



**CULTURAL CHANGE AND  
THE DECLINE OF VIOLENCE:  
Linking Economic Development and  
the Long Peace**

Ronald Inglehart

Laboratory for Comparative Social Research,  
Moscow  
November 13, 2013

# The Democratic Peace thesis

- The democratic peace thesis holds that democracies almost never fight each other.
- This implies that the spread of democracy is conducive to international peace.

# Is the democratic peace due to democracy– or to modernization?

- Mueller and Glatz argue that it's mainly due to cultural changes linked with modernization. Earlier in history, democracies fought each other very frequently
- Today, virtually all democracies are economically and culturally highly modernized– which is the major reason why they no longer fight each other

# The Capitalist Peace thesis

- In recent research, analyzing massive data bases, Gartzke, Hewitt, Mousseau and others argue persuasively that the long peace reflects economic development and the emergence of free markets, more than the rise of democracy.

# The future of War

- The “Democratic Peace,” “Capitalist Peace” or “Long Peace” is actually a secular trend away from war that is based on modernization. Virtually all advanced industrial societies are democracies and vice versa, so it’s difficult to distinguish between them.

# Man Instinctively Fights

- Man instinctively fights for survival, when it is threatened.
- War is the result of evolution, not a cultural invention.

Historical evidence shows that hunter-gatherer societies of all sizes fought:

- Fossils of skulls and bodies show violent impact points
- Rate of violent death among men = 25%
- Present day Kalahari Bushmen, African Pygmies (the last hunter-gatherer populations) have high homicidal rates. Violence only declined with interference from state authority

# The changing cost-Benefit calculus of war

Agrarian societies have a zero-sum economy:

Land is the only means of production and it is finite. You can only get more by taking it away from someone else— which usually requires killing him.

Population rises to meet the food supply.

When there is barely enough pasture or farm land to support your tribe, if another tribe comes along, it is literally us or them: xenophobia is realistic and humans have evolved to respond xenophobically when survival is uncertain.



Since the industrial revolution, war has become less frequent. And though WWI and WWII were the bloodiest in history, they were no more devastating than earlier wars, in percentage of population killed. Genocide was standard practice earlier in history. The end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 was followed by the 3<sup>rd</sup> longest period without war in history. After 1870, the 2<sup>nd</sup> longest such period occurred. Since 1945, we have been living in the longest period in recorded history without war between major powers by FAR- in 1984, it was already the longest period without war between major powers since the Roman Empire. Since then, the Long Peace has extended over almost 30 additional years

# In industrial society, the economy is no longer a zero-sum game.

Industrialization increased productivity tenfold and eventually one hundred-fold.

It became possible to become rich without conquering another country, enslaving or killing the population and taking their land.

Stripped of their empires after WWII, Germany and Japan re-industrialized and became far richer than they had even been at the height of their conquered empires.

Getting rich by internal development was much safer and much more profitable than war.

From the industrial revolution to 1945, the rewards of peace became progressively greater-- **for industrial societies.**

This alone was sufficient to make war less frequent. Contrary to widespread belief, the cost of war did not become higher, relative to wealth and population size. The advent of nuclear weapons increased the potential cost of war with another major power to the point where no conceivable gains would outweigh the likely costs. But the change was already underway well before the emergence of nuclear and other WMD.

# Why did the Long Peace start so late?

- By the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, war was no longer a cost-effective route to prosperity, as Angell (1909) pointed out. Initially, this view was widely accepted— but World War I and World War II seemed to discredit it.
- Changes in the objective rationality of war were insufficient— subjective worldviews also had to change.
- The leaders of many major nations remained the prisoner of pre-industrial worldviews.

# Causes of the Long Peace:

1) the **changing cost-benefit calculus** of war.

2) **cultural changes** linked with modernization.

--both were required.

Cultural changes in advanced industrial democracies have made their publics unwilling to employ the genocidal techniques that once were standard, in their wars with developing countries.

This has made imperialism untenable against a determined population. These changes have also made the publics of advanced democracies increasingly intolerant of casualties— even losses that once were viewed as insignificant.

# Modernization brings two sets of changes among mass publics

1. Social mobilization and cognitive mobilization:

these bring growing mass participation:

2. Changing values:

this leads to greater emphasis on autonomous choice in life, and democratic political institutions in politics.

# economic development is bringing systematic value changes

- These motivational changes have important implications
- A common trend toward:
  - gender equality
  - greater tolerance of outgroups
  - diminishing xenophobia
  - **diminishing willingness to fight wars**





These findings are based on empirical evidence from the first and most extensive global survey of mass values and motivations—the World Values Survey

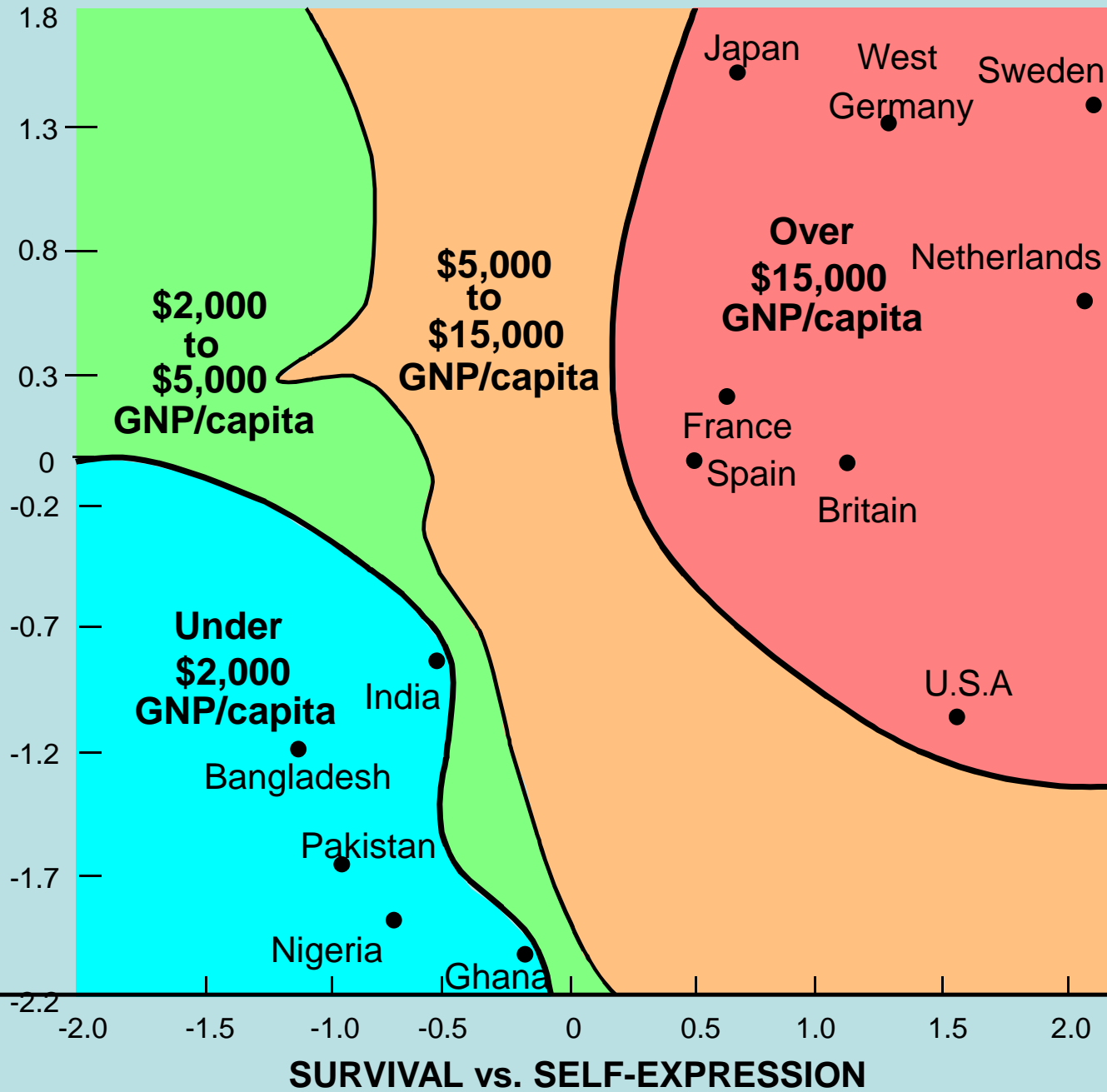
Development and cultural change move in two major phases

Industrialization brings a shift from **Traditional** values to **Secular-rational** values.

Postindustrial society brings a shift from **Survival values** to **Self-expression** values

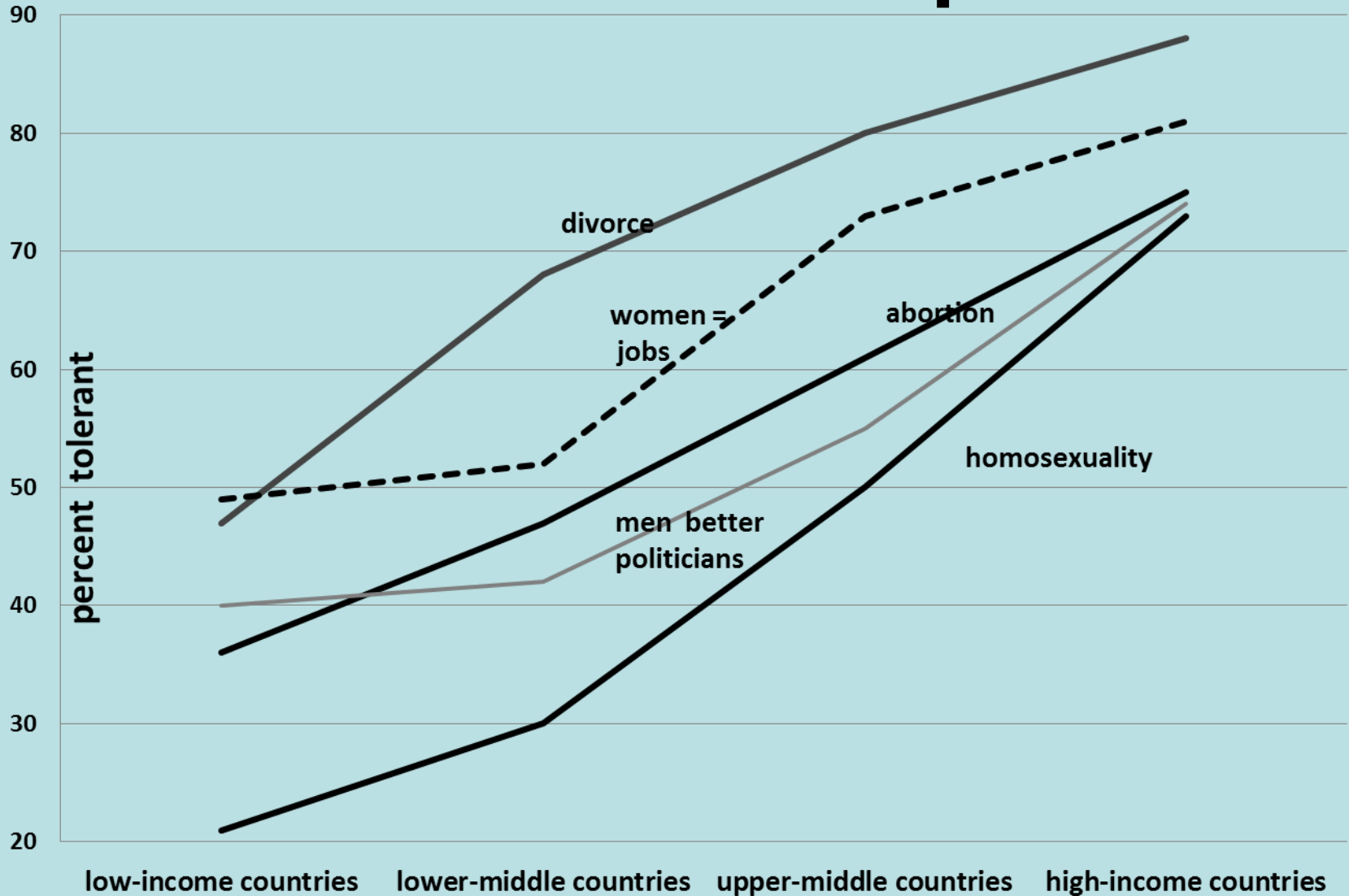
- All “high-income” societies (as defined by the World Bank) rank relatively high on both dimensions– with no exceptions
- All “low-income” societies rank relatively low on both dimensions– again, without any exceptions
- Middle-income societies fall in between

TRADITIONAL vs. SECULAR-RATIONAL AUTHORITY

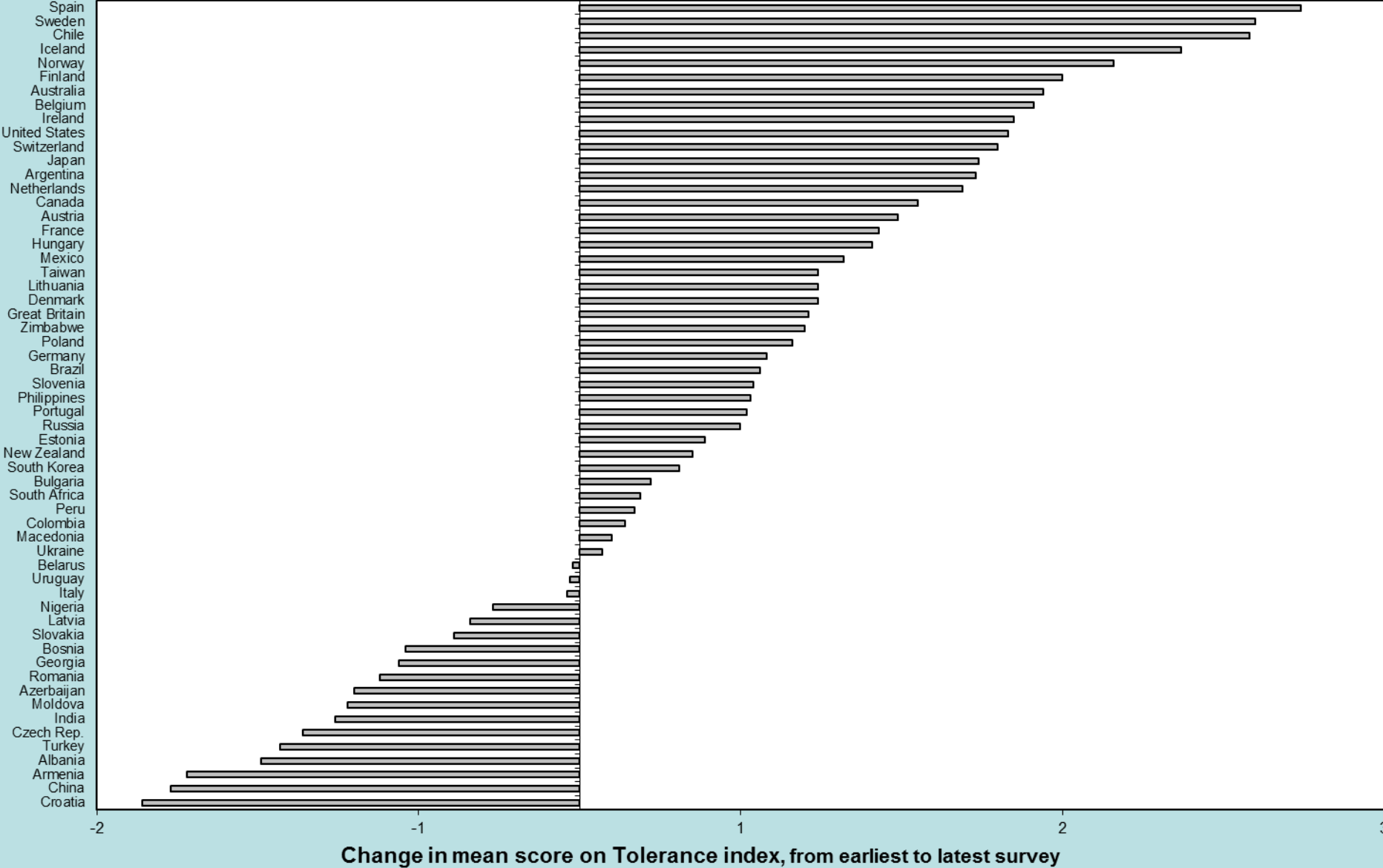


- Under conditions of extreme scarcity, xenophobia is realistic: survival may literally be a case of Us or Them. Survival requires a macho willingness to fight for one's tribe (and later, for one's country).
- Economic development brings high levels of existential security. This is conducive to a less xenophobic, more tolerant, more feminized, less aggressive culture.

# Tolerance by level of economic development



# Changes in Tolerance index, from earliest available survey to latest available survey



- Economic development brings declining xenophobia and rising tolerance of outgroups
- The publics of virtually ALL high-income societies moved toward higher levels of lifestyle tolerance
- (the publics moving toward lower tolerance were mainly ex-communist)
- High tolerance is linked with declining willingness to fight for one's country

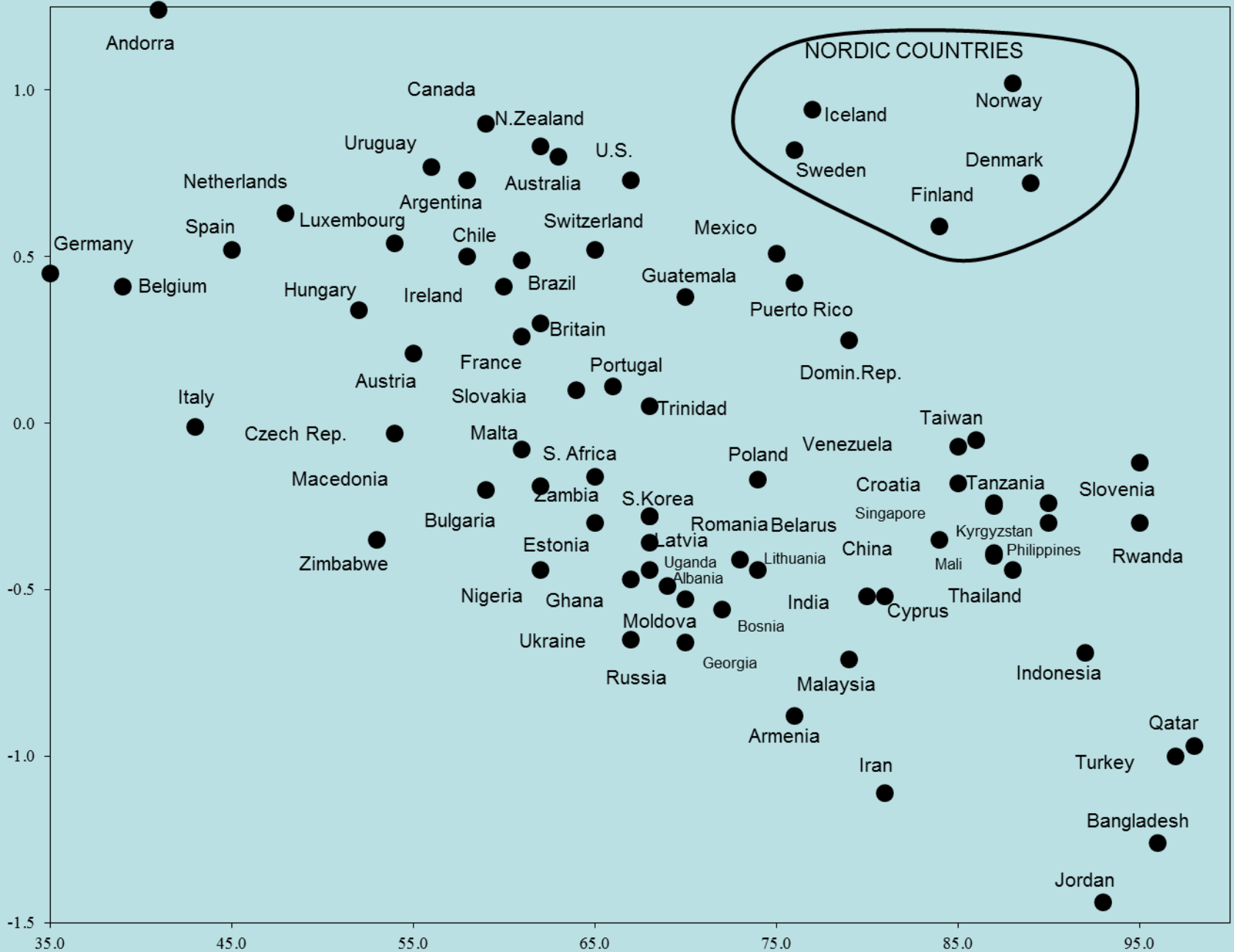


**Tolerance of foreigners, gays and gender**



**% saying they are willing to fight for their country**

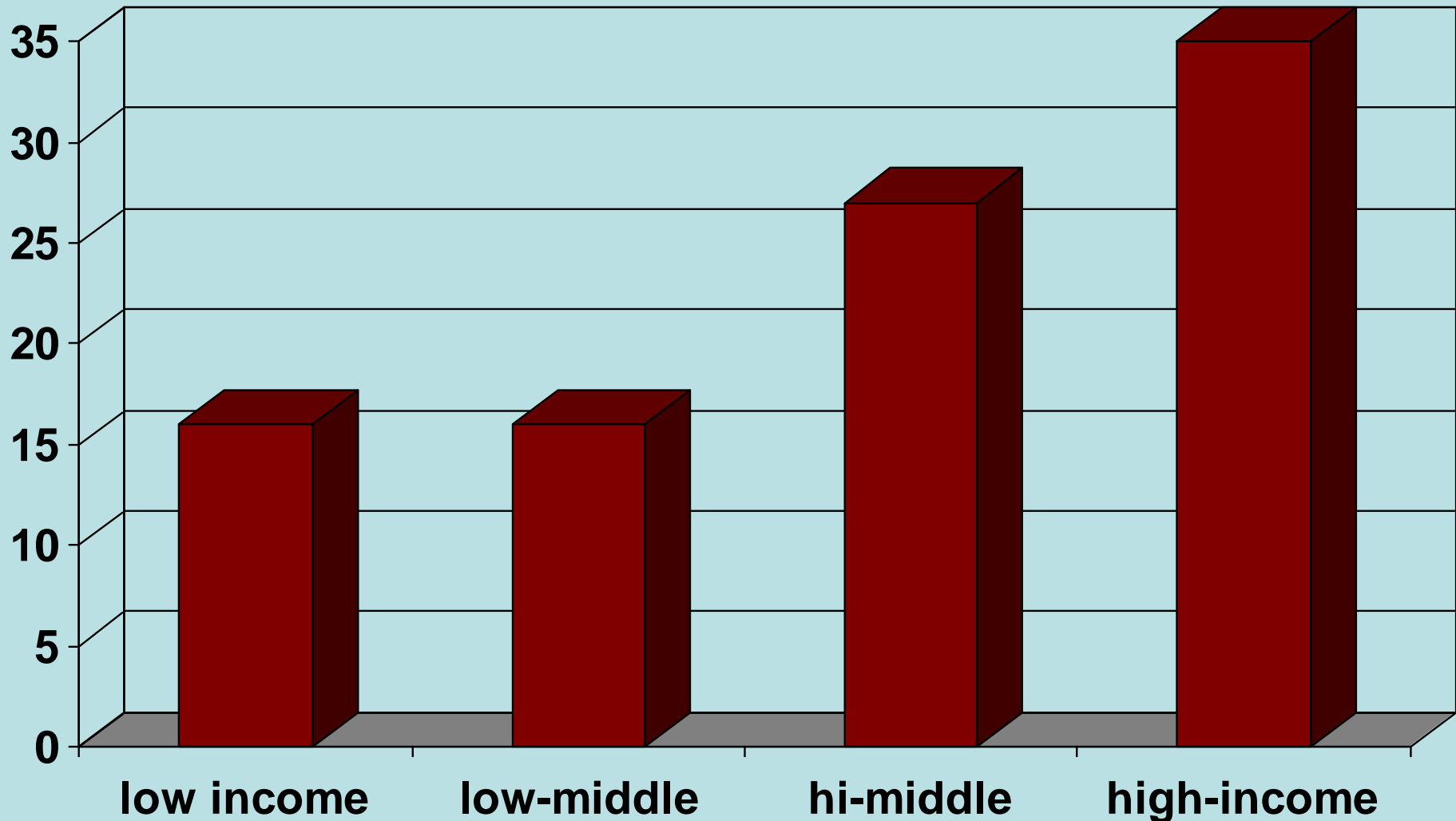
Tolerance of foreigners, gays and gender equality



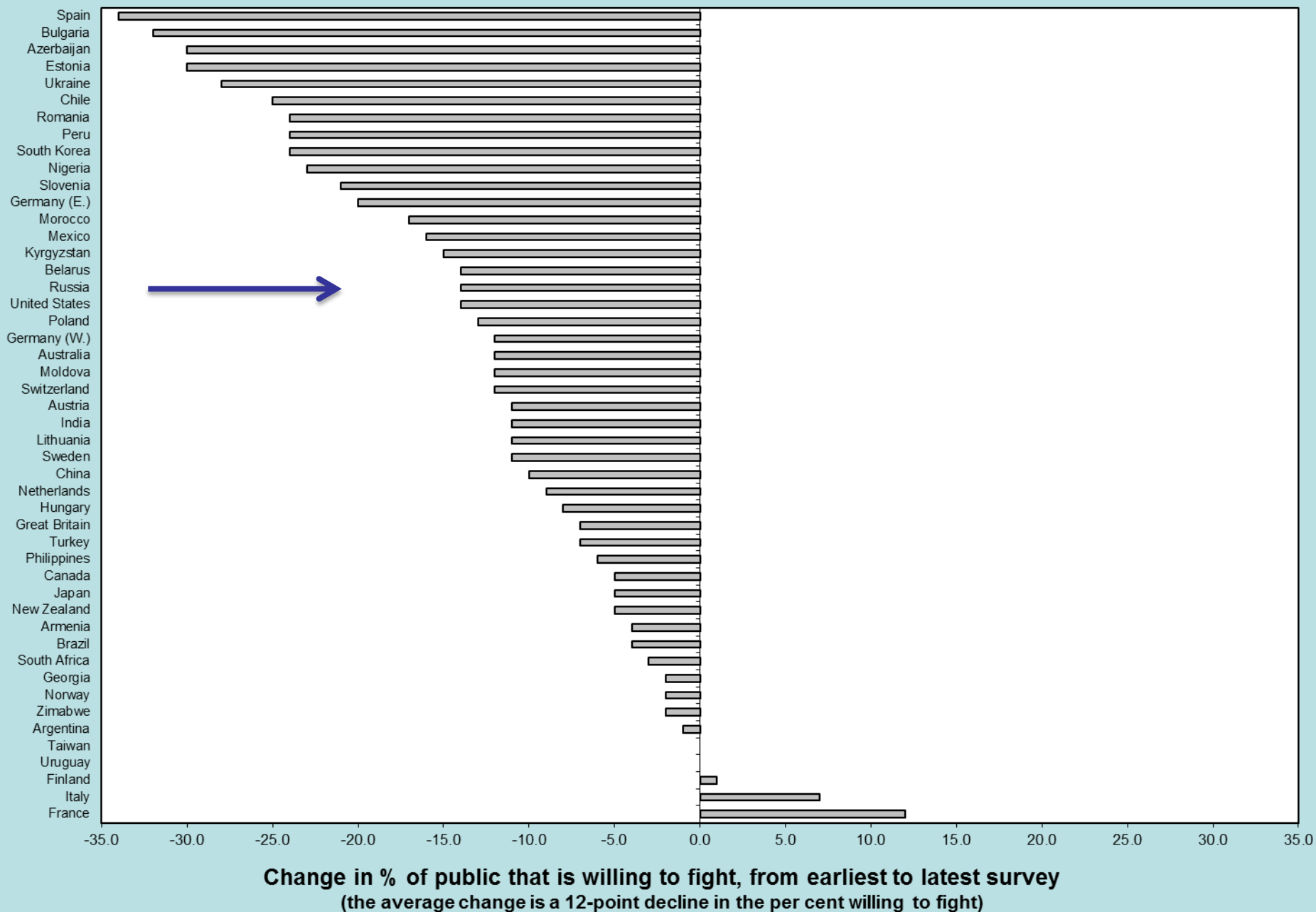
% saying they are willing to fight for their country ( $r = -.51$ )

# The Democratic Peace thesis.

% saying they would **not** fight for their country,  
by level of economic development



# Shift in the % saying they would be willing to fight for their country, 1981-2012



- The trend toward less willingness to fight for one's country is pervasive.
- Among the 49 countries for which we have time series data (across a mean span of 17 years) only three publics became more willing to fight for their country.

# Symptoms of change

- The rise of the Democratic Peace thesis.
- The Long Peace: no war between major powers since 1945— by far the longest such period in history.
- Swedish parliament has adopted new goals for Swedish military: defense against invasion no longer seen as likely; main functions are now peace-keeping and developmental aid missions. Other Nordic countries have also followed this path.

- And a pervasive decline in willingness to fight for one's country among mass publics

cultural change →  
lower tolerance for casualties

- In the Civil War, the U.S. suffered 618,000 combat deaths. This exceeded the total loss of life in all of the country's subsequent wars.
- On an average day in World War II, approximately 25,000 people lost their lives. A total of 60 million lives were lost.



- In Vietnam, public support for the war disappeared in the U.S. after 58,000 American lives were lost in several years of war
- The 2003 war in Iraq lost the support of a majority of the public after 3,000 American lives were lost  
(equivalent to less than 3 hours of World War II).

1. Objective rational changes:

Changing cost/ benefit calculus for war

2. Cultural changes are making people less willing to fight for their country: with rising existential security, people are becoming more tolerant and less aggressive. This makes them less willing to go to war.



**END**