

Introduction to Public Policy

Week 6

Problem Identification

Theodolou & Kofinis, pp. 99-114.

What is a problem? Is it public or private?

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

Examples: Public or Private Issues?

- Illnesses
 - Ebola
- Unemployment
- Homelessness



Rarely Consensus on Policy Actors Regarding...

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

Problem Identification

- 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

Problem Identification is...

- **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**

Problem Identification is...

- **Open to change** when **new information & understanding** emerges
 - 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
 - Significantly increased taxation

Problem Identification is...

- Public problems **change over time**
 - Changing conditions
 - Land reform in Turkey was more important when Turkey was an agricultural society
 - New information & experiences
 - Unemployment becomes a much more important problem if one loses his/her job
 - Pressing concerns
 - 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?



Political & Social Implications of Identifying Public Problems

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

Private Problems? Individual Responsibility?

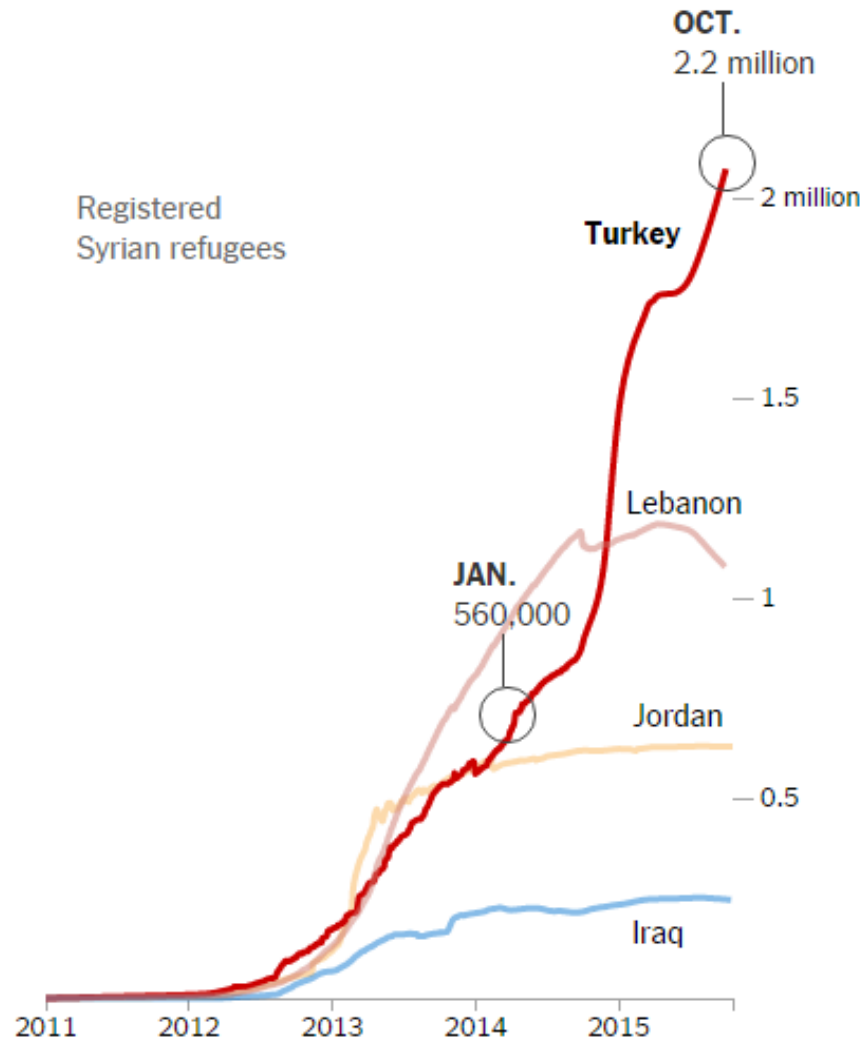
- Limb operations due to obesity
- People eating fast food
- Individuals making bad investment decisions
- People getting ill
 - Example: Smokers
- Making a car accident

Classic Public Problems

- 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**



Refugee Crisis: Impossible to Ignore or Avoid



Meanwhile, the number of Syrians in Turkey more than tripled in the last two years.

Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/11/04/world/middleeast/syria-refugees-europe-crisis-maps-explainer.html>, Nov. 16, 2015.

Zone of perceptual confusion

- 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

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

1. CAUSALITY:

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

THE WORLD IS GETTING FATTER



HOW DO I KNOW WHETHER I AM OVERWEIGHT?

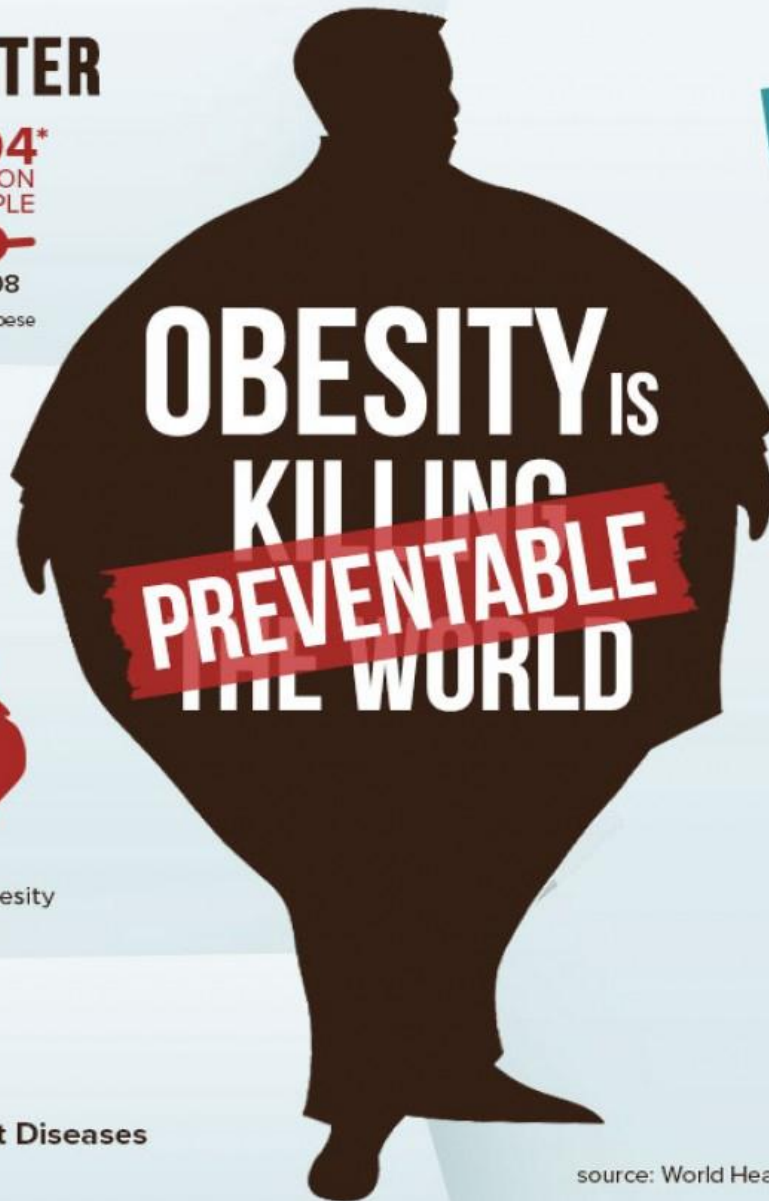
Calculate your body mass index (BMI) using this formula

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


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



Factors that Increases the «Publicness» of an Issue

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**: Wars, natural disasters
 - Can **not be avoided or ignored**

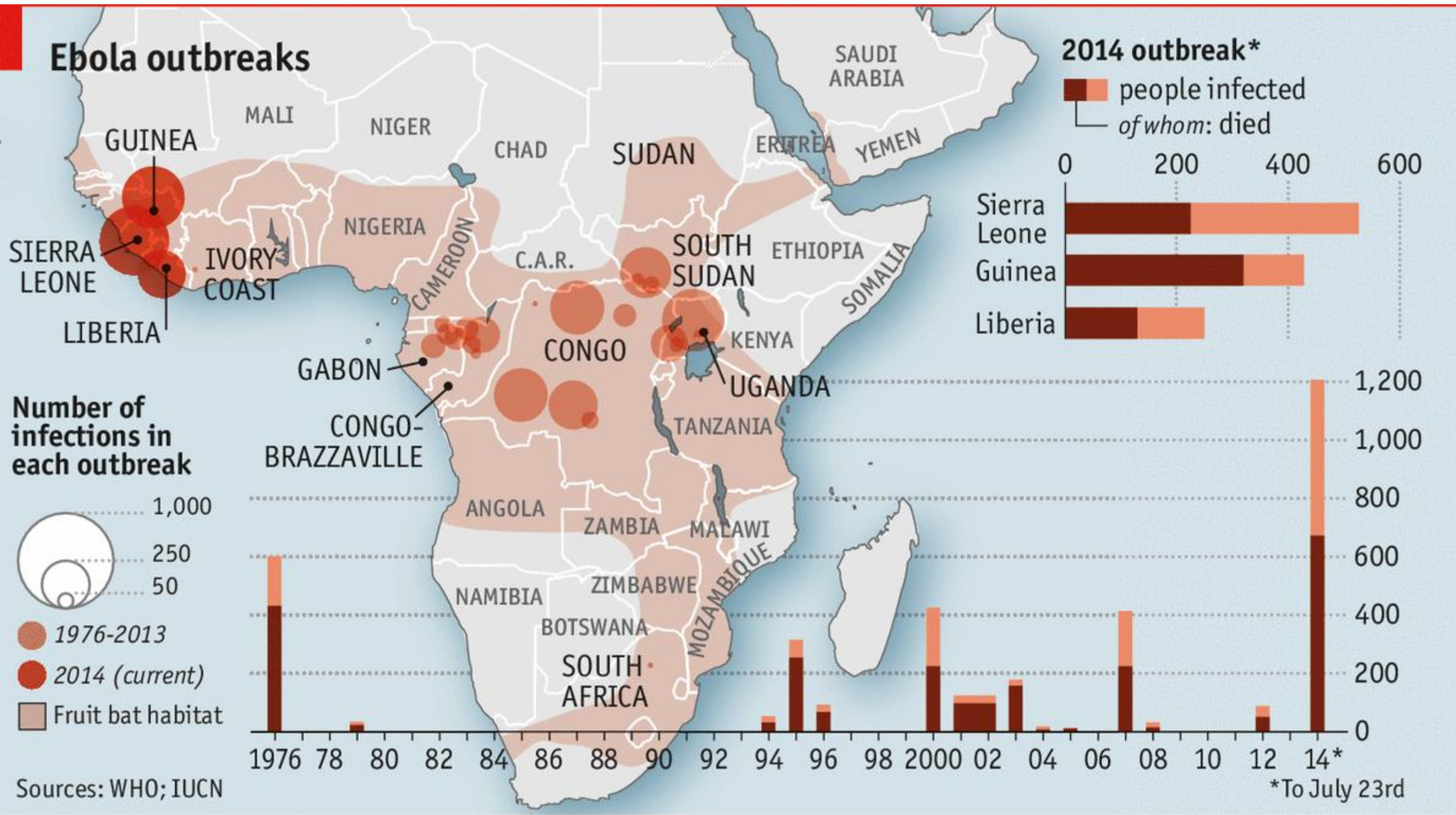


Factors that Increases the «Publicness» of an Issue

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

- **% of the public** affected by the issue
- **TIME DIMENSION**: Is the problem **worsening, improving or remaining static?**
- Example: Ebola Epidemic

Ebola outbreaks

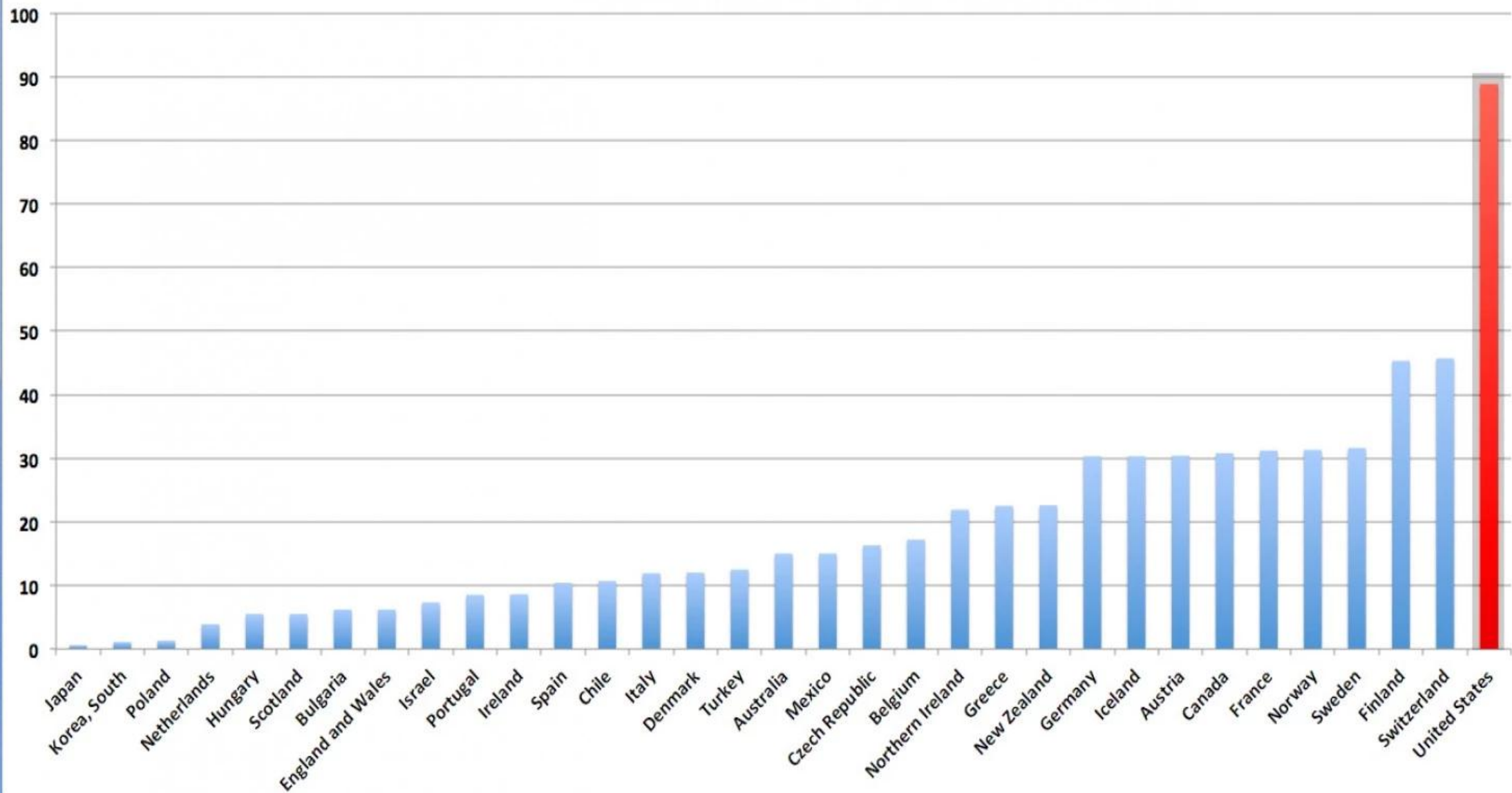


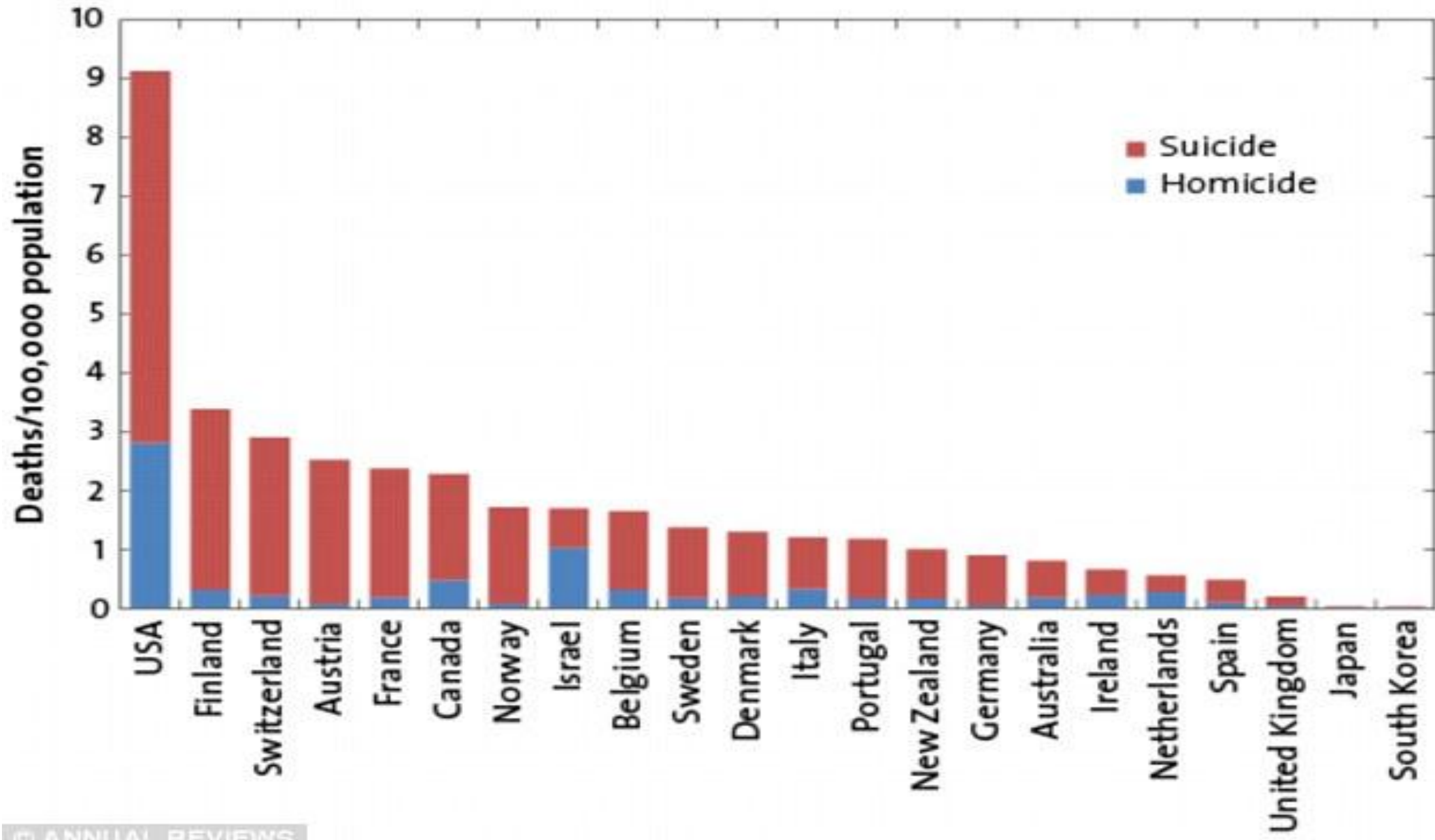
Factors that Increases the «Publicness» of an Issue

4. BELIEF SYSTEMS & SOCIAL REALITY

- 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

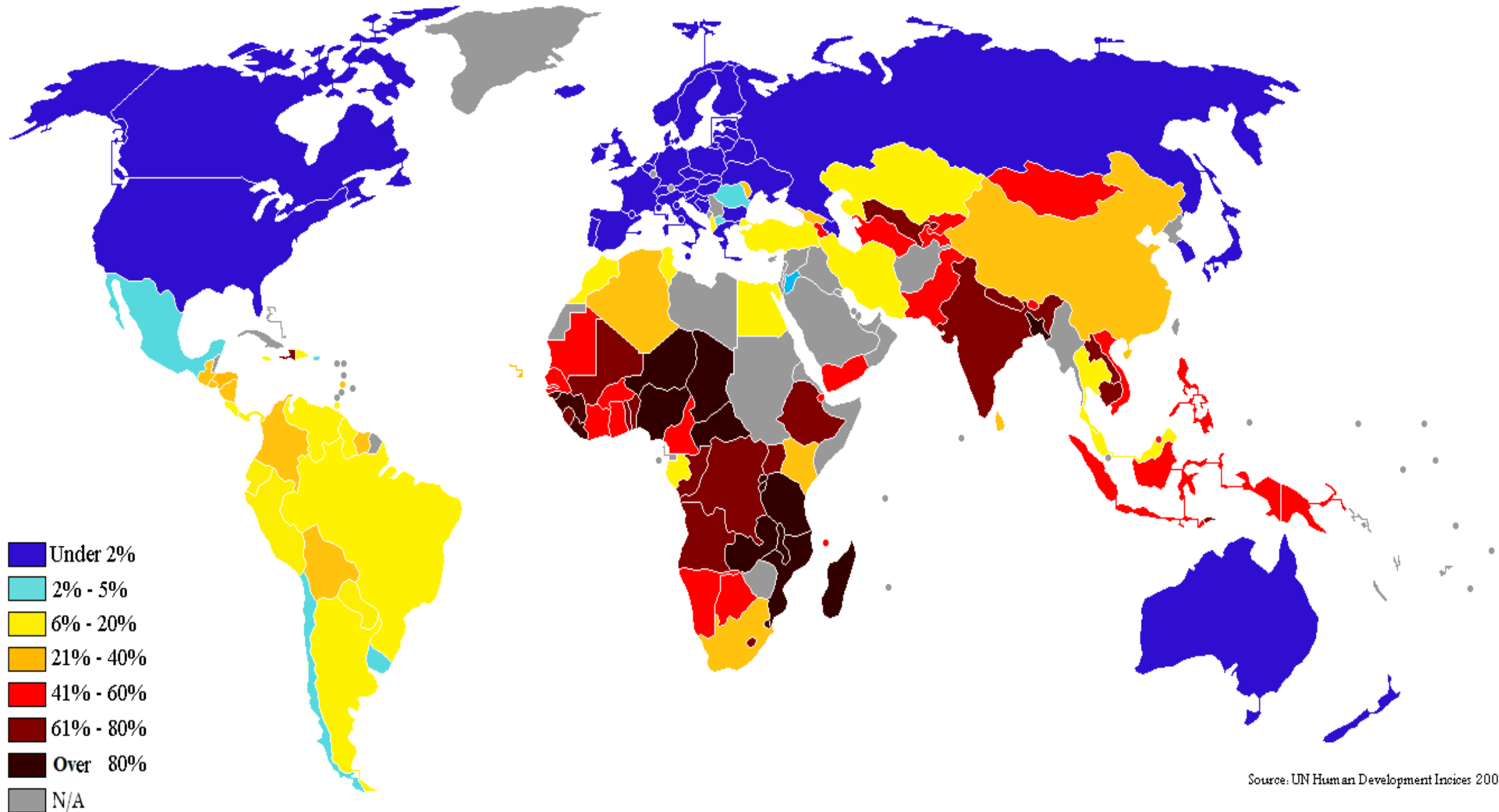




Factors that Increases the «Publicness» of an Issue

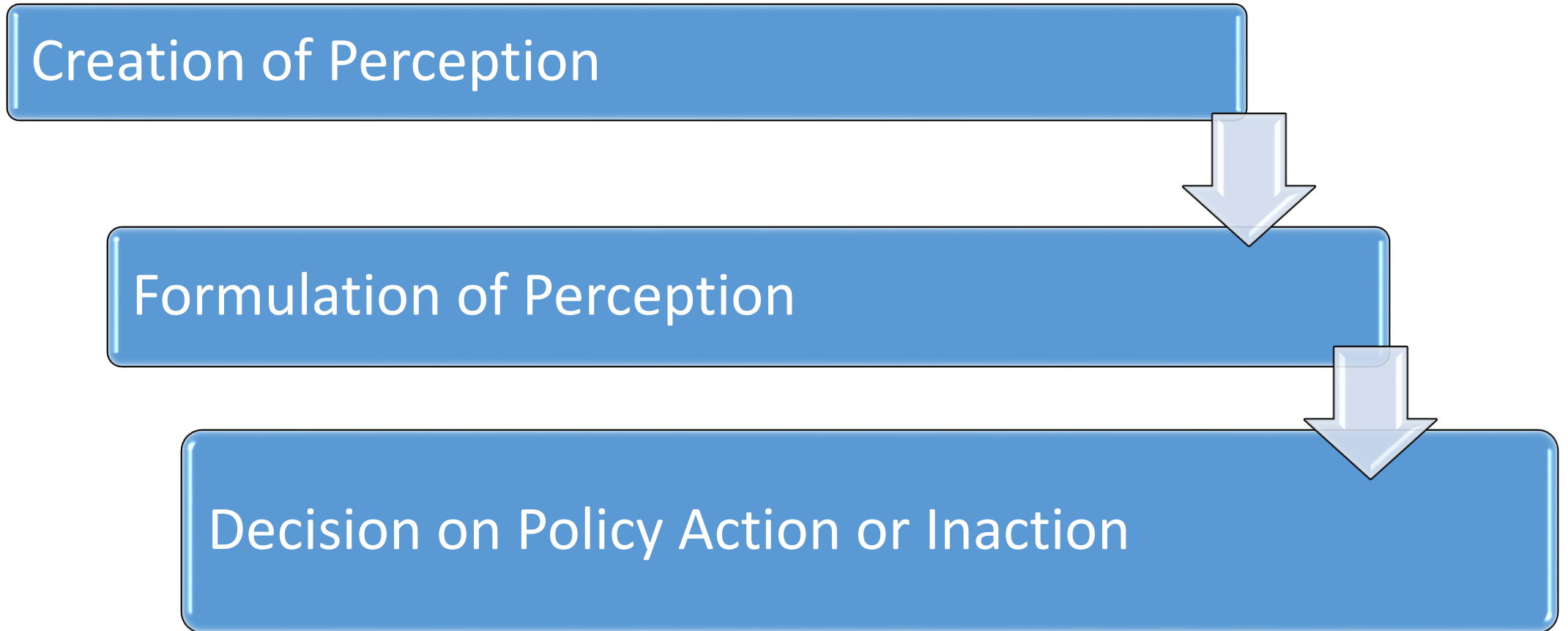
5. PROXIMITY/CLOSENESS

- Is the problem **close to** the individual's **level of social reality**?
- Is the impact direct?
 - Example: Third World Poverty



Source: UN Human Development Indices 2008

Perceptual Process of Problem Identification

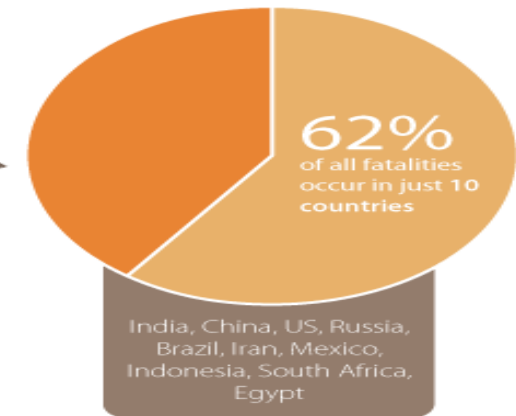
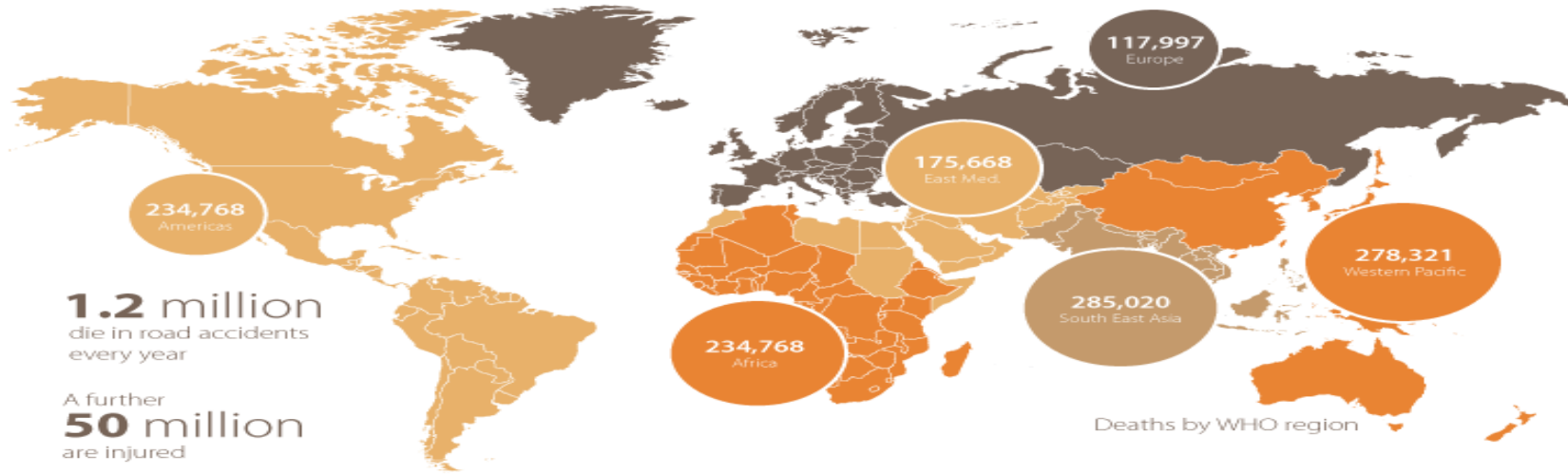


Role of Information in **Objective** Cost Determination

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

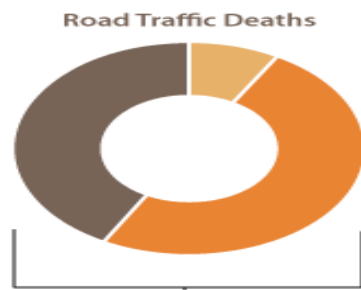
Road Traffic Accidents: The Modern Killer

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

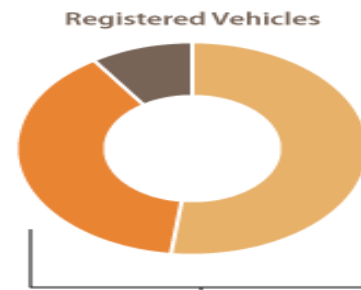


1.2 million die in road accidents every year

A further **50 million** are injured



90% of deaths occur in low or medium income countries



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

High income countries
Middle income countries
Low income countries

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?

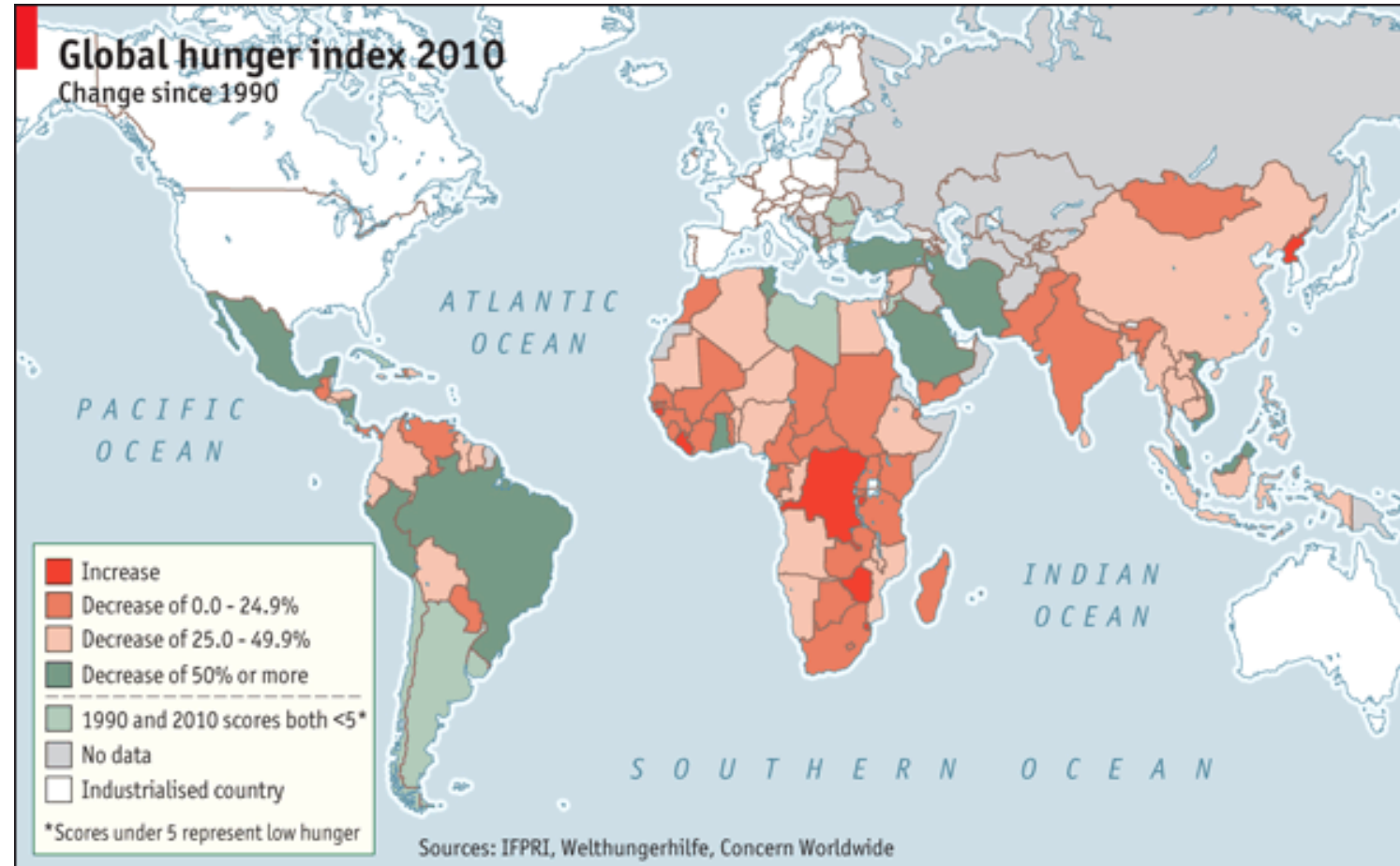
Road traffic accidents are predicted to rise to the **5th leading cause of death by 2030**, higher than AIDS, lung cancer and diabetes



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

PROXIMITY: Perception of (Physical & Emotional) Distance

- Global famine
- Civil wars in distant lands?



Private Issues

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

Example: Unmarried People- Public or Private Issue?

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