

PSC 202

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

**INTRODUCTION TO
POLITICAL
ANALYSIS
DEVELOPING THEORIES IN POLITICAL
SCIENCE**

HOUSEKEEPING

- First problem set posted later today
 - Course website and Blackboard
- Due Friday next week (September 22, 6:00 PM)
 - Via Blackboard

HOUSEKEEPING

Week 3

- Monday (9/11): Research Questions in Political Science
 - Slides
 - Reading: Barakso, Maryann, Daniel M. Sabet, and Brian F. Schaffner (2014): "The Research Question." (Blackboard)
 - Multiple Choice Quiz due (3:45 PM, Blackboard)
- Wednesday (9/13): Developing Theories in Political Science
 - Slides
 - Reading: Barakso, Maryann, Daniel M. Sabet, and Brian F. Schaffner (2014): "Linking Theory and Inference." (Blackboard)
 - Multiple Choice Quiz due (3:45 PM, Blackboard)
- Problem Set 1 (due Sep 22)

Week 4

- Monday (9/18): Concepts and Measurement
 - Reading: EPA (Textbook) Ch. 1
 - Multiple Choice Quiz due (3:45 PM, Blackboard)
- Wednesday (9/20): Variables
 - Reading: EPA Ch. 2, Sections "Essential Features" and "Levels of Measurement"
 - Multiple Choice Quiz due (3:45 PM, Blackboard)
- Problem Set 1 due on Friday (Sep 22, 10:30 AM, submit on Blackboard)

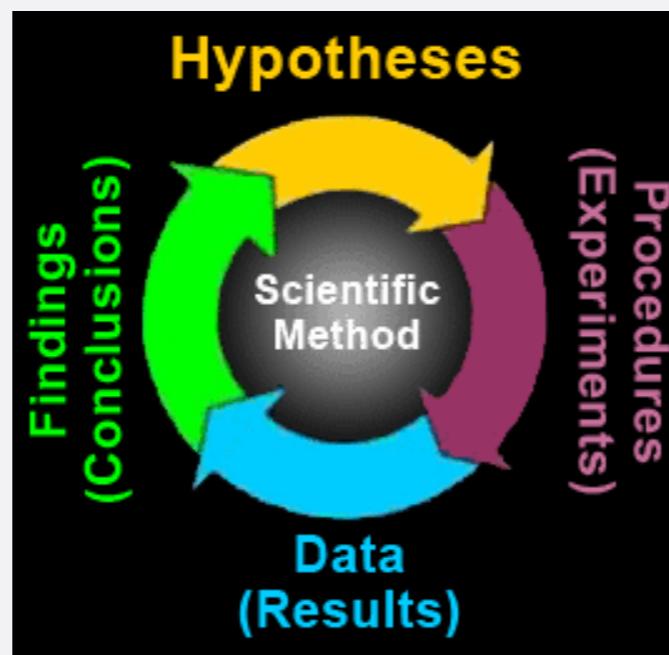
- <http://www.simonweschle.com/psc202>

HOUSEKEEPING

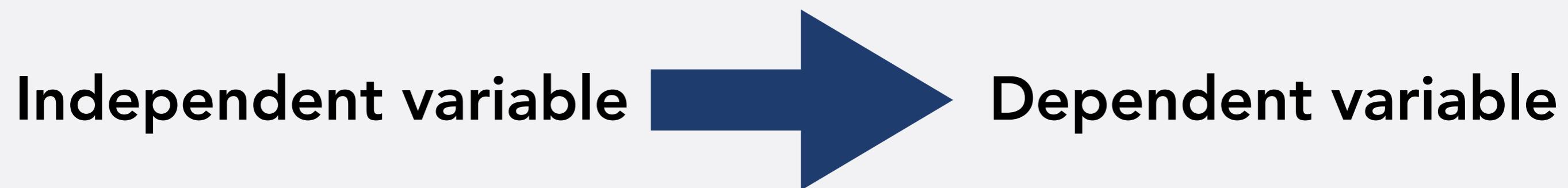
- Problem sets
 - Will drop lowest score at end of semester
- Multiple choice quizzes
 - Will drop lowest 3 scores at end of semester

RECAP

- Formulate research question
- Propose explanation/theory, hypotheses
- Data collection process
- Use data to evaluate hypotheses
- Reassess explanation



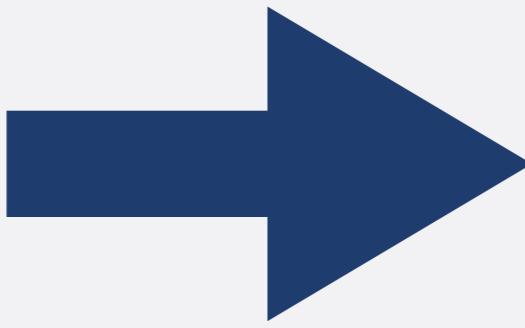
WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO DO?



- **Ultimate goal of research project:**
 - Higher _____ causes higher _____
 - Higher _____ causes lower _____

EXAMPLE

Media/public
attention



Adoption of
unpopular policies

- Research question: Do politicians adopt unpopular policies when media/public are distracted?

GOOD RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- You should care about your research question
- The question should not be normative
- The question should answer an important question in the real world and the scientific literature
- The question should not be too broad or too narrow

CURRENT RESEARCH, EXPLAINED



- **Will be launched very soon**
- **goodauthority.com**

CURRENT RESEARCH, EXPLAINED

THE DUCK OF MINERVA



BRIDGING THE POLICY-ACADEMIC GAP: LESSONS FROM AUSTRALIA

Posted by Maria Rost Rublee | 7 September 2023, 07.11 EDT | Academia, Bridging the Gap | 0

GO GREEN FAST: ARE THE INDUSTRIAL POLICIES OF THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION WORKING?

by Josh Busby & Nathan Jensen | 30 August 2023, 13.26 EDT | Environment & Energy | 0

SELECTION PROCESSES IN ACADEMIA: TIME FOR A REVAMP

by Consuelo Thiers | 25 August 2023, 09.53 EDT | Academia | 1

STRATEGIC SERVICE ON THE TENURE TRACK

by Andrew Szarejko & Sibel Oktay | 28 August 2023, 08.30 EDT | Academia, Featured | 0

PATRIARCHY AND THE CULT OF COERCION: PALE, MALE, AND STALE WILL MAKE DETERRENCE FAIL

by Van Jackson | 21 August 2023, 18.26 EDT | Academia, Gender, Security, US Foreign Policy | 0

- www.duckofminerva.com

CURRENT RESEARCH, EXPLAINED

BROADSTREET

The origins of government and the state

Posted on [July 20, 2023](#) by [Leander Heldring](#)



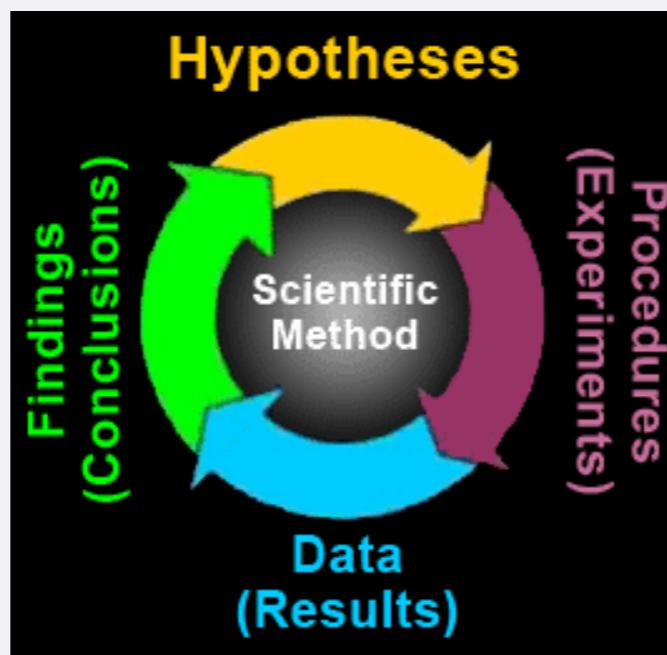
The question on the origins of government and the state is one of the most enduring questions in the social sciences and humanities. On this blog alone, we have had several posts on the origins of various aspects of the state and its capacity, see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#). Two clusters of theories of ...

[CONTINUE READING](#)

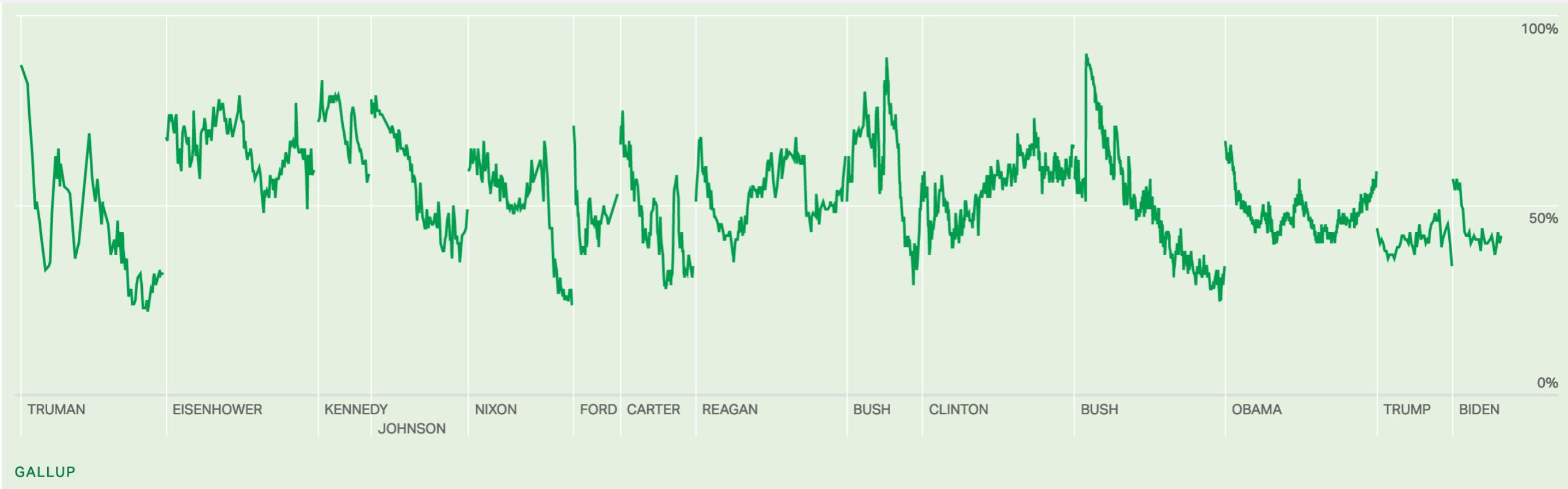
- www.broadstreet.blog

TODAY

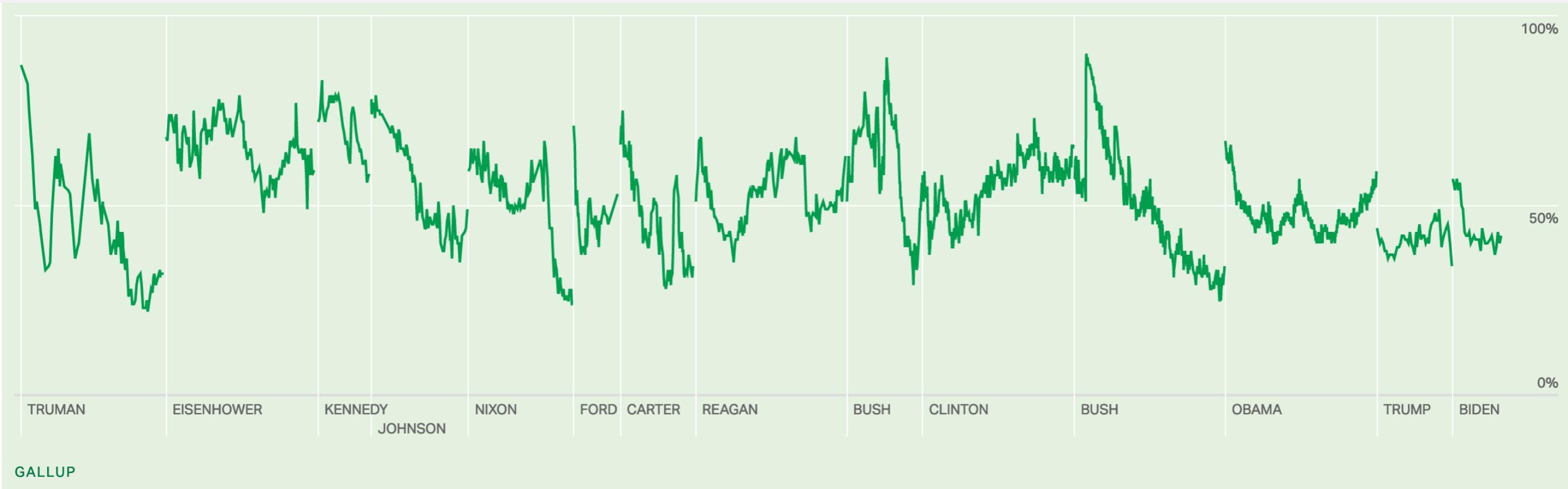
- Formulate research question
- Propose explanation/theory, hypotheses
- Data collection process
- Use data to evaluate hypotheses
- Reassess explanation



TODAY



TODAY



- What determines Presidential Approval Rating?

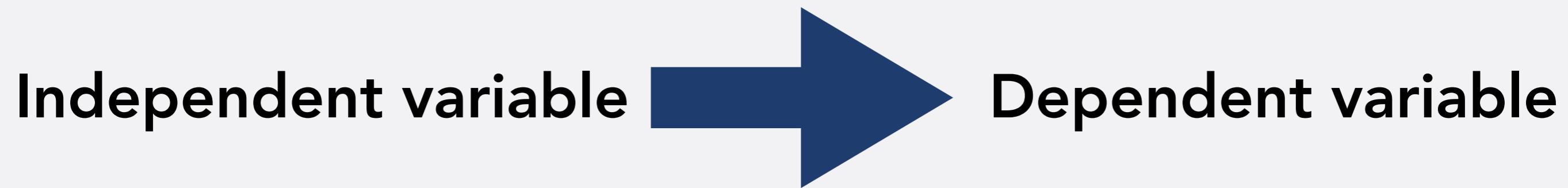
TODAY

- **What is a theory and how does it look?**
- **What are hallmarks of good social science theories?**

THEORY

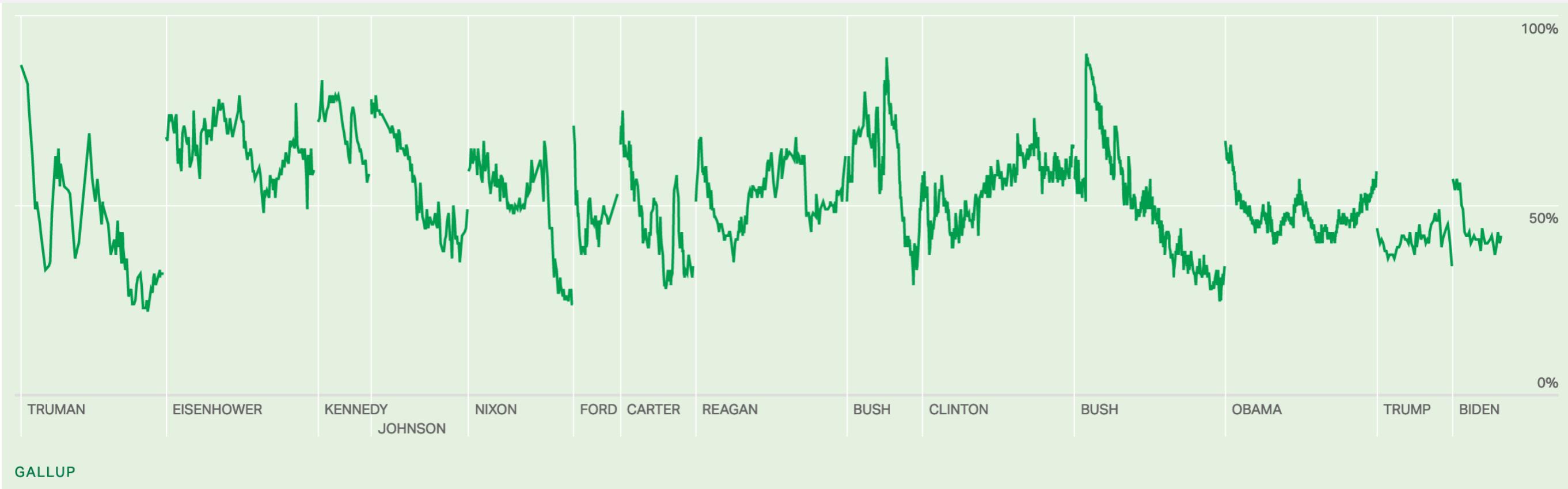
- Theory: Description of how we think the world works
 - with respect to our research question

THEORY

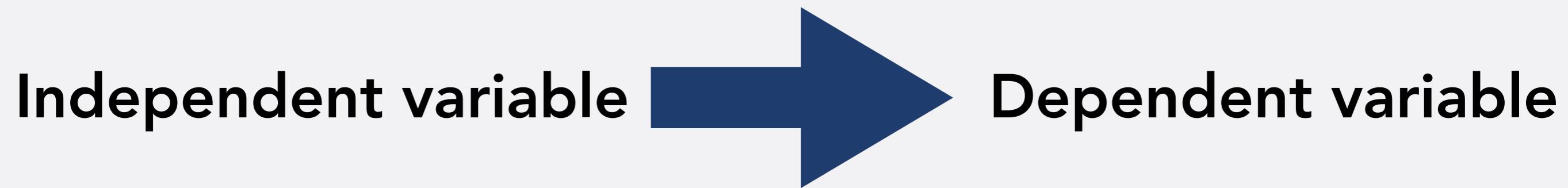


- Goal: Want to provide causal explanation for (variation in) dependent variable
 - Higher _____ causes higher _____
 - Or: Higher _____ causes lower _____

VARIATION



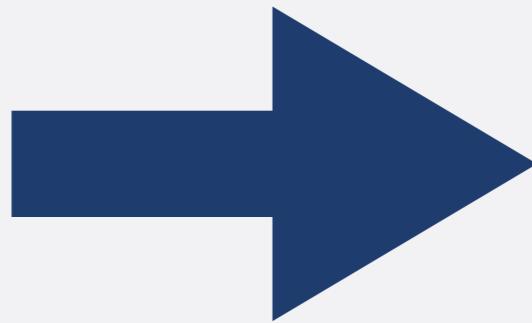
THEORY



- Goal: Want to provide causal explanation for (variation in) dependent variable
 - Higher _____ causes higher _____
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THEORY EXAMPLE

Independent variable



Presidential
Approval Rating

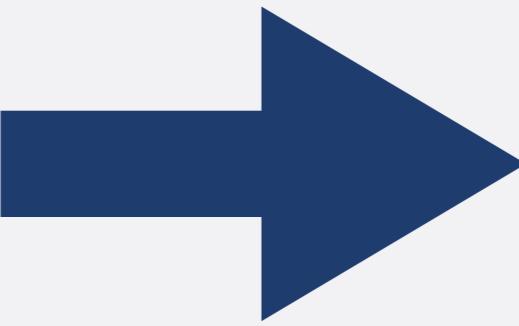
- Higher _____ causes higher Presidential Approval Ratings
- Or: Higher _____ causes lower Presidential Approval Ratings

THEORY EXAMPLE



EXAMPLE

Performance of
economy



Presidential
Approval Rating

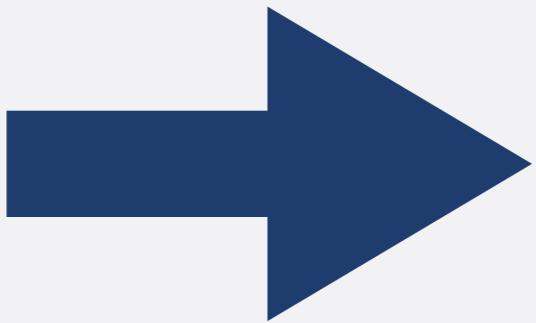
- Better economic performance causes higher
Presidential approval rating

ITERATIVE APPROACH

- First: “What determines Presidential approval rating?”
- Now: “What is the effect of economic performance on Presidential approval rating?”
- Back and forth between question and theory
 - Potential refinement: “What is the effect of the unemployment rate on Presidential approval rating?”

CAUSAL THEORY

Independent variable

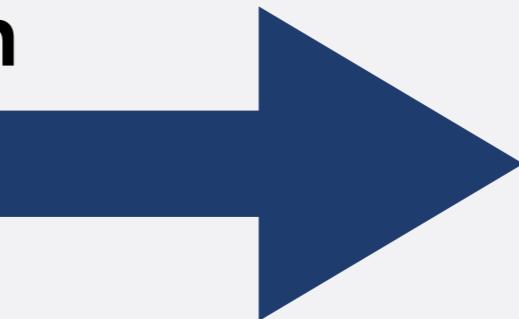


Presidential
Approval Rating

- Cannot just propose any independent variable
- Need to answer: Why do you think that this independent variable is *causally* related to the dependent variable?

A BAD THEORY

NFL: Whether Washington
wins last home game
before election

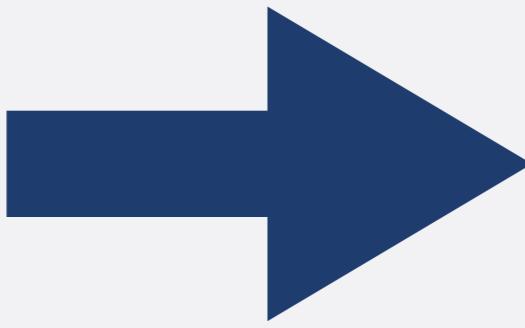


Presidential election:
Whether incumbent
party wins again

Year	Redskins Result	Election Result	Incumbent Party's White House Status	Rule Confirmed
1940	WIN vs. Steelers 37-10	Roosevelt (D) beats Willkie (R)	Keeps	Yes
1944	WIN vs. Rams 14-10	Roosevelt (D) def. Dewey (R)	Keeps	Yes
1948	WIN vs. Yanks 59-21	Truman (D) def. Dewey (R)	Keeps	Yes
1952	LOSE vs. Steelers 24-23	Eisenhower (R) def. Stevenson (D)	Loses	Yes
1956	WIN vs. Browns 20-9	Eisenhower (R) def. Stevenson (D)	Keeps	Yes
1960	LOSE vs. Brown 31-10	Kennedy (D) def. Nixon (R)	Loses	Yes
1964	WIN vs. Bears 27-20	Johnson (D) def. Goldwater (R)	Keeps	Yes
1968	LOSE vs. Giants 13-10	Nixon (R) def. Humphrey (D)	Loses	Yes
1972	WIN vs. Dallas 24-20	Nixon (R) def. McGovern (D)	Keeps	Yes
1976	LOSE vs. Cowboys 20-7	Carter (D) def. Ford (R)	Loses	Yes
1980	LOSE vs. Vikings 39-14	Reagan (R) def. Carter (D)	Loses	Yes
1984	WIN vs. Falcons 27-14	Reagan (R) def. Mondale (D)	Keeps	Yes
1988	WIN vs. Saints 27-24	Bush (R) def. Dukakis (D)	Keeps	Yes
1992	LOSE vs. Giants 24-7	Clinton (D) def. Bush (R)	Loses	Yes
1996	WIN vs. Colts 31-16	Clinton (D) def. Dole (R)	Keeps	Yes
2000	LOSE vs. Titans 27-21	Bush (R) def. Gore (D)	Loses	Yes
2004	LOSE vs. Packers 28-14	Bush (R) def. Kerry (D)	Keeps	No
2008	LOSE vs. Steelers 23-6	Obama (D) defeats McCain (R)	Loses	Yes
2012	LOSE vs. Panthers 21-13	Obama (D) defeats Romney (R)	Keeps	No
2016	WIN vs. Eagles 27-20	Clinton (D) v. Trump (R)	??	??

EXAMPLE

Performance of
economy

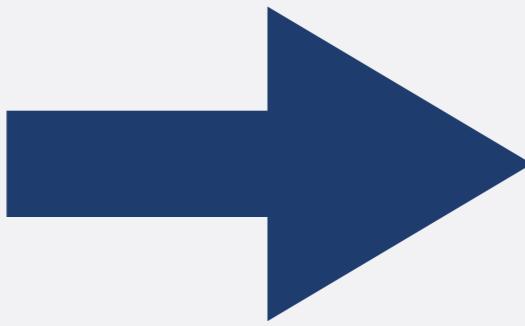


Presidential
Approval Rating

- Better economic performance causes higher Presidential approval rating
 - Why?

EXAMPLE

Performance of
economy

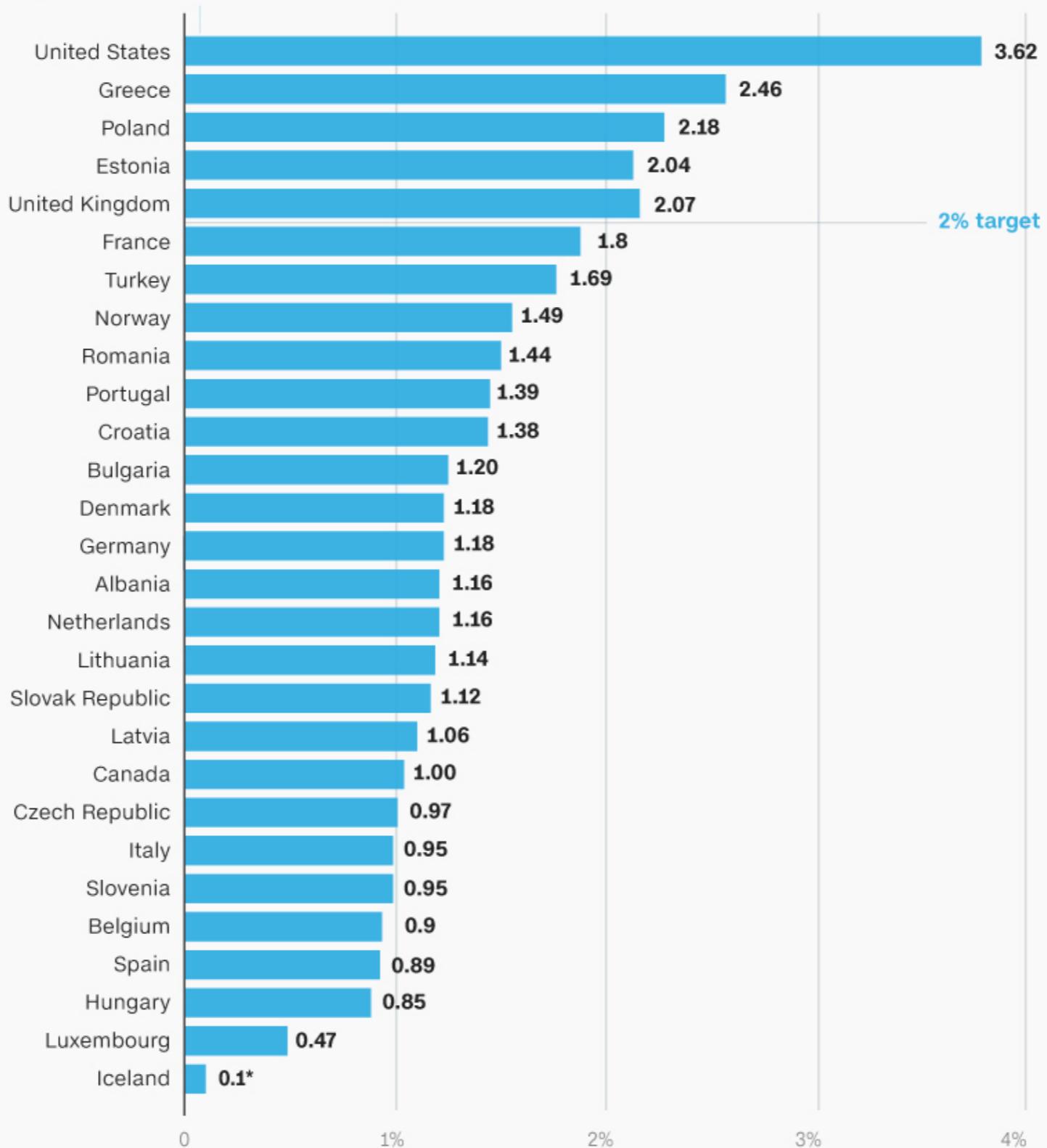


Presidential
Approval Rating

- Better economic performance causes higher Presidential approval rating
 - Causal explanation: Because state of economy allows voters to make inference about how competent President is

ANOTHER EXAMPLE

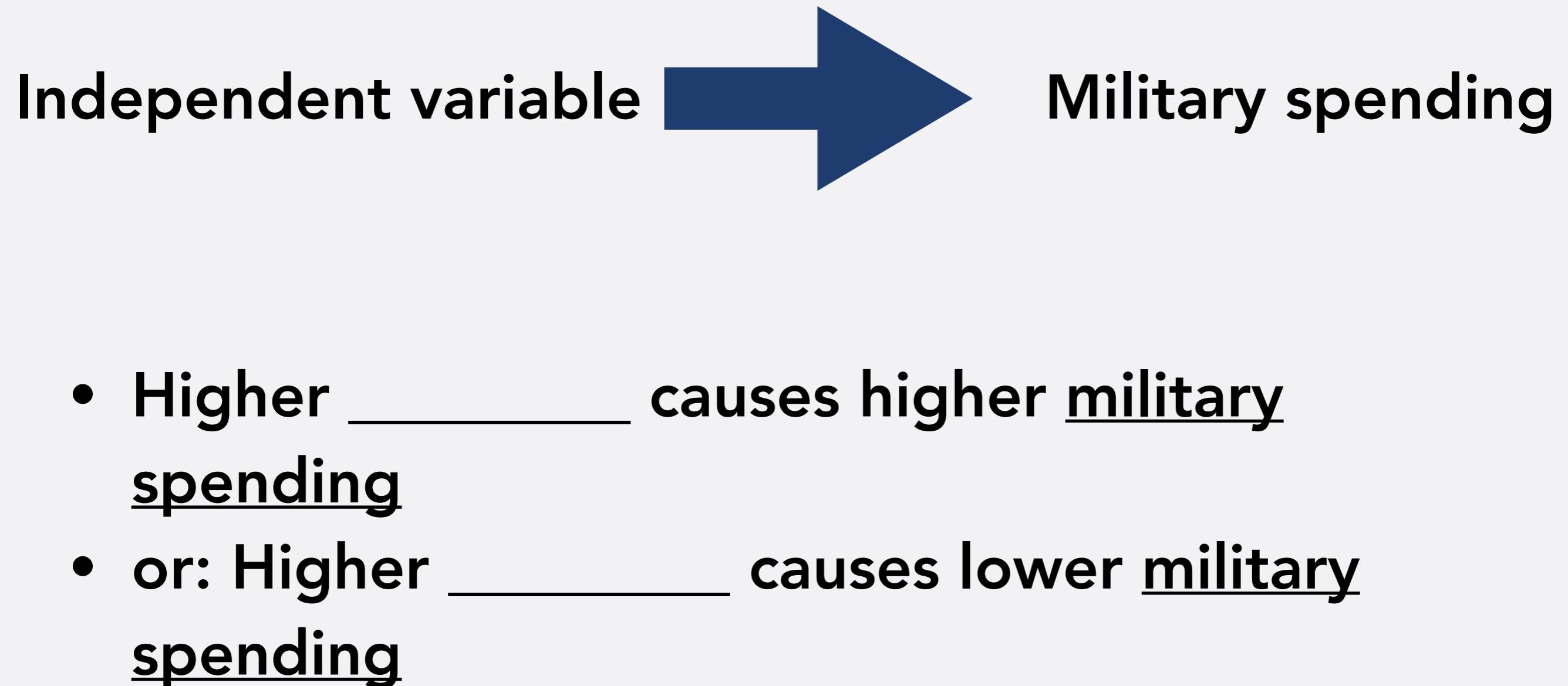
Spending as percentage of GDP:



SOURCE: NATO

*ICELAND DOESN'T HAVE ARMED FORCES. DATA FOR ICELAND FROM WORLD BANK

ANOTHER EXAMPLE



TODAY

- **What is a theory and how does it look?**
- **What are hallmarks of good social science theories?**

GOOD THEORIES

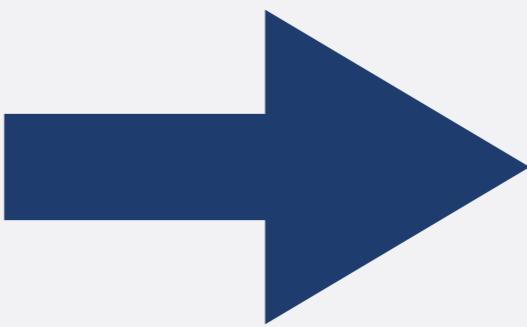
- *Good theory clarifies causal relationship between what does the explaining and what it to be explained*
 - Variable we want to explain: Dependent variable
 - Variable we use to explain the dependent variable: Independent variable
 - Theory must make clear why the independent variable explains the dependent variable (causal mechanism)

GOOD THEORIES

- How to think about a causal mechanism
 - We examine human decision-making:
 - Who are the actors that make the relevant decisions?
 - What are they trying to achieve?
 - What options do they have?
 - How does the independent variable affect the relevant actors' decisions?

EXAMPLE

Performance of
economy



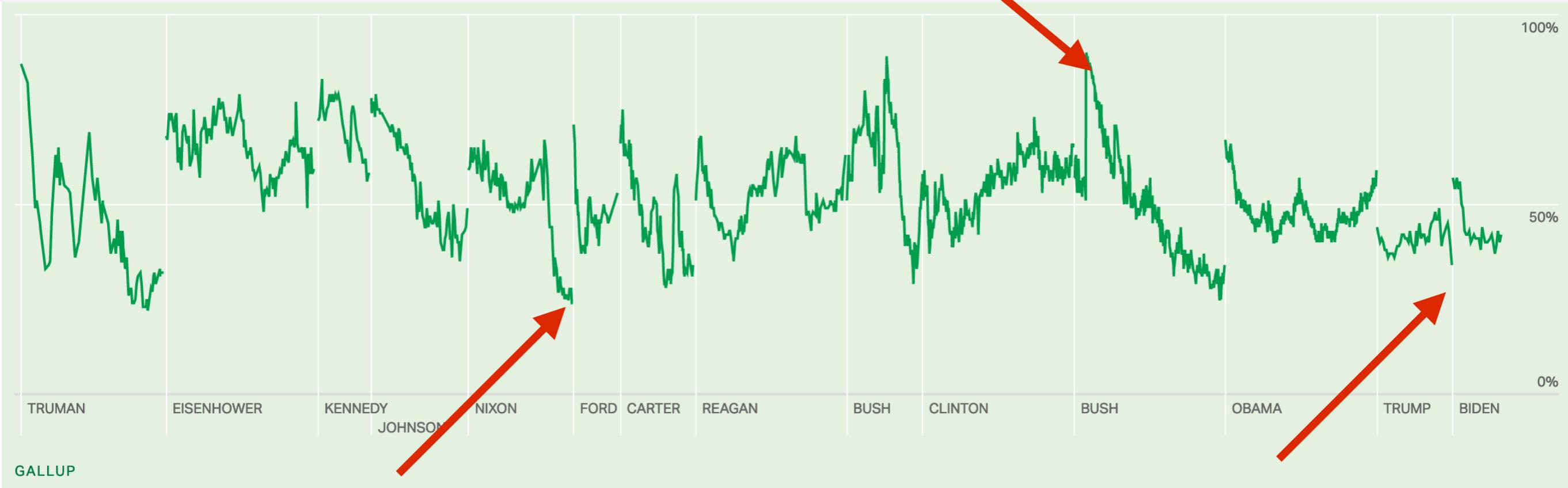
Presidential
Approval Rating

- Who are the actors that make the relevant decisions?
- What are they trying to achieve?
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- How does the independent variable affect the relevant actors' decision?

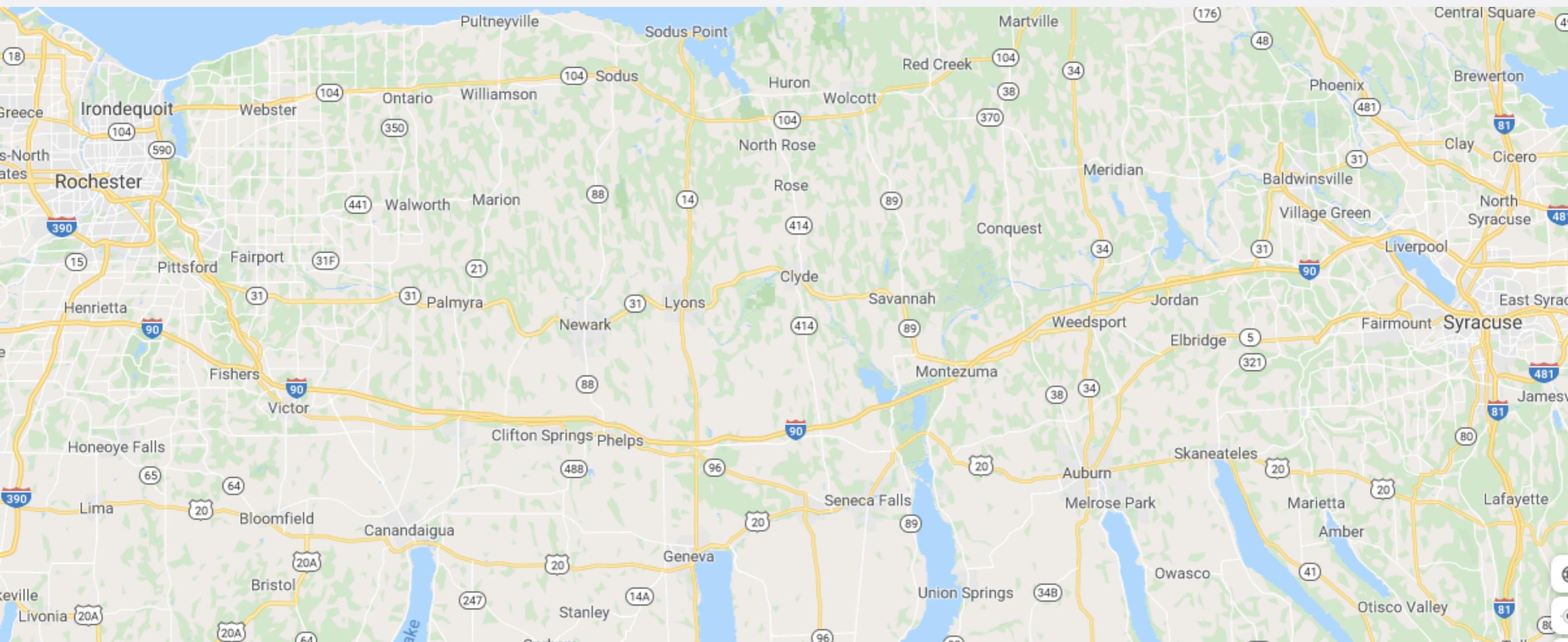
BUT...

- Isn't such a simple theory unrealistic?

YES...



YES, BUT...



THEORIES AS MAPS

- A theory is a map of how the world works
- Theory=simplification
- Simplification makes the theory useful
- Theory: Incomplete and simplified, but useful, description of social reality

GOOD THEORIES

- ***Good theory concretely specifies the concepts it invokes***
 - Precisely explain what we mean by e.g. “performance of the economy”
 - Or “democracy”, “corruption”, etc.
 - Discuss in detail next class

GOOD THEORIES

- **Good theory is falsifiable**
 - Falsifiable = can be proven wrong
 - Falsifiable≠false: We don't aim to create theories that are false, but theories that *can potentially show to be* false
 - “What evidence do I have to observe so I would conclude that a theory is wrong?”
 - If no answer to that, the theory is not falsifiable

GOOD THEORIES

- Non-falsifiable theory: “The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq prevented terrorist attacks in the United States”
- Falsifiable theory: “Military invasions of states harboring terrorists reduce subsequent terrorist attacks”