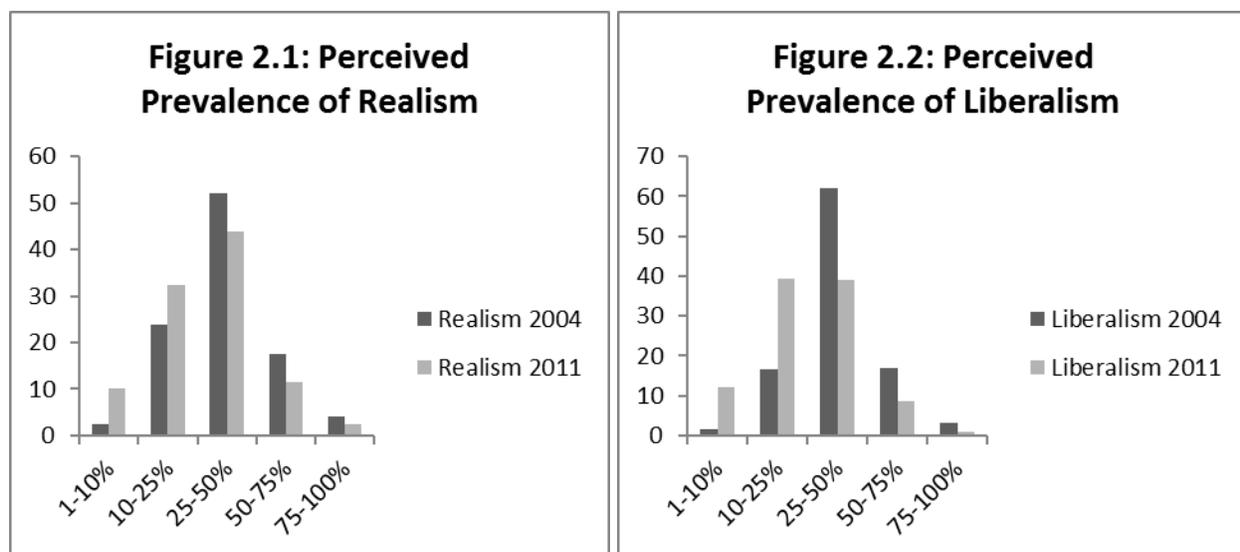
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<sup>17</sup> Using a variable that just codes the gender of the first author listed provides nearly identical results except for the first set of analyses, where that indicator loses significance.

## 2. What Do IR Scholars Perceive

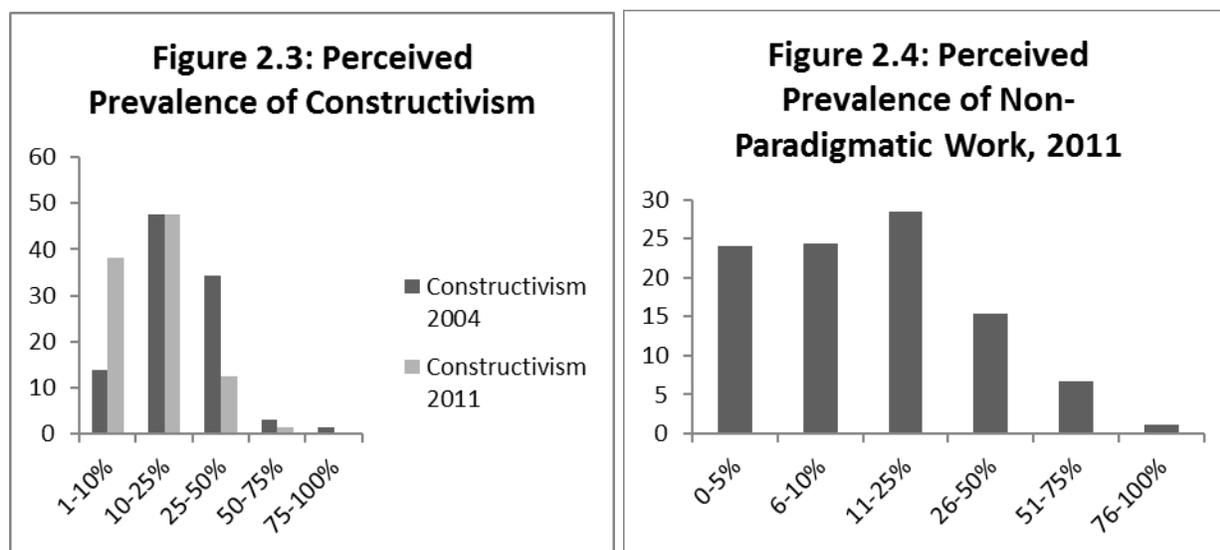
Of course, perception and reality are often two different things (Jervis 1976), and arguments about perceived realities may ultimately shape what people do. TRIP has conducted a series of surveys of IR scholars in the U.S. and around the world, the *TRIP Surveys of Scholars*, which will help us to determine how IR scholars see themselves and see the field. I focus on two sets of surveys—the first in 2004 and 2011—to assess where things stand now and how they have changed (or not).<sup>18</sup>

Despite the content of articles as reported in Figure 1.1, scholars today perceive that Realism is the most prevalent paradigm and the three most prominent paradigms are perceived to be in many if not most articles, as Figures 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3 illustrate. The question here is: “What percentage of IR literature do you estimate is devoted to each of these paradigms today?”



<sup>18</sup> I only use the US data in 2011 to keep the results comparable to the 2004 dataset. The 2014 survey does not contain this information.

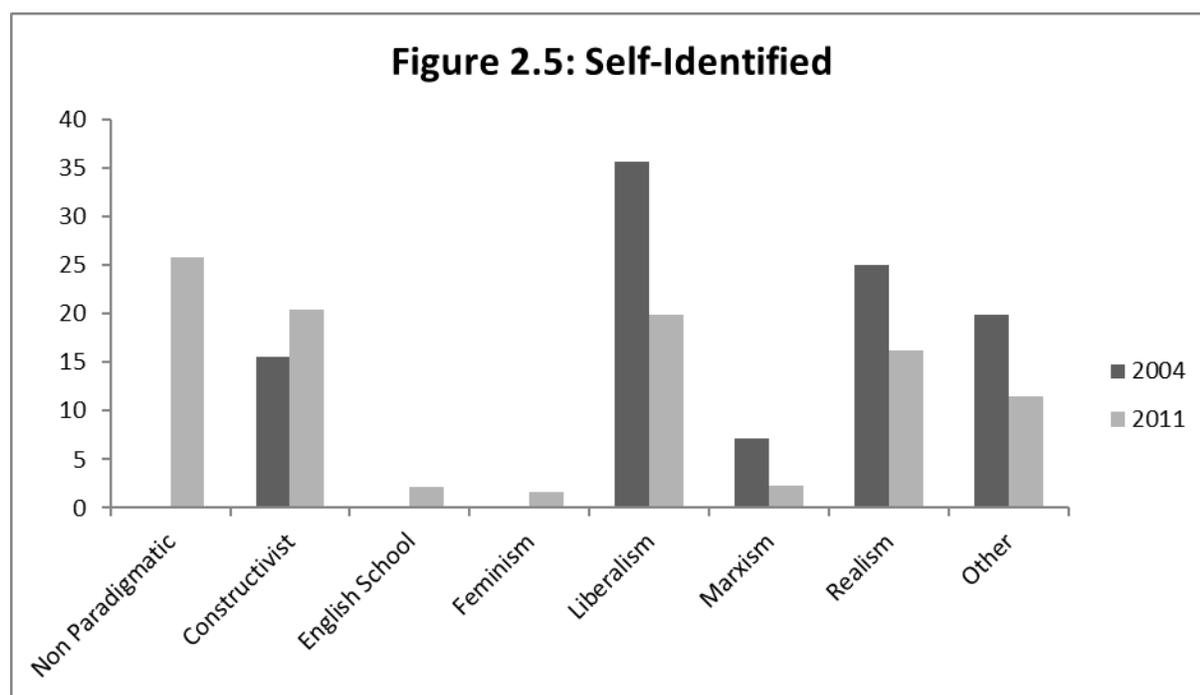
Figures 2.1-2.4 show that most scholars think that the three major approaches are still quite prevalent. In 2011, nearly fifty-seven percent of surveyed scholars based in the U.S. considered more than a quarter of the IR literature to be devoted to Realism. This is down from 2004 where seventy-three percent of the scholars believed that more than a quarter of the literature was devoted to IR. Figure 2.1 illustrates that Realism is no longer seen as quite as prevalent even if the majority of scholars still consider the work widely published. Figure 2.2 indicates that Liberalism took a greater hit as it went from the leading position in the field to second place behind realism. Surprisingly it was not due to an increase in the perceived prevalence of constructivism, which actually declined as Figure 2.3 indicates.



Overall, Figures 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 suggest that scholars, other than Mearsheimer and Walt, do not think that Grand Theory has gone away, but they also do not seem to be thinking there is much more of it. Unfortunately, we do not have comparable 2004 for Non-Paradigmatic. Still, most scholars think that non-paradigmatic work is not very prevalent with more than seventy-six

percent thinking that non-paradigmatic scholarship is in twenty-five percent or less of the literature. Given the earlier set of figures, this demonstrates most strongly that perceptions have not caught up to the reality.

Of course, one key factor shaping perceptions of the field is how people see themselves. The 2004 and 2011 surveys asked scholars under which label do they see themselves. Figure 2.5 shows the results:



Unfortunately, the 2004 survey did not have categories for non-paradigmatic, English School or Feminism, so we cannot be sure that more people identified under those labels. In 2011, about a quarter of the field saw themselves as doing work that was not within any of the major schools AND was not seen as “Other”. In the intervening years, Liberals lost almost half of their relative size. Constructivists grew despite many perceiving that there was less constructivist work in the latter period. Realists also declined relatively. Again, the trends

indicate that Grand Theory is not disappearing but that there is much work that does not fit within that category.

To determine what might be shaping these trends, I turn to some modest multivariate analyses. What influences perceptions of the prevalence of any particular approach to International Relations? Using the 2011 Trip Survey, I focus on a few variables: self-identification with a paradigm; whether one self-identifies as a positivist, whether one uses quantitative methods. Table 2.1 presents the resulting ordered logits as the dependent variables were ordinal—perceptions of increasing prevalence of a paradigm.

**Table 2.1: Multivariate Analyses of Perceived Prevalence<sup>19</sup>**

Variable	Realism	Liberal	Con	Non-Paradigm
<b>Realist</b>	.46**			
<b>Liberal</b>		.59**		
<b>Constr</b>			.46**	
<b>Non-Parad</b>				.82***
<b>Epistem</b>	-.29**	-.09	-.11	.53***
<b>Quant</b>	-.57***	-.25*	-.69***	.61***
<b>Cut/1</b>	-4.3	-3.8	-2.9	-.36
<b>Cut/2</b>	-2.5	-2.1	-.65	.80
<b>Cut/3</b>	-.57	.06	1.7	2.2
<b>Cut/4</b>	-1.6	2.3	4.1	3.5
<b>Cut/5</b>	3.5	4.8		5.6
<b>N</b>	970	954	959	813
<b>LR chi2</b>	38.16	18.82	44.73	79.86
<b>Prob &gt; chi2</b>	.0000	.0003	.0000	.0000
<b>Pseudo chi2</b>	.0147	.0077	.0193	.0314

\* =  $p < .1$ , \*\* =  $p < .05$ , \*\*\* =  $p < .01$

The most obvious pattern is **that scholars will tend to perceive that their approach is more prevalent**, making Mearsheimer and Walt atypical realists. Realists tend to see more of their own, Liberals tend to see their approach as being more prevalent, and the same for

<sup>19</sup> None of the independent variables are highly correlated.

Constructivists. Positivists and quantitative people do see non-paradigmatic work as more prevalent.

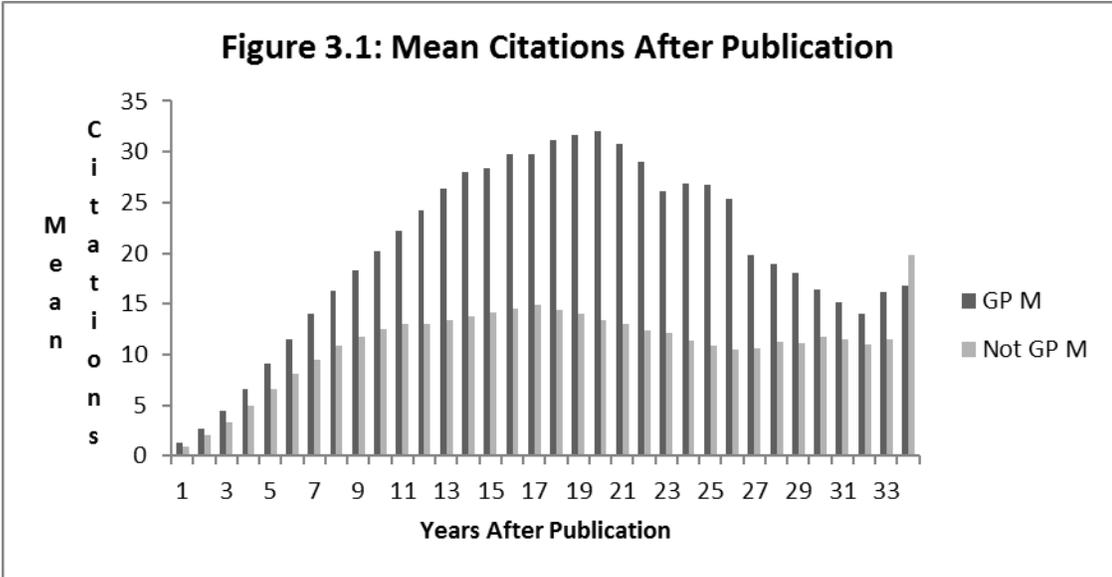
If perception is reality, then Realists and other grand theorists do not have that much to worry about. Scholars tend to believe that much work today still is in the realm of Grand Theory. There are cognitive biases, as Realists see Realism as more prevalent and so on, but combined with the first sets of figures and analyses, it is pretty clear that the field is not discarding the big thinkers of the past. Of course, one way to examine that is to consider what is being cited.

### ***3. What do IR Scholars Cite?***

Thus far, we have considered what IR people do and what they perceive. Patterns of citations can tell us which theories are really being engaged and have lasting value in shaping the discourse. As Mearsheimer and Walt implicate citation counts in the death of Grand Theory (2013, 447), examining citation patterns is critical to testing their hypotheses. Combining the *TRIP Journal Article Database* with data on citations provided by Dan Maliniak,<sup>20</sup> we can consider whether grand theory and non-grand theory have similar or different patterns of citation. Figure 3.1 displays the mean cumulative citations of grand theory and work that is not grand theory. The figure shows an eventual decline rather than a steady increase as many articles in the database were published in the middle or end of the timespan of the dataset. So, a very well cited piece written in 1990 will not contribute to the mean of the cumulative citations 25 years after publication yet.

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<sup>20</sup> (Maliniak et al. 2013)

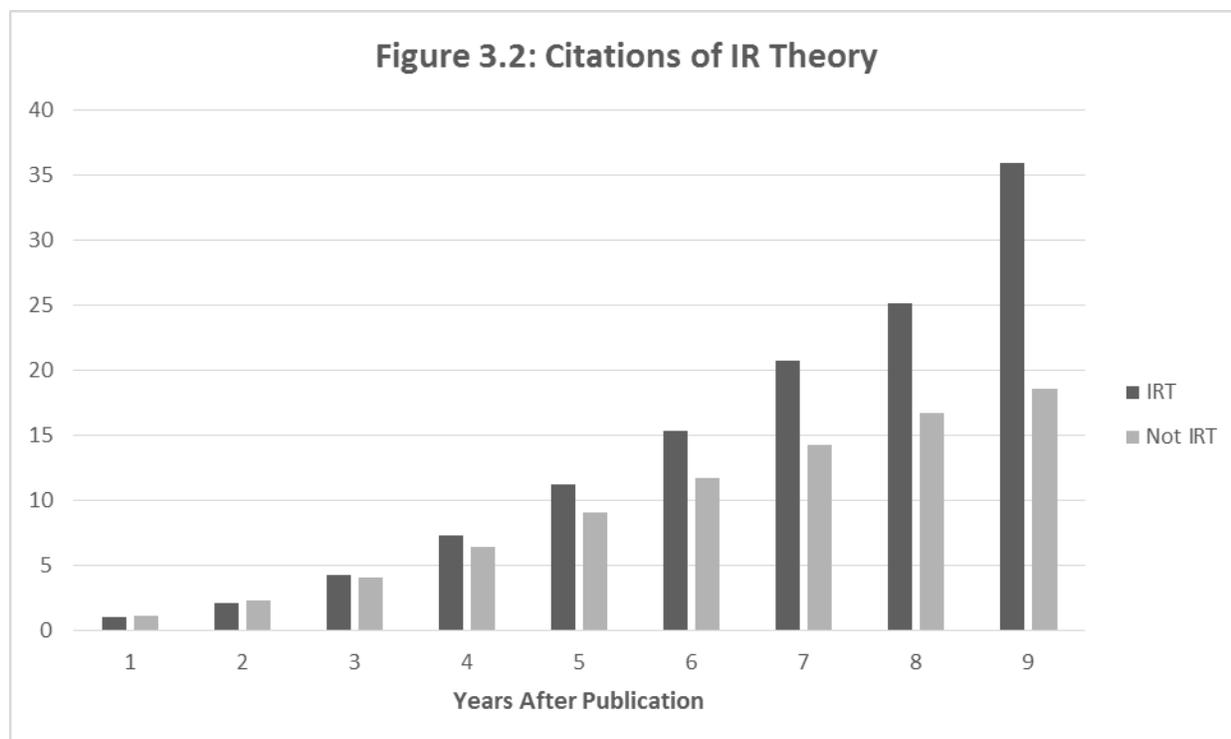


The figure does demonstrate grand theory tends to be more widely cited than other kinds of work.<sup>21</sup> Because the indicator of Grand Theory may be problematic, I used the IR Theory indicator from Figure 1.3 to create Figure 3.2:<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> In splits of the dataset that focus on more recent time periods, grand theory is still more cited than work that is not focused on the paradigms. See online appendix.

<sup>22</sup> There is much less data as Issue Areas were only coded for the last ten years of the dataset.



Using this different measure, we see that IR theory articles get cited more and the gap widens as time passes.<sup>23</sup>

To clarify our understanding of citation counts and IR theory, we need to ascertain the correlates of citation. The dependent variable will be citation count in 2011 for articles published between 1980 and 2011. Since it is nonnegative count variable where the variance is larger than the mean, I use negative binomial regression. The independent variables will be:

- Grand theory to test assertions about what shapes its citation and then Grand Theory Broadly defined to include work that takes seriously grand theory but is not actually within a particular school; (anal/IRT)

<sup>23</sup> I again used the “Analytic” methodology indicator and find similar trends. See Online Appendix.

- Year of publication, to control for the general trend that older work has more time to be cited than newer work;
- Big 3, as articles in APSR, AJPS and JOP tend to get more heavily cited;
- American, as it may be the case that journals published in the U.S. may be more heavily cited;
- Security, to see if International Security and Security Studies are cited differently;
- Quant Methods, to see if quantitative work has different citation patterns;
- Positivist, to see if positivist work is more cited;
- Rank of Author (first author for co-authored work), as senior people are more likely to be cited;
- Gender (first author for co-authored work), as studies have shown that women are cited less (Maliniak et al. 2013).

Table 3.1 reports the incident ratios, akin to odds ratios, of the negative binomial regressions of citations counts.

**Table 3.1: Citation Counts and Theory, 2005-2011<sup>24</sup>**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Grand Theory</b>	<b>IR Theory</b>
<b>Grand Theory</b>	1.03	
<b>IR Theory</b>		1.26
<b>Year</b>	.67***	.67***
<b>Big3</b>	1.29**	1.30**
<b>Security (IS/SS)</b>	.59***	.61***
<b>American Journal</b>	1.25**	1.26**
<b>Quant Methods</b>	1.20**	1.22**
<b>Rank of First Author</b>	1.11***	1.11**
<b>Gender</b>	1.10	1.11
constant	.	.
/lnalpha	-.08	-.08
alpha	.92	.92
N	893	893
Lr Chi2	425.41	427.68
Prob > chi <sup>2</sup>	.0000	.0000
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.0707	.0711

\* =  $p < .1$ , \*\* =  $p < .05$ , \*\*\* =  $p < .01$

<sup>24</sup> While the dataset contains information on citations going back further, most of the independent variables are only coded for the 2005-2011 time period. Given that the arguments being evaluated focus on recent dynamics—the supposed death of theory, this is not problematic. None of the independent variables are correlated.

Neither of the indicators for Theory—Grand theory based on paradigm, IR Theory based on issue area—are significant.<sup>25</sup> Other factors matter more consistently, so there may not be a professional incentive, if one wants to maximize citation counts, to do Grand or IR Theory, but there is not a significant disincentive either. Younger articles are less cited, as expected. Placing an article in APSR, AJPS and JOP increases one's citation count by about thirty percent. Articles in International Security and Security Studies have forty percent less citations, which may feed a sense of under-appreciation by those who focus on these two journals. Rank and methodology have a distinct impact, raising citation counts by ten and twenty percent respectively, but gender seems not to matter significantly. Again, the amount of variation accounted for by the model is quite low.

Simply put, the citation data presented here does not suggest that IR Theory is dying. Mearsheimer and Walt contend that the focus on citations counts “encourage scholars to move away from theory and toward hypothesis testing (2013, 447).” The data here suggests that this is simply not true as theory pieces, measured by paradigm, by issue area or by methodology,<sup>26</sup> receive more citations over time. That might be a product of rank and other factors, so that multivariate analyses indicate that professional incentives (citation counts) do not encourage OR discourage Grand or IR Theory.

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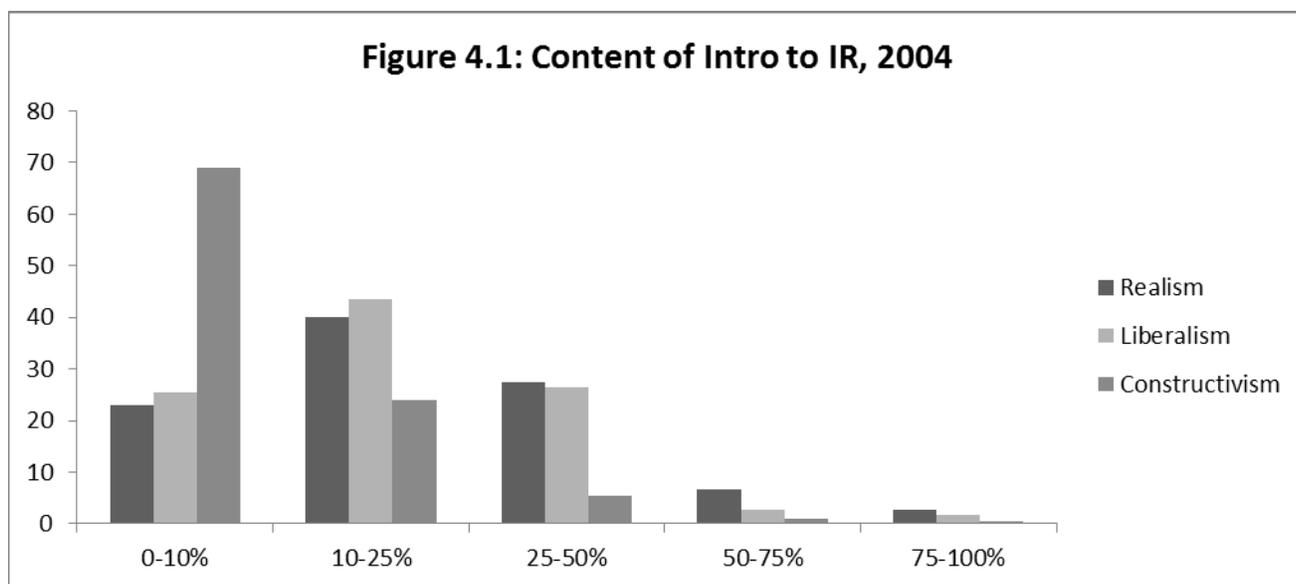
<sup>25</sup> I ran the same analysis with the “Analytical” indicator instead of Grand Theory or IR Theory issue area and found very similar results..

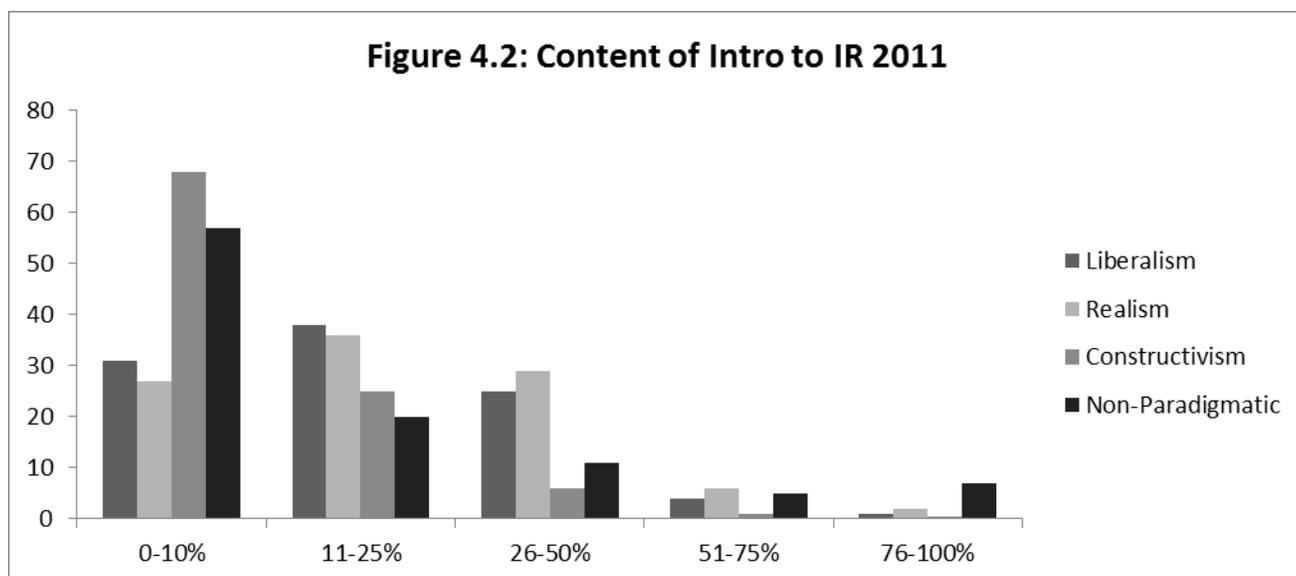
<sup>26</sup> For the last, see online appendix.

#### 4. *What do IR Scholars Teach?*

Of course, the way in which most IR scholars influence the most people is not usually through their research but through their teaching. Introductory classes to IR can range from scores of students to hundreds, and not just political science majors but students across the disciplines who have an interest in international relations. Over the years, a professor teaching an Intro IR class can reach thousands of students who then go on to work in governments, the media, education and other fields, so we ought to consider the trends in these classrooms, as they will ultimately shape how people view IR.

The TRIP survey asked questions about the content of classes. For this paper, the focus is on how much of the paradigms were taught in Intro to IR classes. Figure 4.1 illustrates the percentage of class dedicated to a particular approach to IR in the 2004 survey, and Figure 4.1 reports the 2011 survey's answers.

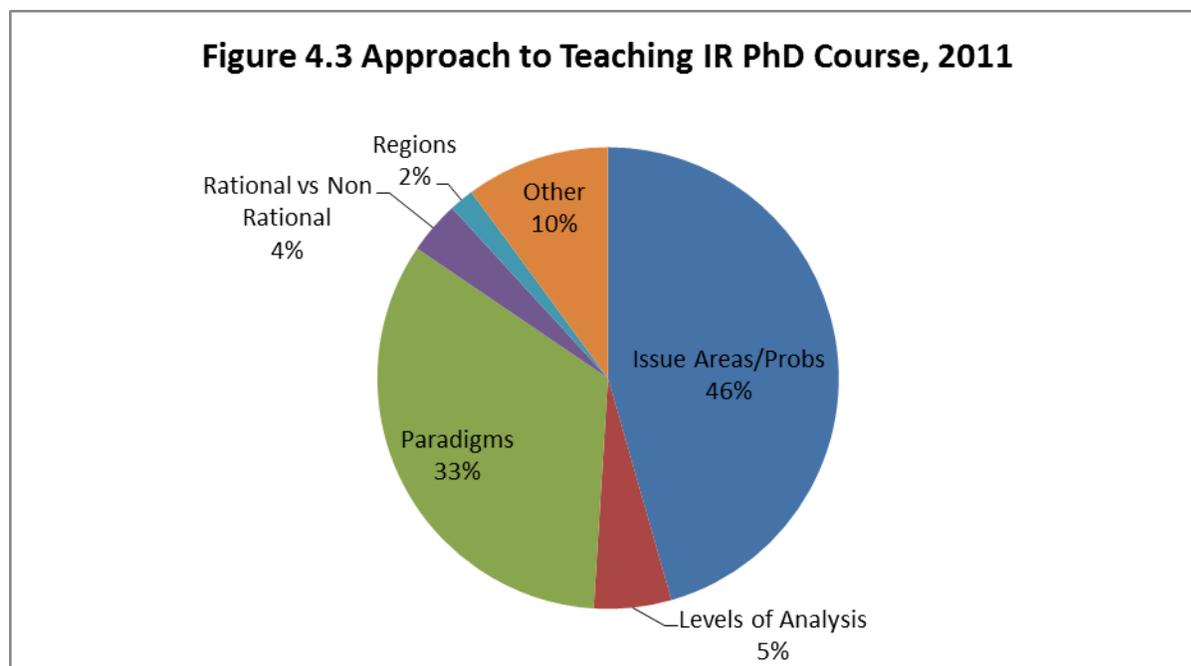




Both figures show that the main isms were well represented in most Intro to IR classes taught in the U.S. in 2011.<sup>27</sup> Realism and Liberalism rarely made just a token showing, and in many classes, they represent a significant chunk of the material: about one third of IR classes devoted between a quarter and a half of the content to either Liberalism or Realism. Non-paradigmatic work makes up a much smaller slice of most Intro to IR syllabi. Grand theory has clearly maintained its place in the Introductory International Relations classes.

The 2011 Survey asks how people organize their PhD level IR courses, with the results displayed in Figure 4.3.

<sup>27</sup> Comparisons with the 2004 survey show some modest decline.



One third of graduate IR classes are organized around the major paradigms, which might be less than one might have expected. However, the way the question is worded, it applies to all IR graduate classes. If one asked how one organized the IR core class, we might find a different answer.

Once again, the question turns to what factors are associated with emphasizing grand theory or not. Like the analyses in Table 2.1, the analyses in Table 4.1 take the available data to ascertain whether one's own identification and stances shape what one includes in their introductory courses (first four columns) and graduate IR courses (fifth column).

**Table 4.1: Factors Shaping the Content of IR Courses, 2011<sup>28</sup>**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Realism</b>	<b>Liberal</b>	<b>Con</b>	<b>Non-Paradigm</b>	<b>Grad Course</b>
<b>Realist</b>	1.09***				-.22
<b>Liberal</b>		1.04***			.34
<b>Constr</b>			.99***		1.54***
<b>Non-Parad</b>				.57**	-1.22**
<b>Epistem</b>	.09	.09	-.06	.08	.02
<b>Quant</b>	-.12	-.37*	-.62**	.58**	-.59**
<b>Basic vs. Applied</b>	.11*	.09	.10	-.10	
<b>Cut/1</b>	-2.28	-2.06	-.62	-.34	-.25
<b>Cut/2</b>	-.64	-.42	1.00	.38	
<b>Cut/3</b>	1.09	1.37	3.02	1.46	
<b>Cut/4</b>	3.40	3.57	4.90	2.23	
<b>Cut/5</b>	5.07	5.17	6.86	2.78	
<b>N</b>	613	616	597	406	374
<b>LR chi2</b>	37.60	38.87	57.39	21.90	39.88
<b>Prob &gt; chi2</b>	.0000	.0000	.0000	.0002	.0000
<b>Pseudo chi2</b>	.0213	.0223	.0368	.0171	.0825

\* =  $p < .1$ , \*\* =  $p < .05$ , \*\*\* =  $p < .01$

<sup>28</sup> None of the independent variables are highly correlated.

In Table 2.1, we found that people tend to see themselves in the field—realists think that realism is prevalent, liberals think that liberalism is prevalent and so on. In these analyses, we find that **IR scholars tend to teach what they think**. Realists have more realist content, Liberals have more Liberal content, Constructivists have more constructivist content, and those who view themselves as not doing paradigmatic work tend to assign work that is non-paradigmatic. To be fair, in analyses I do not report here, Liberals are more likely to have higher Realist and Constructivist content, and Realists are more likely to have more Liberal content. Thus, those positively inclined towards any of the big three paradigms are more likely to assign grand theory in greater proportion in Intro to IR classes. Among those identifying as belonging to a paradigm, Constructivists are more likely to organize their graduate courses by paradigms while non-paradigmatic scholars and quantitative scholars are more likely to use an alternative organizational scheme.

I added a variable to include one's stance on Basic versus Applied research, and found that those who lean towards more applied work tend to assign more Realist content. Scholars who tend to rely more on quantitative work are less likely to have much paradigmatic content in their undergraduate classes (although they are no more or less likely to assign Realism) and less likely to organize their graduate classes along paradigms.

Again, there is much little variance accounted for in these analyses. Still, the general pattern emerges: people tend to develop their IR courses based on what they themselves do. This is not a huge surprise. It also probably provides some additional anxiety for Mearsheimer and Walt since there are more non-paradigmatic scholars than once was. On the other hand, again, this is really about the tent getting bigger rather than any one approach losing badly. The next

generation of IR students will still be getting grand theory in their coursework while they are also likely to be exposed to more non-paradigmatic work.

## Conclusions

To be sure, any effort to assess the state of the discipline is essentially political—to push the field in a particular direction (Kristensen 2015). The goal here has been see whether the assessments match the reality, with the implicit bias that the assessments were off the mark. As it turns out, there is some good news and bad news for most scholars in these debates. First, and most importantly, there are more premiere outlets for IR work.<sup>29</sup> There are more widely respected journals, which means that most of the changes seen by observers are *relative* changes and not *absolute* ones. For instance, there is more quantitative work, but there is about as many non-quantitative articles each year as there ever has been. It is no small irony that two noted Realists observe the relative loss and tend to ignore the absolute levels. Of course, they may be more upset by the real decline in Realist work (Figure 1.5), but again that is mostly a decline from an abnormal peak.

Second, using a variety of measures, I have shown that grand theory or theory development is hardly dead. It may have declined somewhat since its peak in the early 1990s, but the reality is that pure theoretical work was never the predominant form of research produced by IR scholars. Those generalizing about the state of IR today may be using different bases of comparison. Comparing 2013 or so to 1993 may be deceptive since 1993 was more of an outlier than a typical period for IR research, given the various figures presented here. Moreover, the

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<sup>29</sup> Younger scholars joke that there are 20 top three IR journals.

surveys of scholars indicate that even if the paradigm wars might be dead, the paradigms themselves are not. Scholars still see the big paradigms as prevalent in scholarship and in their own assigned readings in the classroom.

Third, despite the fear that citation counts might lead people away from doing theoretical work, the realities of citation indicate that good theory, like any kind of good work, is as or more likely to be cited. There is no contradiction between responding to the demands of the profession and doing IR theory, at least as indicated here.

Fourth, the state of IR today is good if one values diversity. One of the interesting themes of the EJIR special issue is the repeated call for diversity. “Although we both work in the realist tradition, we think many kinds of theory — including middle-range theory — can be useful for helping us understand how international politics works. In our view, a *diverse theoretical ecosystem is preferable to an intellectual monoculture* (Italics added, Mearsheimer and Walt 2013, 430, italics added).” Jackson and Nexon (2013, 560) assert:

“International theory used to be a much smaller place — in terms of the number of scholars active in it, the number of journals in which they published (Kristensen, 2012), and the intellectual breadth of their theories. The *field is bigger and more diverse now*, and laments about the ‘end of IR theory’ might be the dying gasp of the ‘American social science’ (Hoffmann, 1977) that the discipline once was and is unlikely to ever be again. The future of international theory may be bright, but it will not look like a linear extrapolation of what came before. This, perhaps, is ‘progress.’”

While we can value diversity for its own sake, it may make IR scholarship more complicated, more noisy, and ultimately more confusing (Sylvester 2013). The participants will

have different standards of what is good IR scholarship and different vocabularies so much conversation will take place within various circles with less fruitful communications across the discipline. We may need to expend much effort to understand and appreciate the cacophony, but that noise does make one thing clear: theory development is alive and well at all levels.

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