

10 things we think we know, but really don't

Towards the end of Hans Noel's [paper](#) on “Ten Things Political Scientists Know That You Don't,” he offers a list of 10 things that the public thinks it knows but political scientists haven't been able to prove. They are:

1. Money buys the votes of the general public. (Maybe savvy donors just donate to candidates who will win in the hopes of influencing them.)
2. Money buys the votes of elected legislators. (Maybe savvy donors just donate to candidates who will vote the way they would like, and not to those who would not.)
3. Parties influence the votes of elected legislators. (Maybe politicians just sort themselves into the parties they agree with in the first place.)
4. Some candidates are just better campaigners than others.
5. Democracy leads to economic growth. (Maybe economic growth enables democracy. Or maybe they are spuriously related.)
6. Autocracy leads to economic growth. (Maybe economic performance enables dictators to hold onto power.)
7. The media is biased. (Maybe they are just trying to tell us what they think we want to hear.)
8. Voters make choices based on their own self-interest. (Maybe they rationalize their choices in this way.)
9. Voters choose the candidate that is closer to their own preferences.
10. People are more likely to vote when they think the election will be close.

To be sure, the fact that political scientists haven't been able to prove any of these things doesn't mean they aren't true. They haven't disproved them, either. But it does mean that the evidence isn't as strong and the case isn't as clear as we commonly assume.

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