

# Introduction to Public Policy

Week 8

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Problem Identification

Theodolou & Kofinis, pp. 99-114.

Knill & Tosun, pp. 97-120.

# Problem Identification: A Causal Story

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- (1) Identifies harm
- (2) Describes what causes them
- (3) Assigns blame to those causing them
- (4) Claims that the government is responsible for stopping them

# Problem Definition: A Highly Contested Process

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- There are many different ways in which one and the same issue can be defined.
- The actor proposing the first definition of the problem has a strategic advantage, i.e. a **first-mover advantage**.
  - Alternative definitions need to **discredit** the first definition
- A battle between **expanders and containers** in which the expanders must redefine the issue so that the public, who previously did not care about it, now become concerned.
  - These groups employ various devices to increase or reduce the public's attention towards a certain problem.

# Contested Definition of Unemployment

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- Problem 1: Lack of education
  - Solution 1: Improving the public funding of the education system
- Problem 2: Economic recession
  - Solution 2: Intervening at a macroeconomic scale to stimulate economic growth
- Problem 3: Lack of willingness to look for a job
  - Solution 3: Cutting unemployment benefits in order to motivate individuals to look for a job

# Problem Identification: From Many to Few

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- There are many public problems.
- But only a small number of them will be given official attention by legislators and executives.
  - Why?
- Why are some issues taken up while others are left unconsidered?

# Who defines problems and why?

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- Most citizens and organizations possess some concerns – real or perceived – that they believe merit government attention.
- Problem definition is subject to different interpretations and ‘**social construction**’.
- **Policy framing** is the strategical structuring of a conflict so that the actor who does the framing can win the struggle of how to frame the issue.
  - Example: Abortion: Choice or Murder?

# What is a problem? Is it public or private?

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- Identifiable issues & recognized concerns
  - Individuals can **neither solve nor ignore**
    - Example: Climate change
- Some individually and socially **unacceptable anomaly**
  - Example: Poverty
- Some social and individual **difficulty**
  - **At home or far away/global**
    - Example: Unemployment

# Examples: Public or Private Issues?

- Poverty
- Homelessness
- Obesity





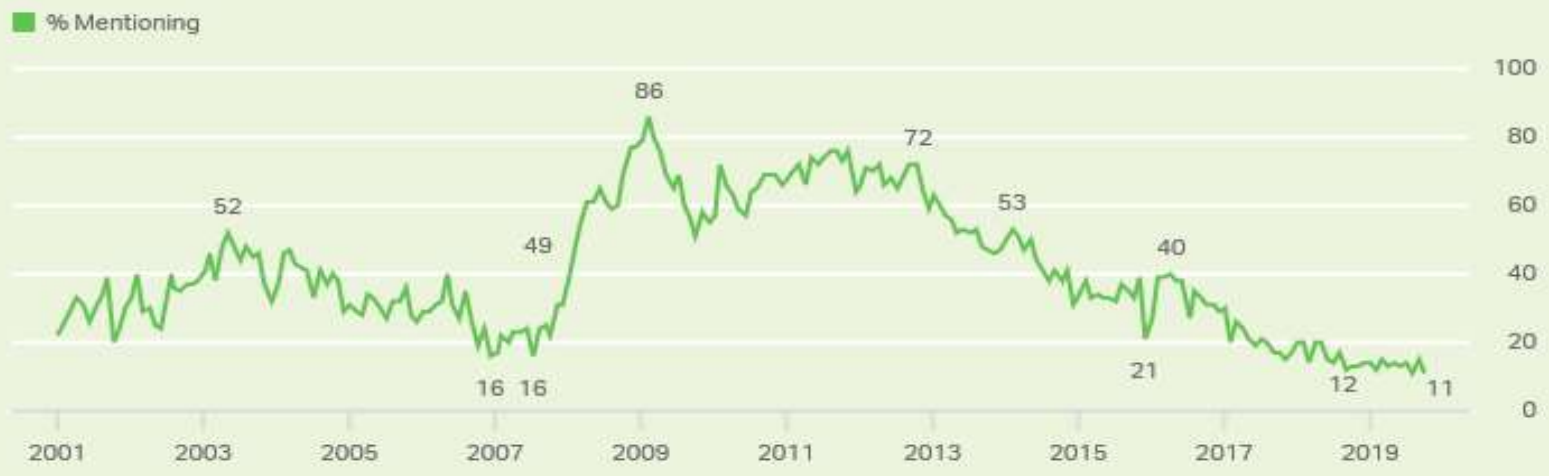
# Rarely Consensus on Policy Actors Regarding...

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- Which issues are problems?
  - Which issues should **gain public attention**?
- Which problems are **more urgent/pressing**?
  - The issues having the **greatest negative effect** on the **greatest number** of people.

GALLUP @ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1675/most-important-problem.aspx>

Percentage of Americans Mentioning Economic Issues as the Nation's Most Important Problem



GALLUP

# Social & Political Trends in Turkey – 2019 REPORT

Kadir Has University, Center for Turkish Studies

@[http://www.mustafaaydin.gen.tr/source/TT2019\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.mustafaaydin.gen.tr/source/TT2019_ENG.pdf)



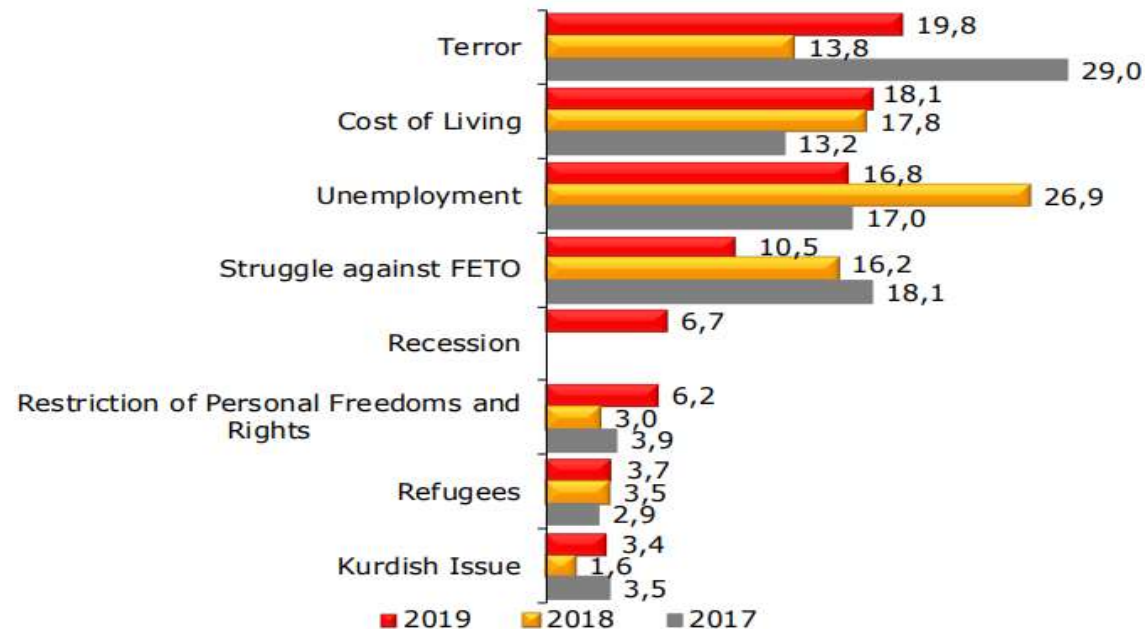
AKADEMETRE

Turkey Trends | 15

## Turkey and Its Problems (1)

### The Most Important Current Problem in Turkey

Please indicate from the selection provided on the card what do you think is the most important current problem facing Turkey?



Sum of economy-related issues: %41,6

Data under 3,4% is not included in the chart.

Basis: 1000

# Problem Identification

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- Problem identification is **the very beginning** for every policy issue.
- What is a **public** problem?
  - Classic public problems, such as national defense
- Clear **crisis**: Impossible to **ignore or avoid**
- Issues that foster **real consensus** among policy actors

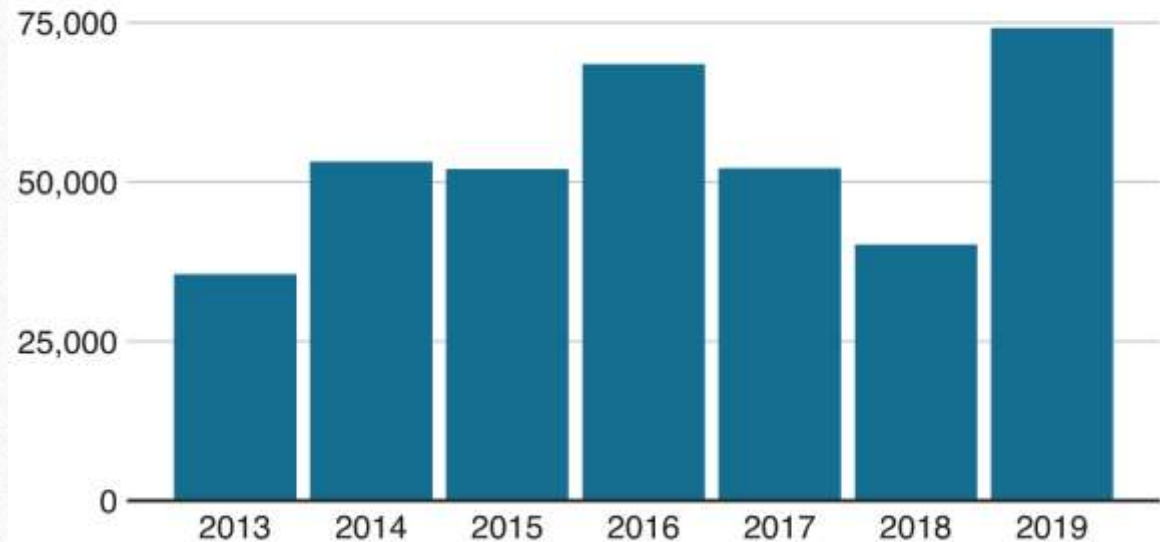
# Destruction of the Amazons: Is it impossible to ignore or avoid?

@ <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2019/08/near-brazil-amazon-fires-residents-sick-worried-angry/>



## This year has seen more than double the number of fires in Brazil than in 2013

Total number of fires between 1 January - 20 August



Source: National Institute for Space Research

BBC

# Problem Identification is...

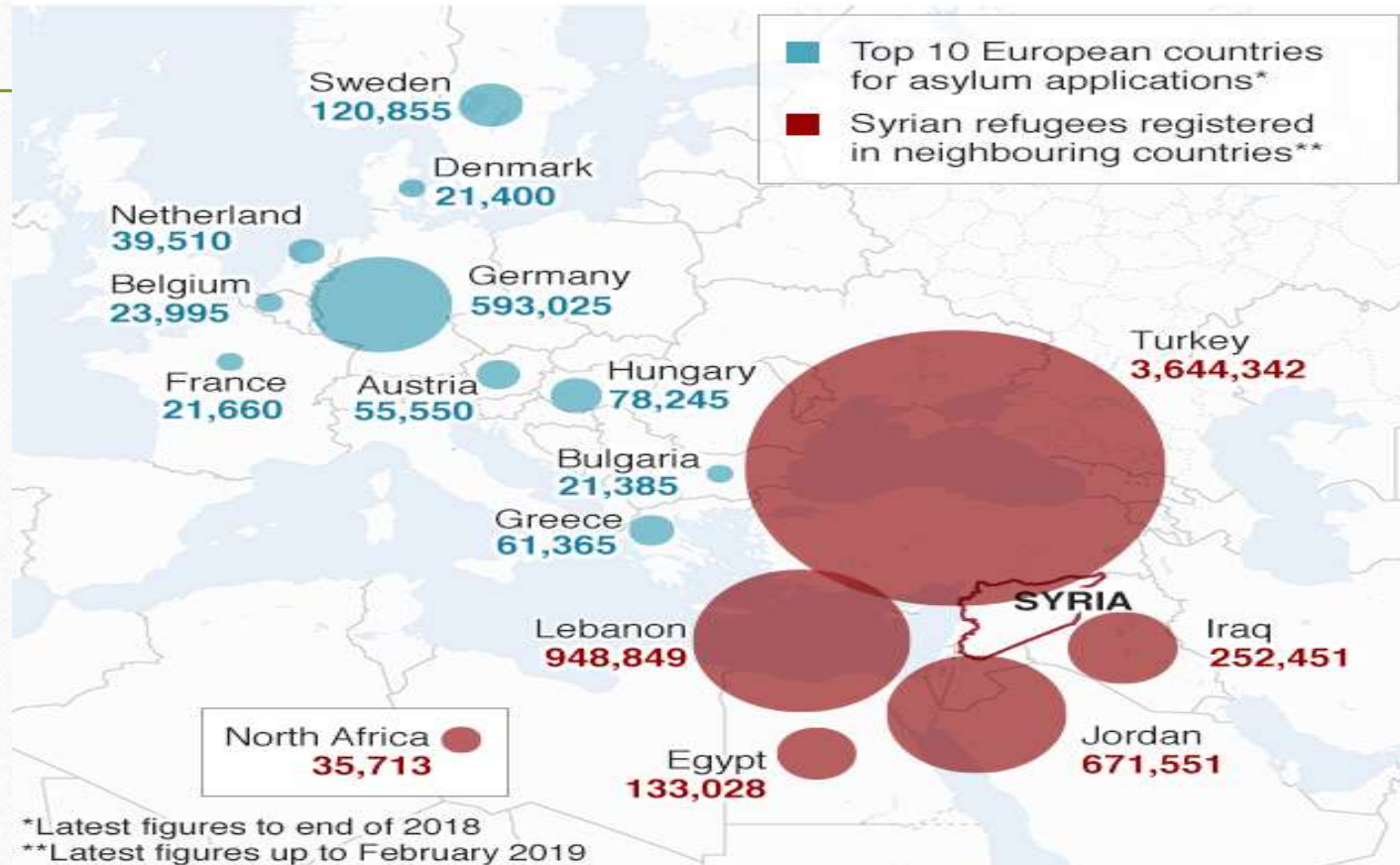
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- Not objective/fact based, but perceptual/subjective
  - Based on different social realities and filters of belief systems
    - Example: Should we help obese people?
- Policy actors fight over how an issue is framed/identified
  - Lobbyists, interest groups
  - Definition of an issue as «unacceptable»
    - Can not be resolved privately
    - High cost and large scope, going to the extreme, leading to a crisis

# Syrian Refugee Crisis: Unacceptable?

@ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35806229>

## Where have all the Syrian refugees gone?



Source: Eurostat / UNHCR

BBC

# Problem Identification is...

- Open to change when new information & understanding emerges

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- Opportunity for redefinition
  - Example: Cigarette smoking was acceptable at home & work in 1960s in the US.
    - Perception changed from «bad habit» to a «addictive cancer agent»
    - Advertisement regulations
    - Limits on use in public spaces
    - Significantly increased taxation
  - Current Example: New research shows the health risks of smoking e-cigarettes (vaping)



# New Research Shows the Harms of Vaping (Smoking E-Cigarettes)

@ <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/vaping-cigarette-warnings-years-timeline/story?id=65508468>



# Problem Identification is...

- Public problems **change over time**

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  - Changing conditions
    - Land reform in Turkey was more important when Turkey was an agricultural society
  - New information & experiences
    - Health insurance coverage becomes a much more important problem if/when a person becomes ill.
  - Pressing concerns
    - Global warming, civil wars, economic and political crises...

# Change in Beliefs: Domestic Violence in Turkey?

- Transformation of a private problem to a public problem?
- Do we have new data/information & understanding?
- Did public perception/belief systems change?



# Violence Against Women: A Public Policy Problem?

@ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/more-than-1100-women-killed-in-five-years-across-turkey-91666>



# Political & Social Implications of Identifying Public Problems

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- Scarce resources
- Degree of political and/or public support
- Implementation problems

## Private Problems? Individual Responsibility?

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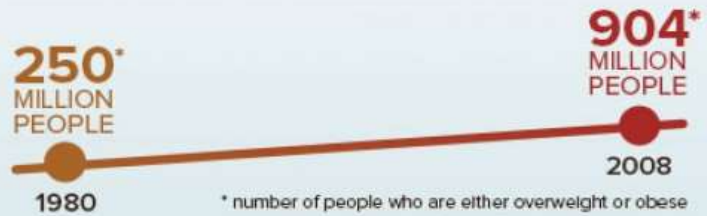
- Limb operations due to obesity
- People eating fast food
- Individuals making bad investment decisions
- People getting ill because of smoking.

# Classic Public Problems

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- National Defense
- Terrorism
- Policy actors **may disagree/not have consensus on how to address** these threats.
- Consensus on problem identification **does not mean consensus on solutions.**
  - Example: Obesity

# THE WORLD IS GETTING FATTER



## HOW DO I KNOW WHETHER I AM OVERWEIGHT?

Calculate your body mass index (BMI) using this formula

$$\text{BMI} = \frac{\text{weight (kg)}}{\text{height}^2 \text{ (m}^2\text{)}}$$


## OBESITY KILLS!

7 common diseases due to obesity:

- Arthritis
- Cancer
- Infertility
- Heart Diseases
- Back Pain
- Diabetes
- Stroke



## ABC TO OBESITY PREVENTION

### SIMPLE RULES TO STAY IN SHAPE

#### A dopt New Healthy Habits



#### B alance Your Calorie Intake



#### C ontrol Your Weight Gain





# PREVENT OBESITY



## AVOID STRESS

Learn about stress in your community, including how to avoid stress and how to manage stress. Learn about stress in your community, including how to avoid stress and how to manage stress.



## GET ENOUGH SLEEP

Learn about sleep in your community, including how to get enough sleep and how to manage sleep. Learn about sleep in your community, including how to get enough sleep and how to manage sleep.



## STOP EATING FAST FOOD

Learn about fast food in your community, including how to avoid fast food and how to manage fast food. Learn about fast food in your community, including how to avoid fast food and how to manage fast food.



## DO PHYSICAL EXERCISES

Learn about physical exercises in your community, including how to do physical exercises and how to manage physical exercises. Learn about physical exercises in your community, including how to do physical exercises and how to manage physical exercises.



## EAT MORE FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

Learn about fruits and vegetables in your community, including how to eat more fruits and vegetables and how to manage fruits and vegetables. Learn about fruits and vegetables in your community, including how to eat more fruits and vegetables and how to manage fruits and vegetables.



## GET RID OF BAD HABITS

Learn about bad habits in your community, including how to get rid of bad habits and how to manage bad habits. Learn about bad habits in your community, including how to get rid of bad habits and how to manage bad habits.



## DRINK ENOUGH WATER

Learn about drinking enough water in your community, including how to drink enough water and how to manage drinking enough water. Learn about drinking enough water in your community, including how to drink enough water and how to manage drinking enough water.



## LESS TV

Learn about watching less TV in your community, including how to watch less TV and how to manage watching less TV. Learn about watching less TV in your community, including how to watch less TV and how to manage watching less TV.

#158411209

# Zone of perceptual confusion

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- The area in which, ideology, debate and persuasion determine which issues are public problems
- Constant political **debate about** the «**publicness**» of issues
- Differing beliefs and social realities
- **Severe crises affect the limits** of this zone

# Freeing Rapists from Jail or Reuniting Families: Zone of Perceptual Confusion?

@ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/3000-abusers-rapists-avoid-jail-time-by-marrying-their-victims-in-turkey-appeals-court-101387>

rs-rapists-avoid-jail-time-by-marrying-their-victims-in-turkey-appeals-court-101387

**DAILY NEWS**

Turkey Economy Opinion World Arts & Life Sports Video Photo

Home > Turkey > Local

July 08 2016 17:40:00

**3,000 abusers, rapists avoid jail time by marrying their victims in Turkey: Appeals court**

ANKARA



The testimony of a Turkish Supreme Court of Appeals representative has revealed the sad truth about the practice of victims of sexual abuse being married to their assaulters.

Mustafa Demirdag, the head of the Supreme Court of Appeals department which oversees sexual crimes, said the number of such marriages which were officially registered had reached nearly 3,000, according to daily Milliyet.

# Factors that Increases the «Publicness» of an Issue/ Perceptual Clarity

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## 1. CAUSALITY:

- Can we **clearly understand the factors & actors responsible** for the problem?
  - Example: What is the cause of crime?
  - Personality or social ills?

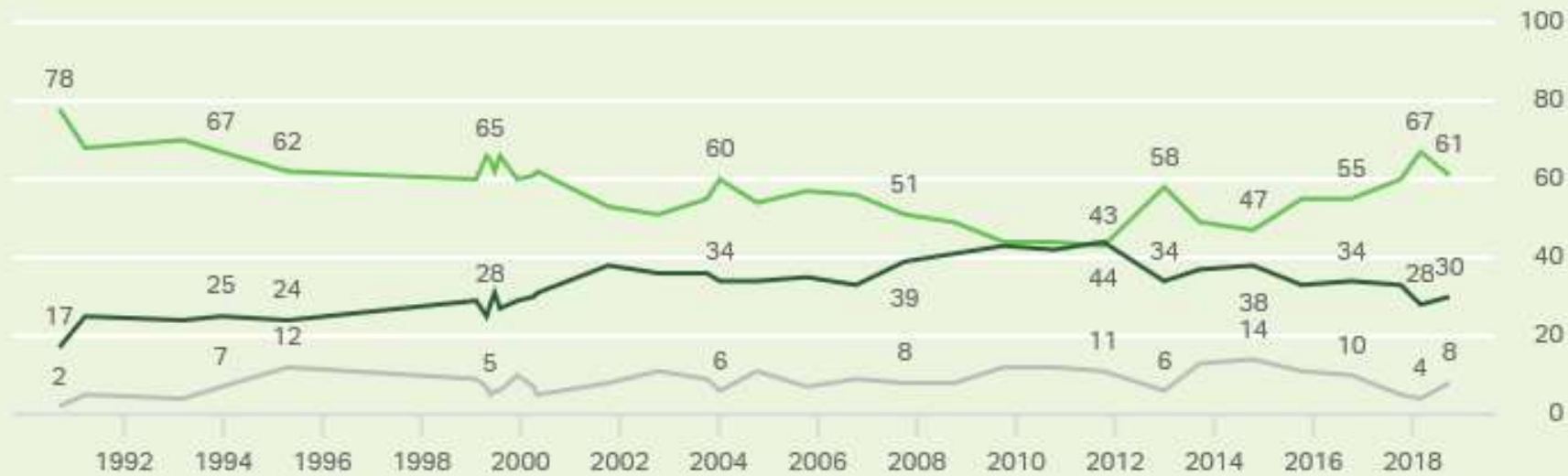
# Do Guns Protect People or Put Them at Risk?

@ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/243797/six-americans-support->

## Americans' Support for Stricter Gun Laws Off Recent High

In general, do you feel that the laws covering the sale of firearms should be made more strict, less strict or kept as they are now?

■ % More strict ■ % Kept as they are ■ % Less strict



GALLUP

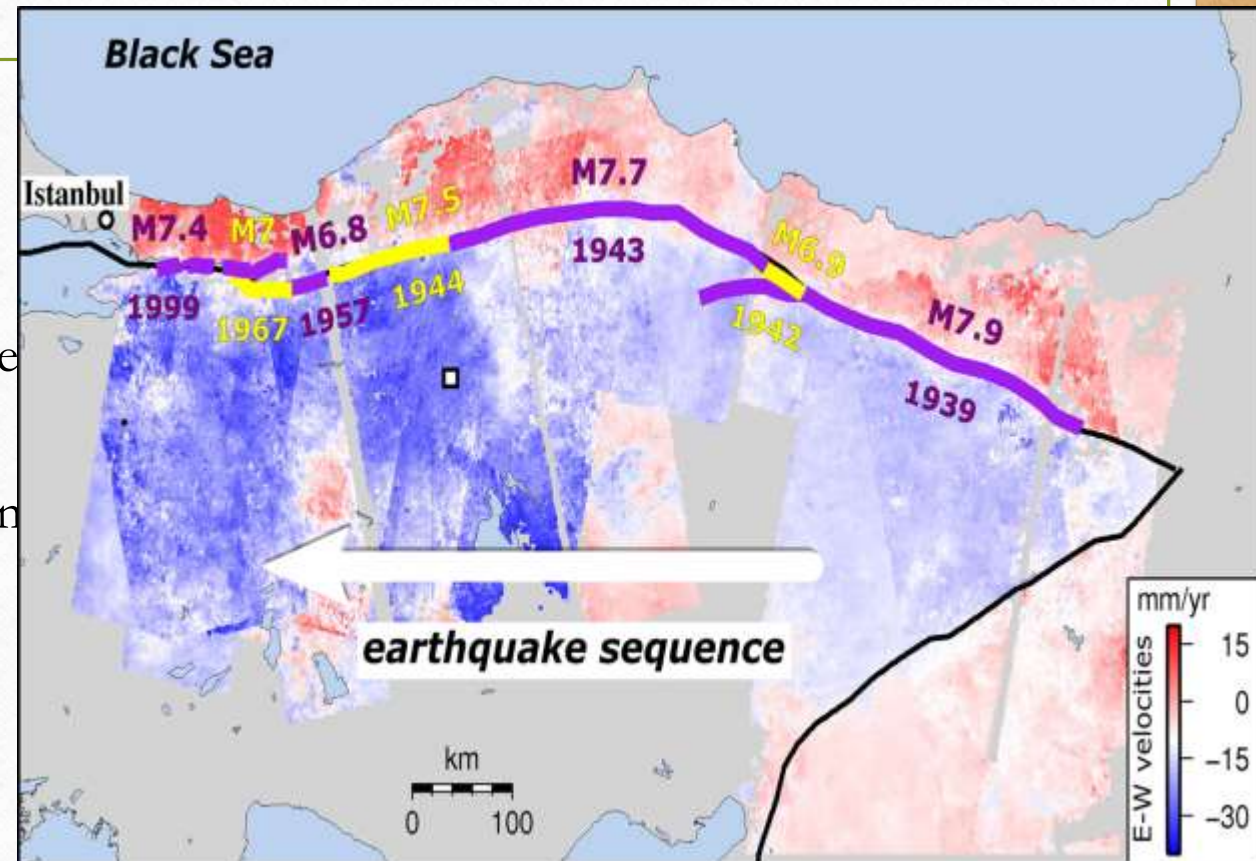
# Factors that Increases the «Publicness» of an Issue

@ <https://www.jpl.nasa.gov/spaceimages/details.php?id=pia22412>

## 2. SEVERITY/SERIOUSNESS/COST:

Extreme increase in **Sum of social consequences**

- that **extend beyond the capabilities** of private individuals
- Highlight the necessity of government action
- In **extreme, a CRISIS, a disaster**: Natural disasters
  - Can **not be avoided or ignored**



# Factors that Increases the «Publicness» of an Issue

## 3. **SCOPE & INCIDENCE (Frequency):** Number of affected individuals

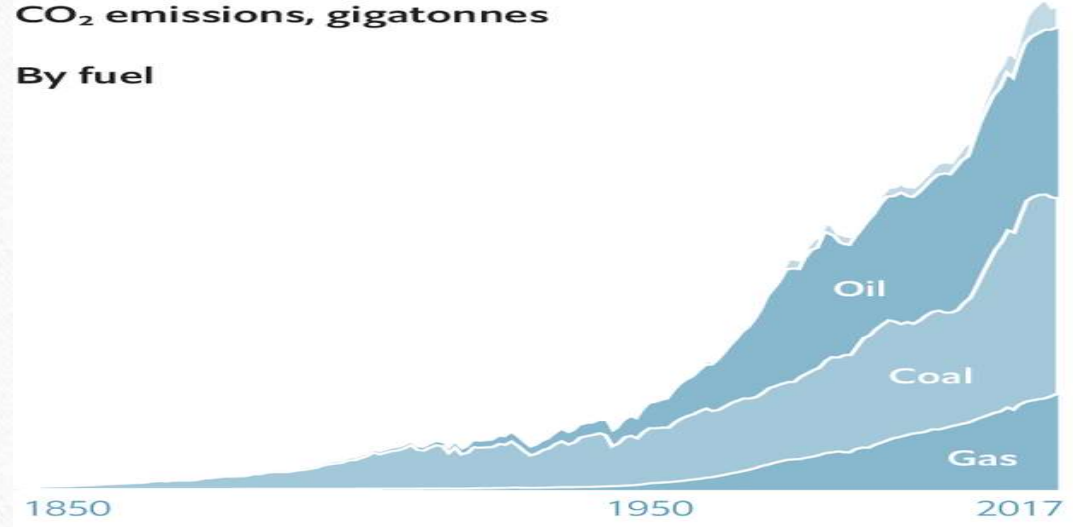
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- % of the public affected by the issue
- **TIME DIMENSION:** Is the problem **worsening, improving or remaining static?**
- Example: **CO2 emissions** that increase global warming

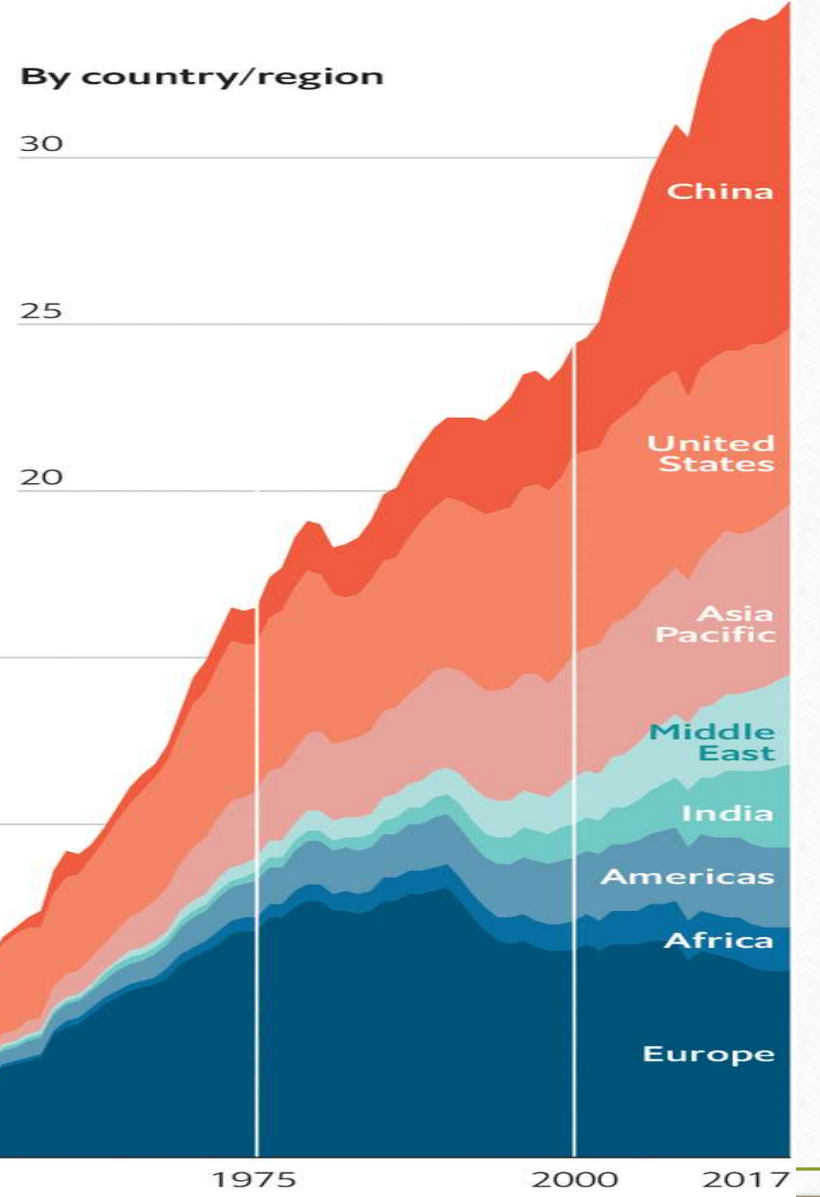
@<https://www.economist.com/briefing/2019/09/21/the-past-present-and-future-of-climate-change>

# CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, gigatonnes

## By fuel



## By country/region



Sources: Le Quéré et al. (2018); Global Carbon Project (GCP); Carbon Dioxide Information Analysis Centre (CDIAC)

1850 1875 1900 1925 1950 1975 2000 2017



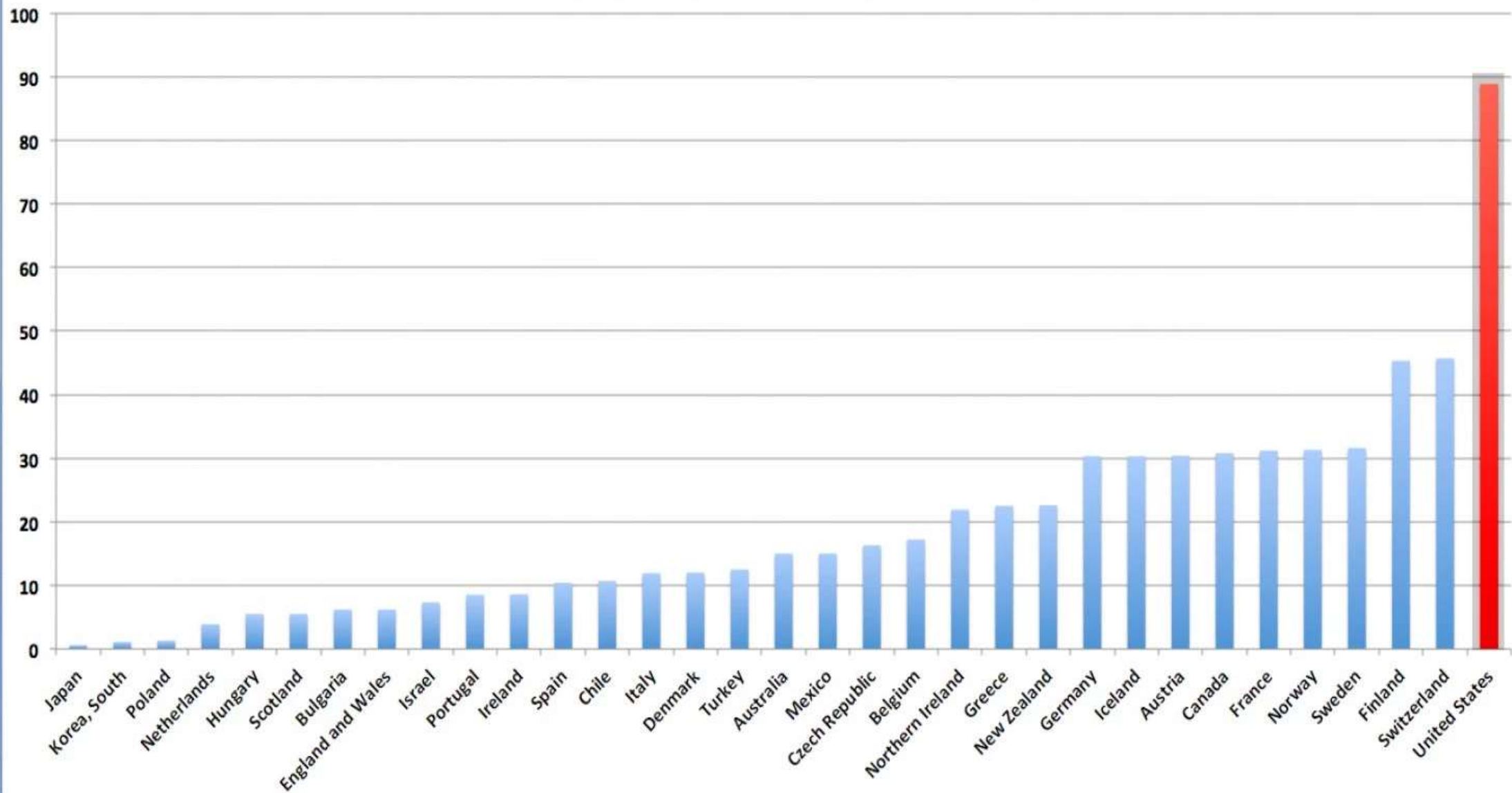
# Factors that Increases the «Publicness» of an Issue

## 4. BELIEF SYSTEMS & SOCIAL REALITY

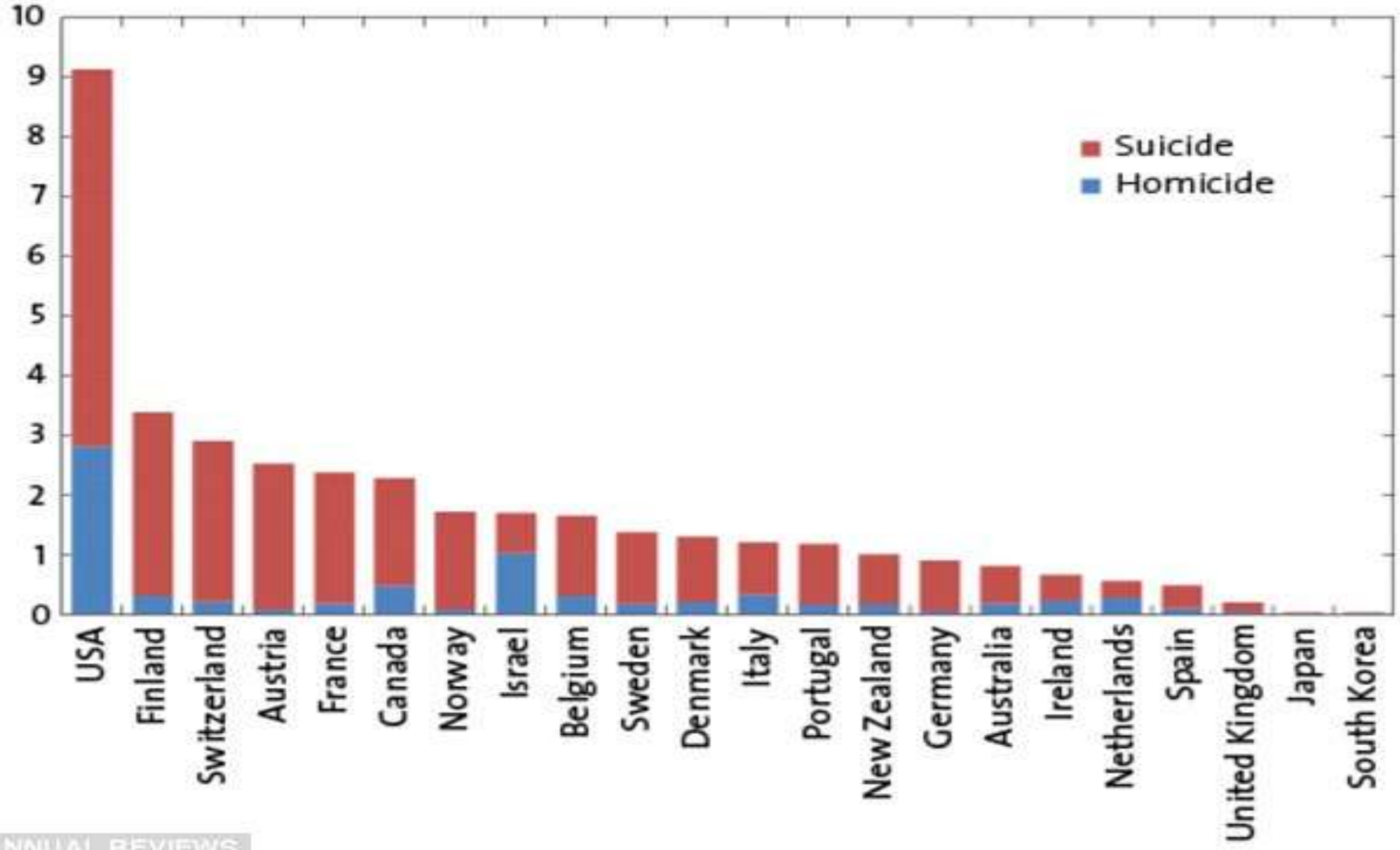
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- A powerful filter (cultural, ideological, moral, religious, etc.)
- Supported by facts and information learned in life.
- Expanded by traditional & electronic media outlets.
  - We experience the World through media & technology.
  - Example: What is the appropriate level of government intervention?
    - Gun violence in the US vs. «right to have guns» & ensure self defense
  - Example: A member of a **minority** group can be **sensitive to discrimination**
  - New information & life experiences may **change social reality**
    - Member of a **majority** group may experience **discrimination** in another country

Number of guns per 100 people, OECD "developed" countries



# Deaths/100,000 population



# Factors that Increases the «Publicness» of an Issue

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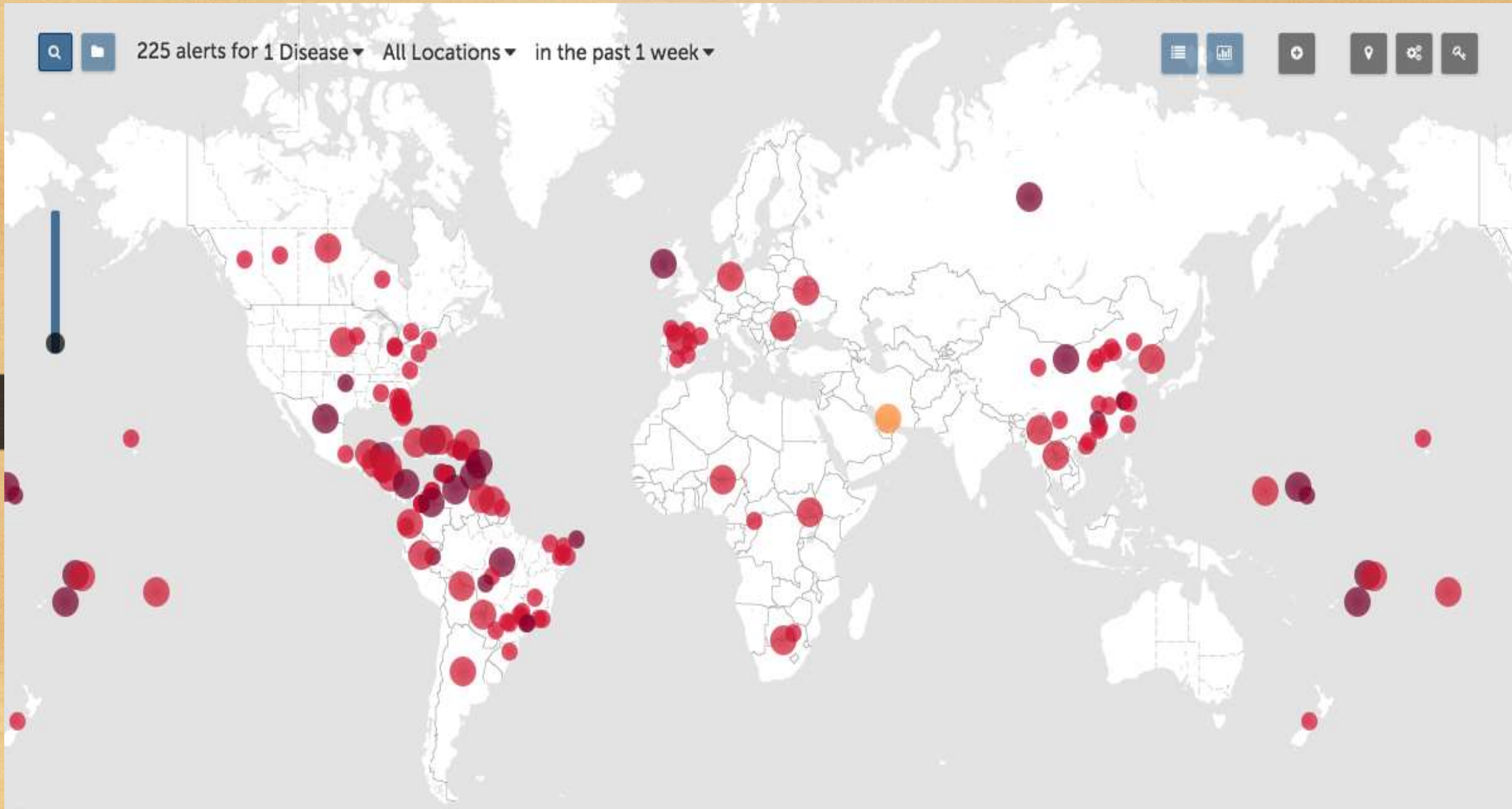
## 5. PROXIMITY/CLOSENESS

(Perception of (Physical & Emotional) Distance)

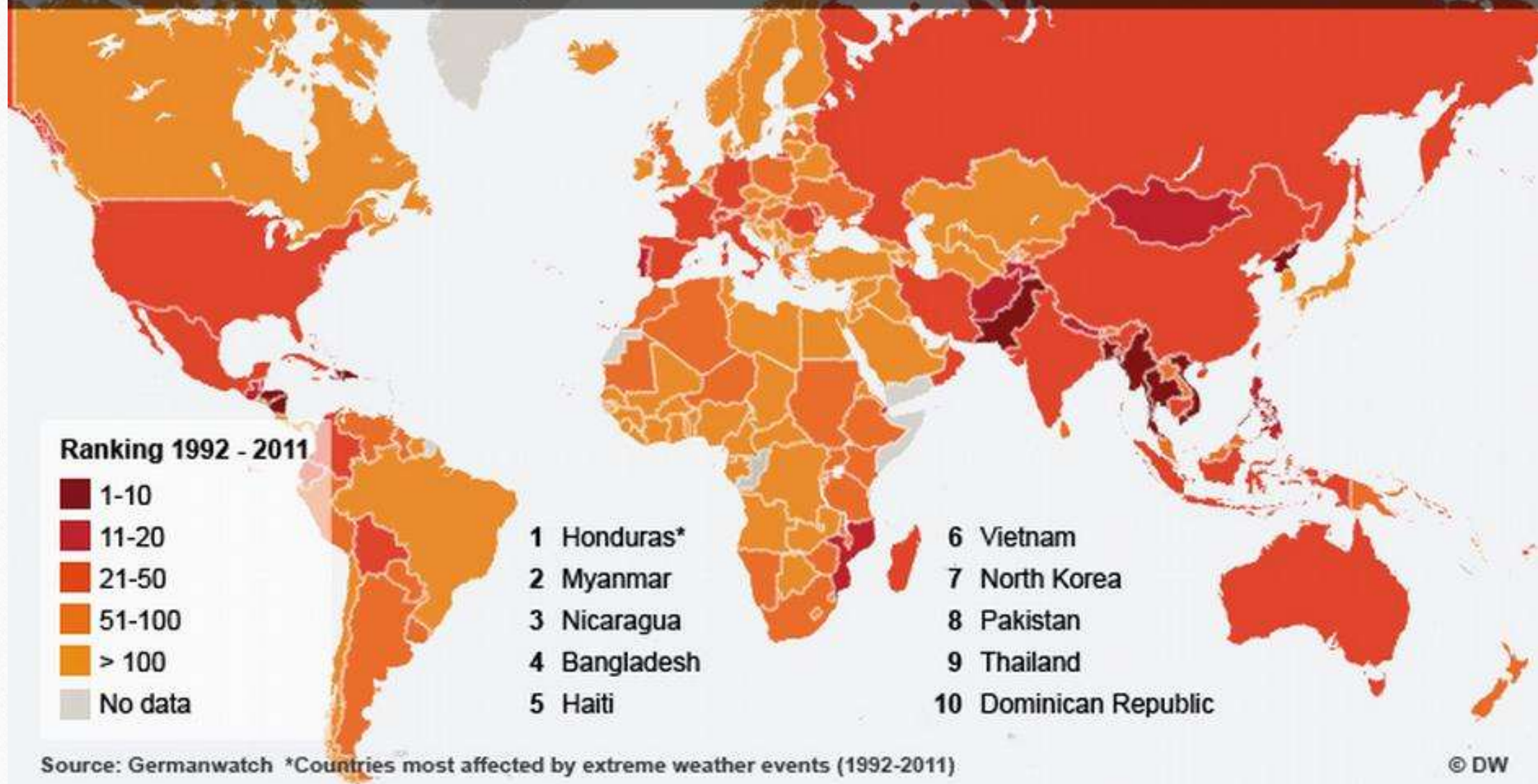
- Is the problem **close to** the individual's **level of social reality**?
  - Global famine
  - Civil wars in distant lands?
- Is the impact direct?
  - Example: Zika Virus



225 alerts for 1 Disease ▾ All Locations ▾ in the past 1 week ▾

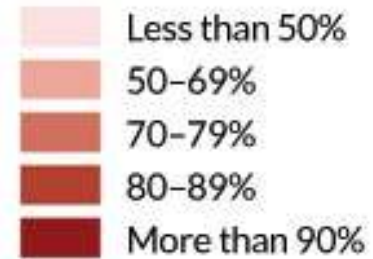
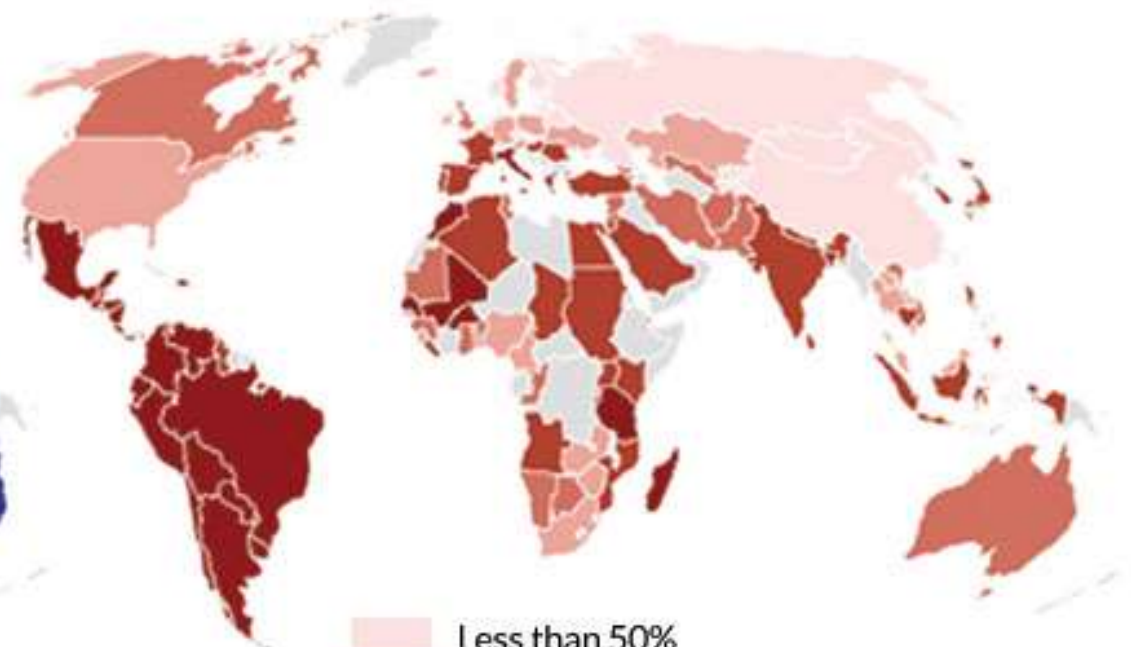
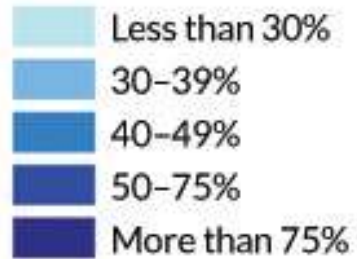
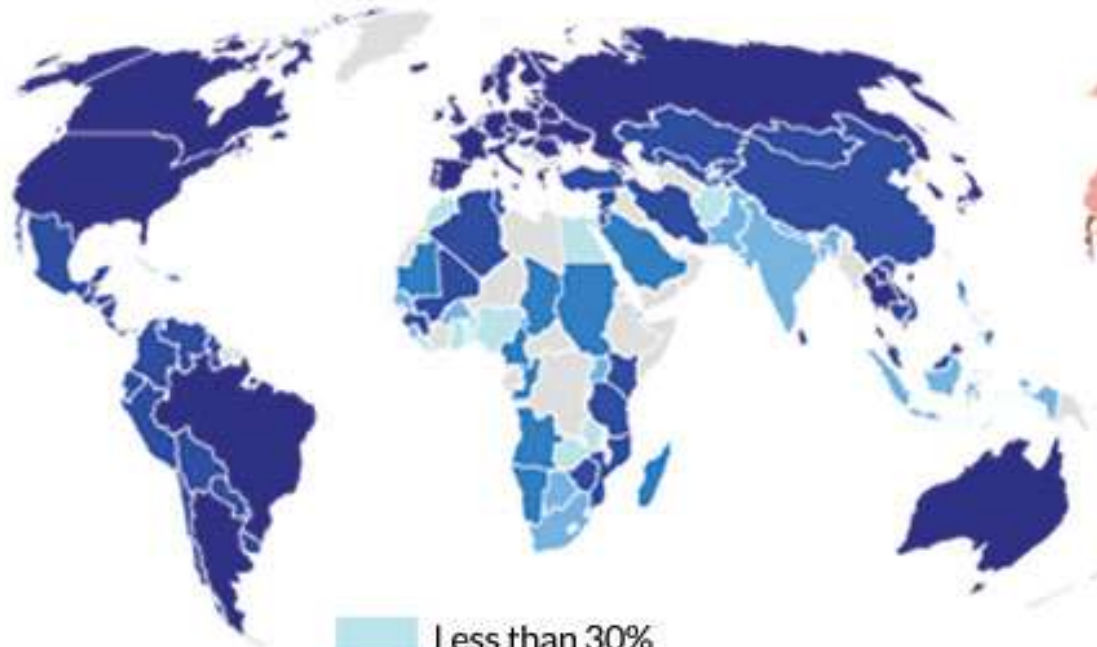


## The countries most affected by climate change



## Aware of climate change

## Of the "Aware:" climate change is a serious threat



# Perceptual Process of Problem Identification

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Creation of Perception



Formulation of Perception



Decision on Policy Action or Inaction



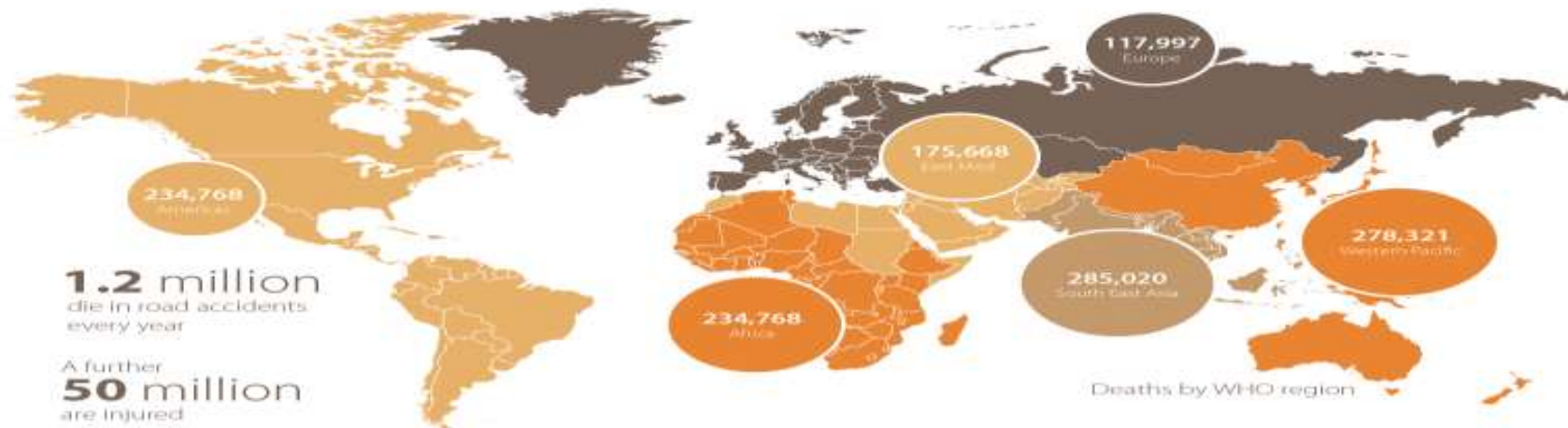
# Role of Information in **Objective Cost** Determination

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- Cost of Traffic Accidents?
- Objective or perceptual/subjective (affected by the belief system)

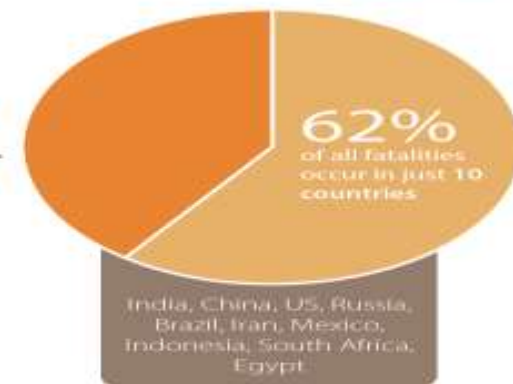
# Road Traffic Accidents: The Modern Killer

The Global Status Report released by WHO this year, confirms that road traffic injuries are still a big global health and development problem



**1.2 million** die in road accidents every year

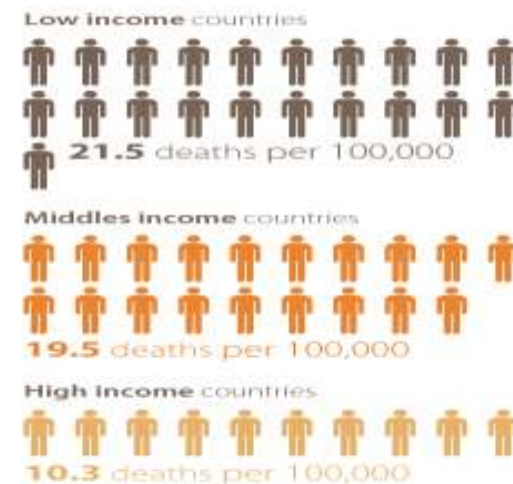
A further **50 million** are injured



High income countries  
Middle income countries  
Low income countries

90% of deaths occur in low or medium income countries

However high income countries have over 50% of all registered vehicles



Almost **50%** of those who die in traffic accidents are cyclists, pedestrians and motorcyclists

## The Laws



Only **49%** of countries stipulate a **legal blood alcohol concentration** limit of less than 0.05g per decilitre



Only **57%** of countries **requires seatbelts** to be used by passengers



Only **40%** of countries have a comprehensive **helmet law** and require helmets to be of a specific standard

## On the rise?

Road traffic accidents are predicted to rise to the **5th leading cause of death by 2030**, higher than AIDS, lung cancer and diabetes.



Car accidents are the **number 1 killer** for 15-29 year-olds

# Private Issues

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- Issues that impact few people
- Little severity
- Do not require government action


# Should governments encourage their citizens to marry?

www.debate.org/opinions/should-governments-encourage-their-citizens-to-marry

DEBATE.ORG DEBATES OPINIONS FORUMS POLLS

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Should governments encourage their citizens to marry?

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YES or NO

29% Say Yes 71% Say No

**Encouraging is not forcing.** The issue is that the government should encourage or not, there is no statement which says the government would force their citizens to marry. As well, to encourage someone their might be some benefits to attract them, for example, paying lesser household taxes or lower tuition fees for the government schools. Marriage can also increase a better benefits for the economics, marriage would increase human supplies.

**Not worth the paper it's printed on** It makes me angry to think that I'm missing out on or having to pay towards these tax breaks just because I haven't signed a piece of paper to state officially "in the eyes of some religious entity marketed my salesmen which not every one believes in" to say that me and my partner are happy together etc etc. We're not interested in wasting a deposit on a house on a fancy party to tell the world. We're happy together and don't need to advertise the fact.

Why they seem to think that having this "contract" changes anything just baffles me. People's feelings ,emotions ,situations and personally can change over time which can lead to break up regardless of saving a few

Report Post

Like Reply

# Example: Unmarried People- Public or Private Issue?

www.pembepanjur.com

Üye Giriş

**pembepanjur**  
MUTLU HAYATLARIN BAŞLANGICI

ÜCRETSİZ ÜYE OL

Şimdi Kayıt ol, sana uygun üyeleri ücretsiz gör. Ücretsiz kişilik testimizden yararlan. Profilin gizli kalsın!

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Aradığınız Kişi:  Erkek  Kadın

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