



# **How More Equal Societies Reduce Stress, Restore Sanity and Improve Wellbeing**

**Richard Wilkinson**

**Professor of Social Epidemiology**

**Children In Scotland**

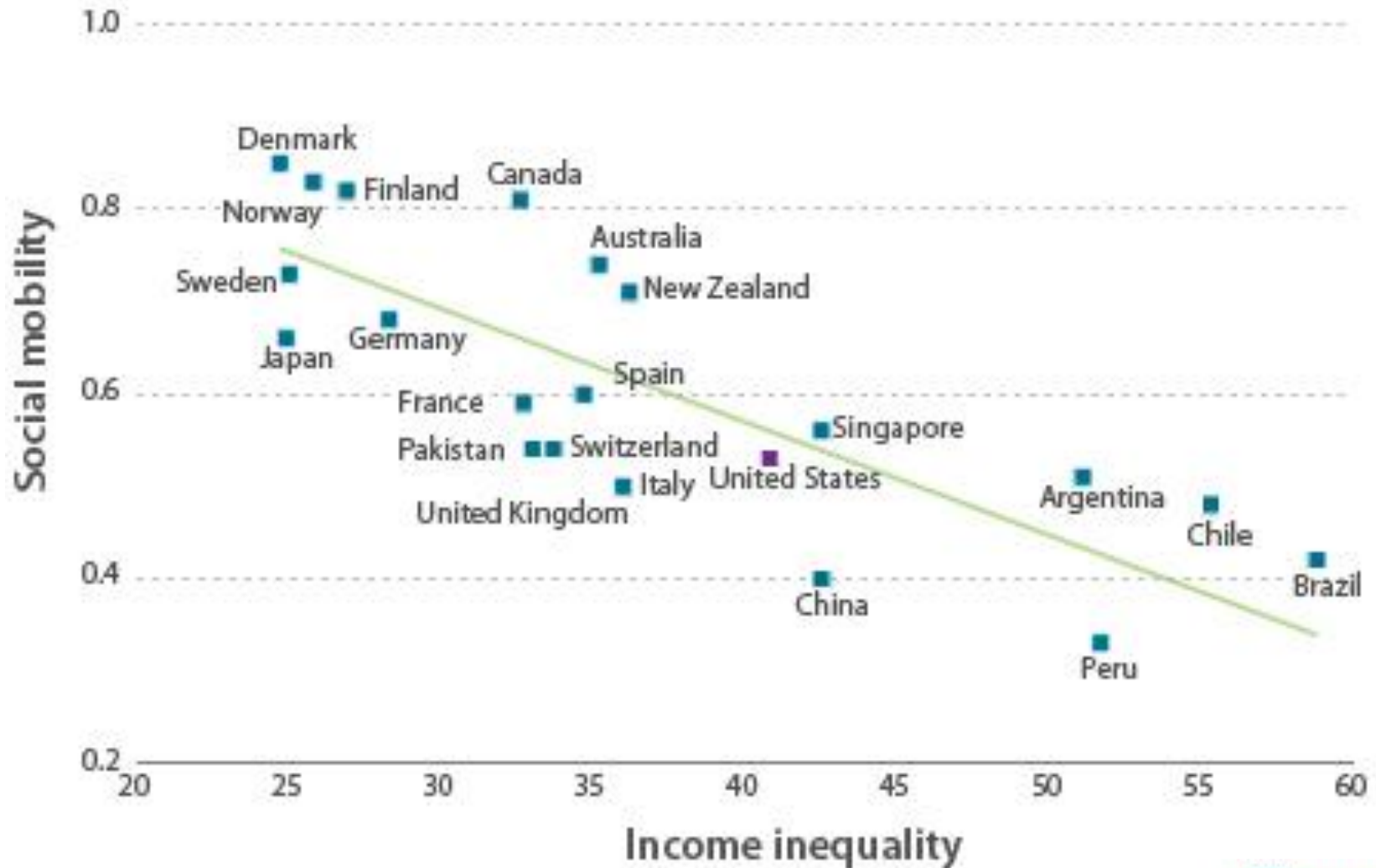
**Edinburgh November 2018**



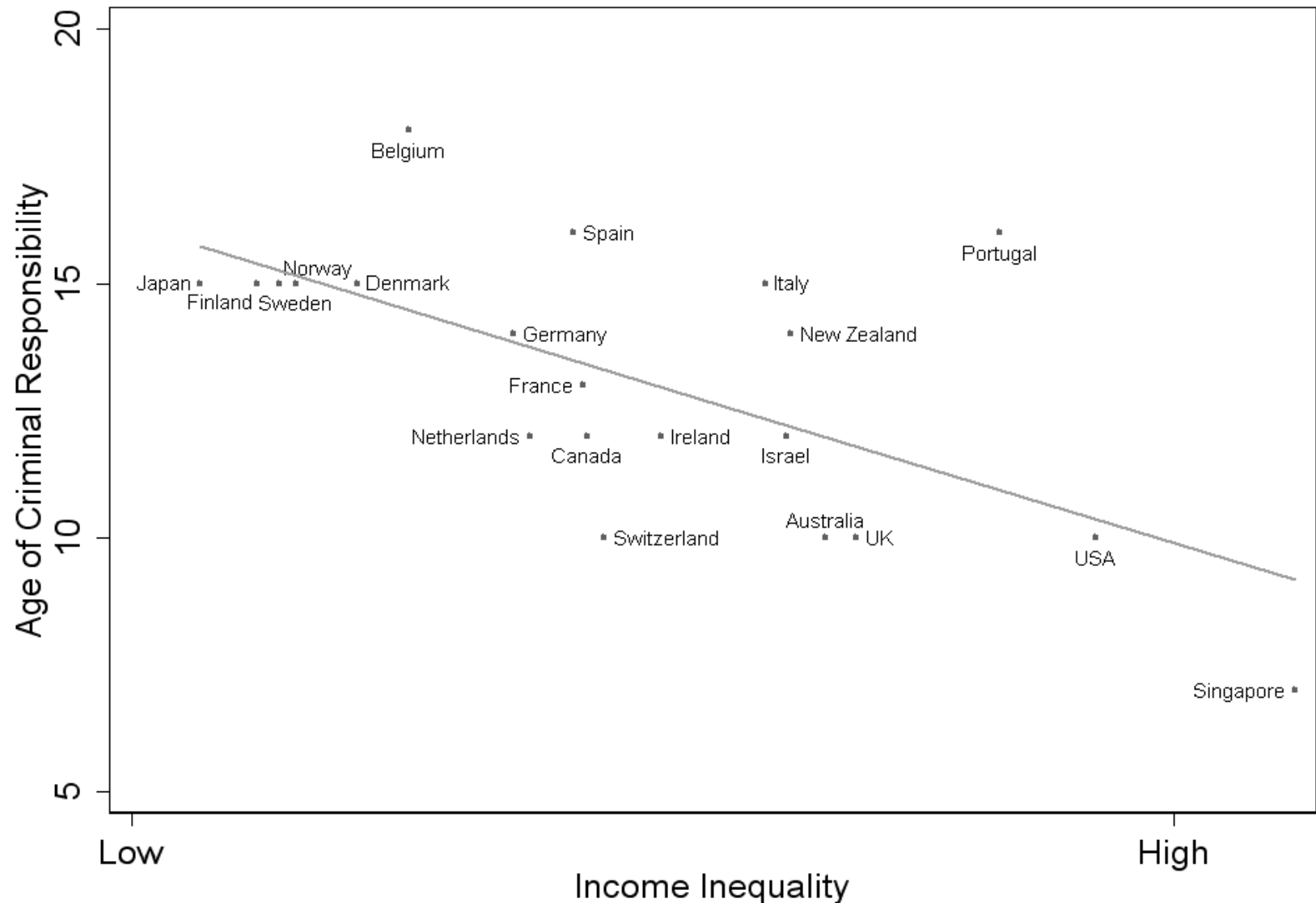
**Individual differences will explain who falls, but the height of the hurdles will explain how many fall**



# Where income inequalities are larger, there is less social mobility



# The age of criminal responsibility is lower in more unequal societies



# Average maths and reading scores are lower in more unequal countries



# Mental illness is more common in more unequal societies



# The Dominance Behavioural System

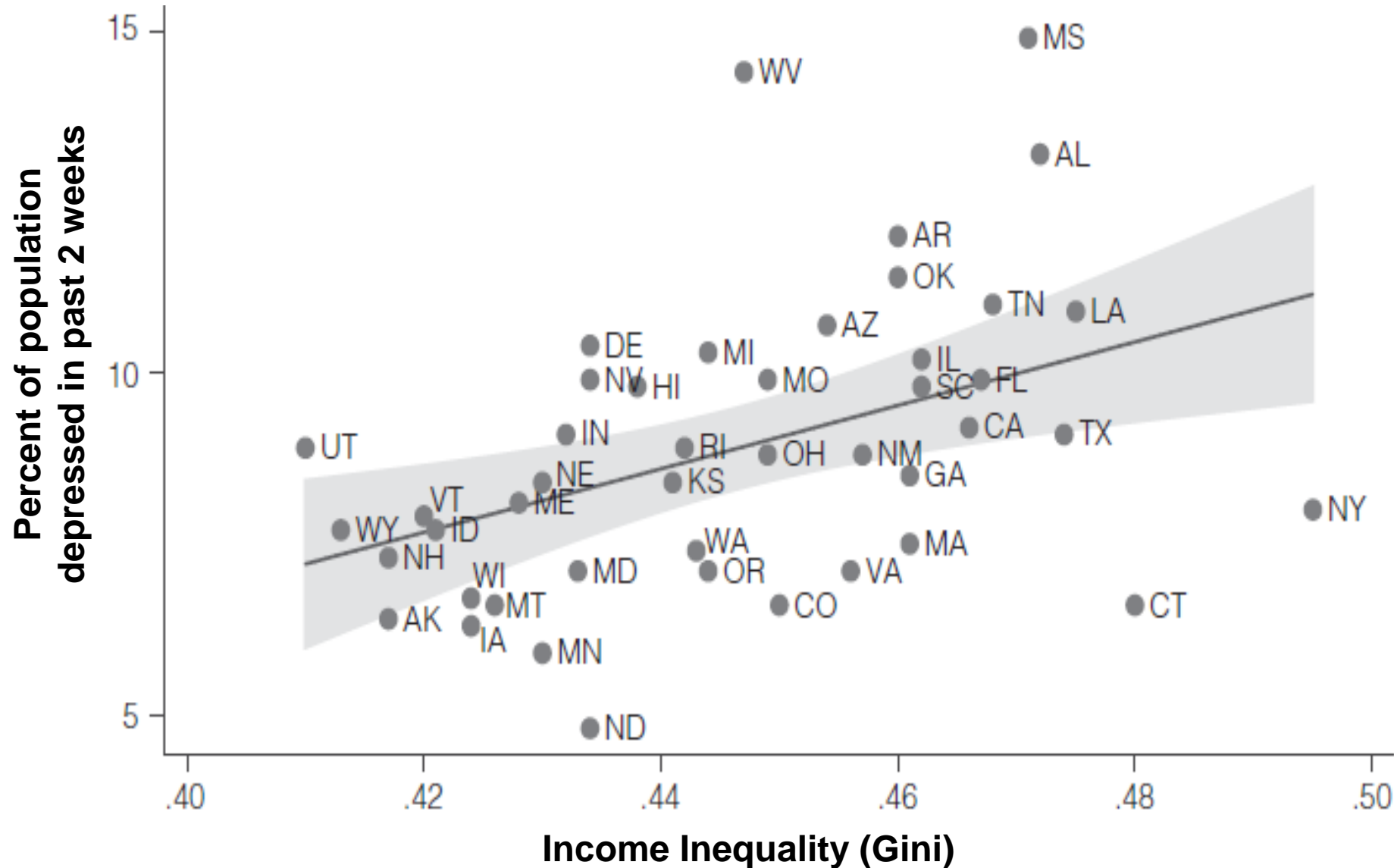
Johnson SL, Leedom LJ, Muhtadie L.

The Dominance Behavioral System and Psychopathology.  
*Psychological Bulletin*, 2012; 138(4): 692-743.

## **Findings:-**

- **Anxiety and depression are related to subordination, to submissiveness and to the desire to avoid subordination.**
- **Disruptive behavior disorders, mania and narcissistic traits are related to inflated self-perceptions of power or a heightened focus on achieving social dominance and recognition**

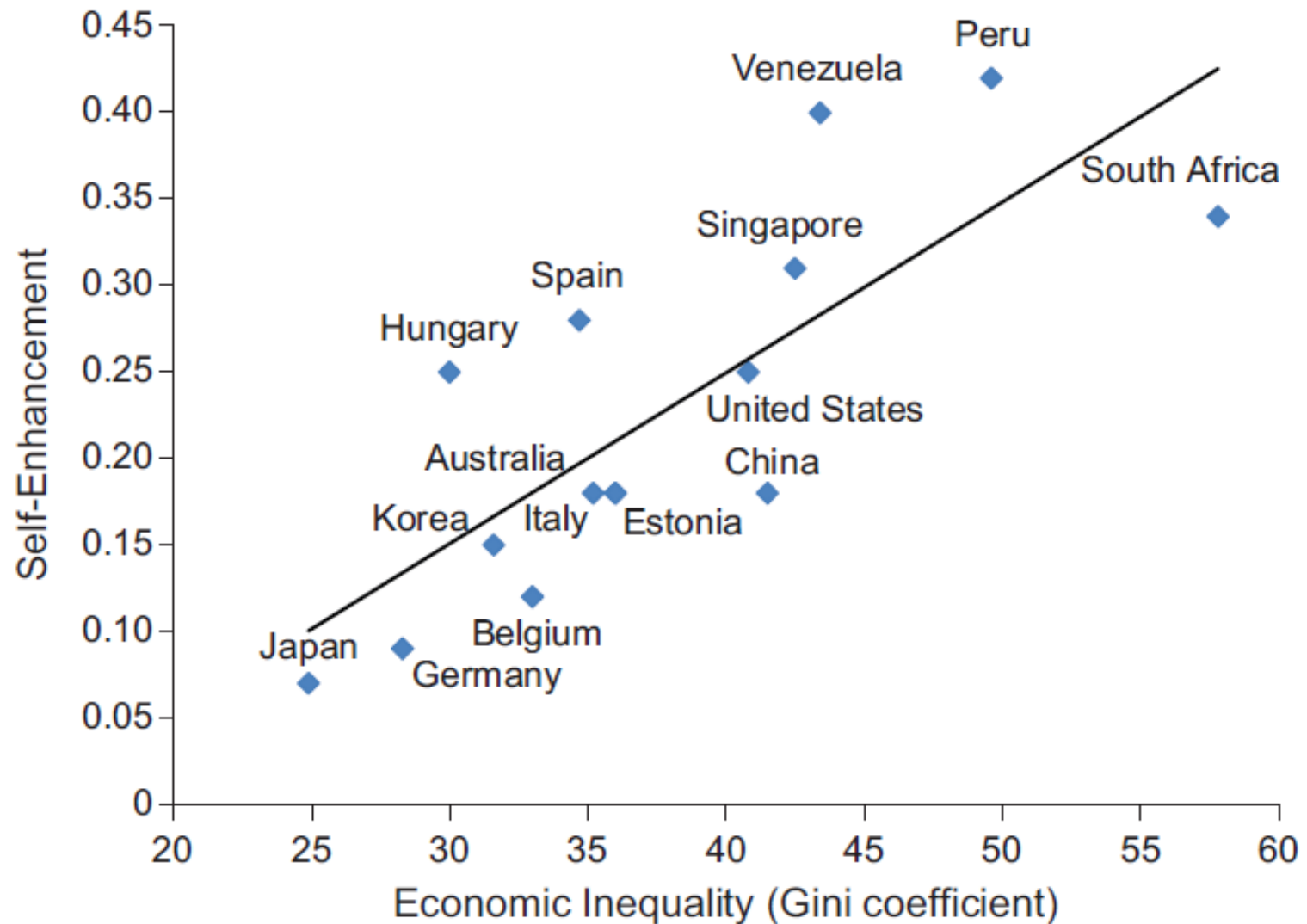
# Depression is more common in more unequal states



Messias E, Eaton WW, et al. . Economic grand rounds: Income inequality and depression across the United States: an ecological study." Psychiatric Services, 2011; 62(7): 710-2.

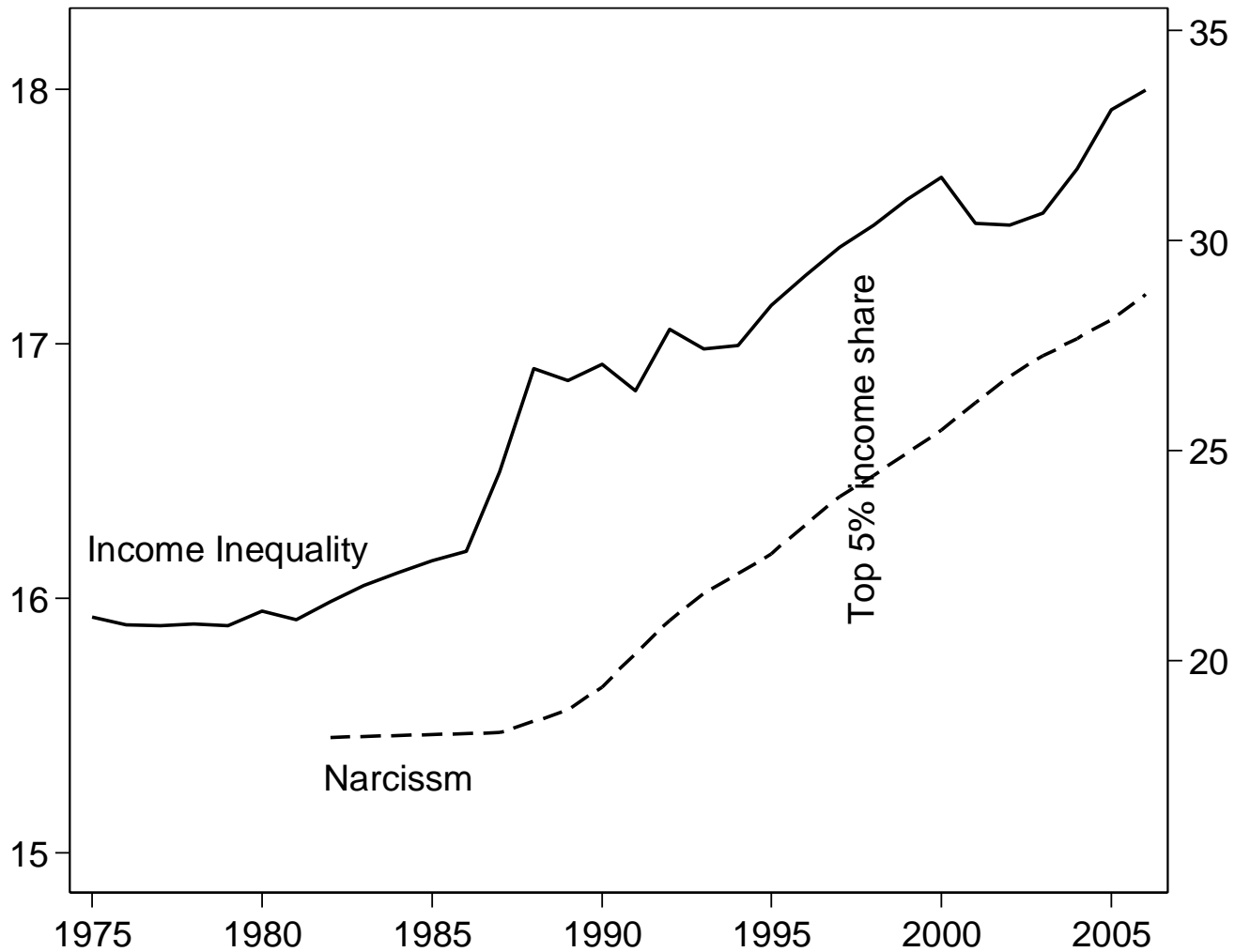


# Self-enhancement increases in more unequal societies

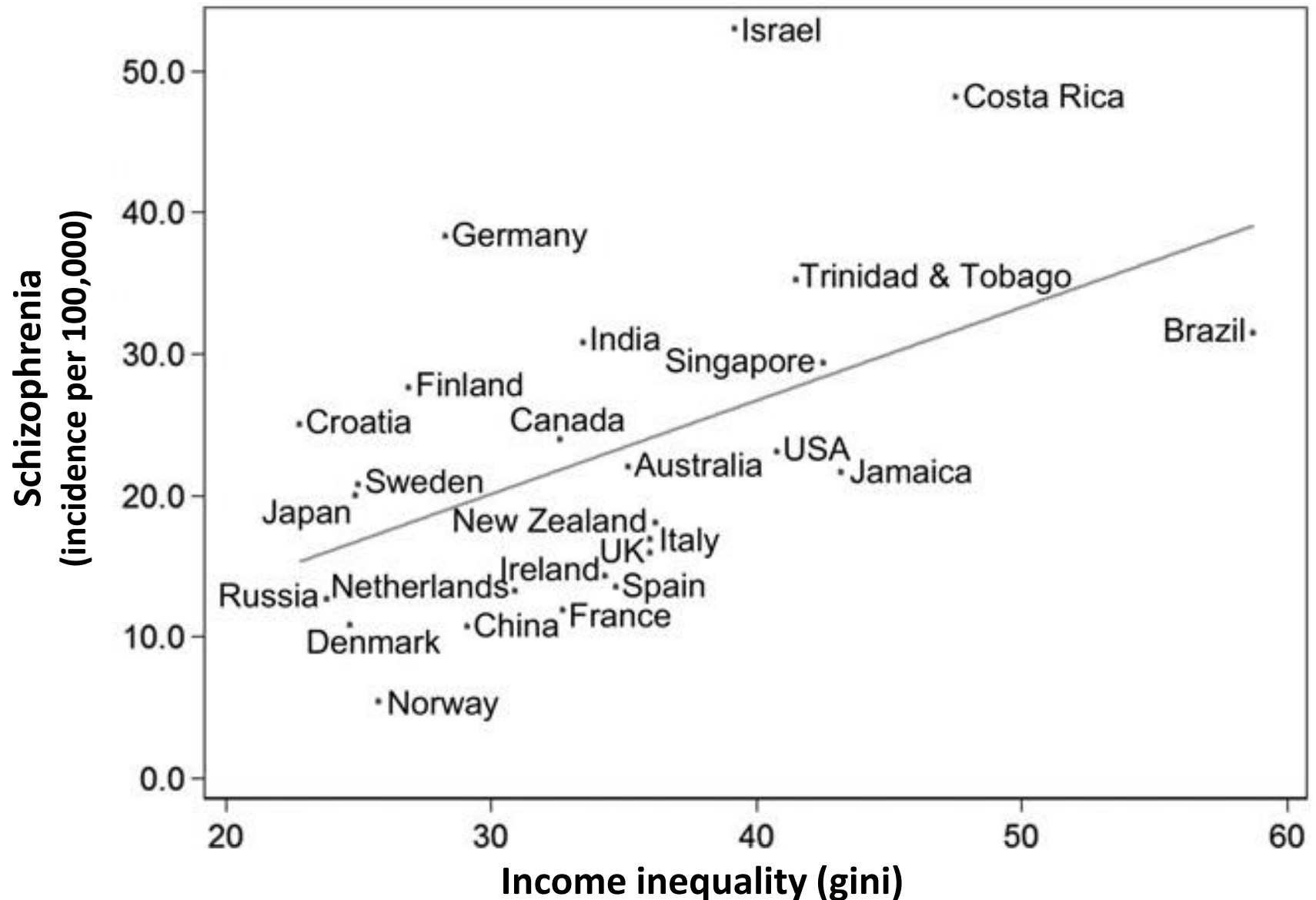


Loughnan S, et al. Economic Inequality is linked to biased self-perception.  
*Psychological Science*, 2011; 22: 1254

# US college students became more narcissistic as income inequality increased



## Schizophrenia is more common in more unequal countries



# Inequality increases conspicuous consumption and consumerism

- **People in more unequal areas of the USA are more likely to buy high status cars**

Bricker J., et al. Signaling Status: The Impact of Relative Income on Household Consumption. Finance and Economics Discussion Series, Divisions of Research & Statistics and Monetary Affairs, Federal Reserve Board, Washington, D.C. 2014

- **People in more unequal US states and more unequal countries are more likely to buy status goods**

Walasek L, Brown GDA. "Income Inequality, Income, and Internet Searches for Status Goods. Social Indicators Research: 1-14. 2015. Walasek L, Brown GD. "Inequality and status seeking. Psychol Sci. 2015; 26(4):527-33





LOUIS VUITTON

MAISON FONDÉE EN 1854  
PARIS

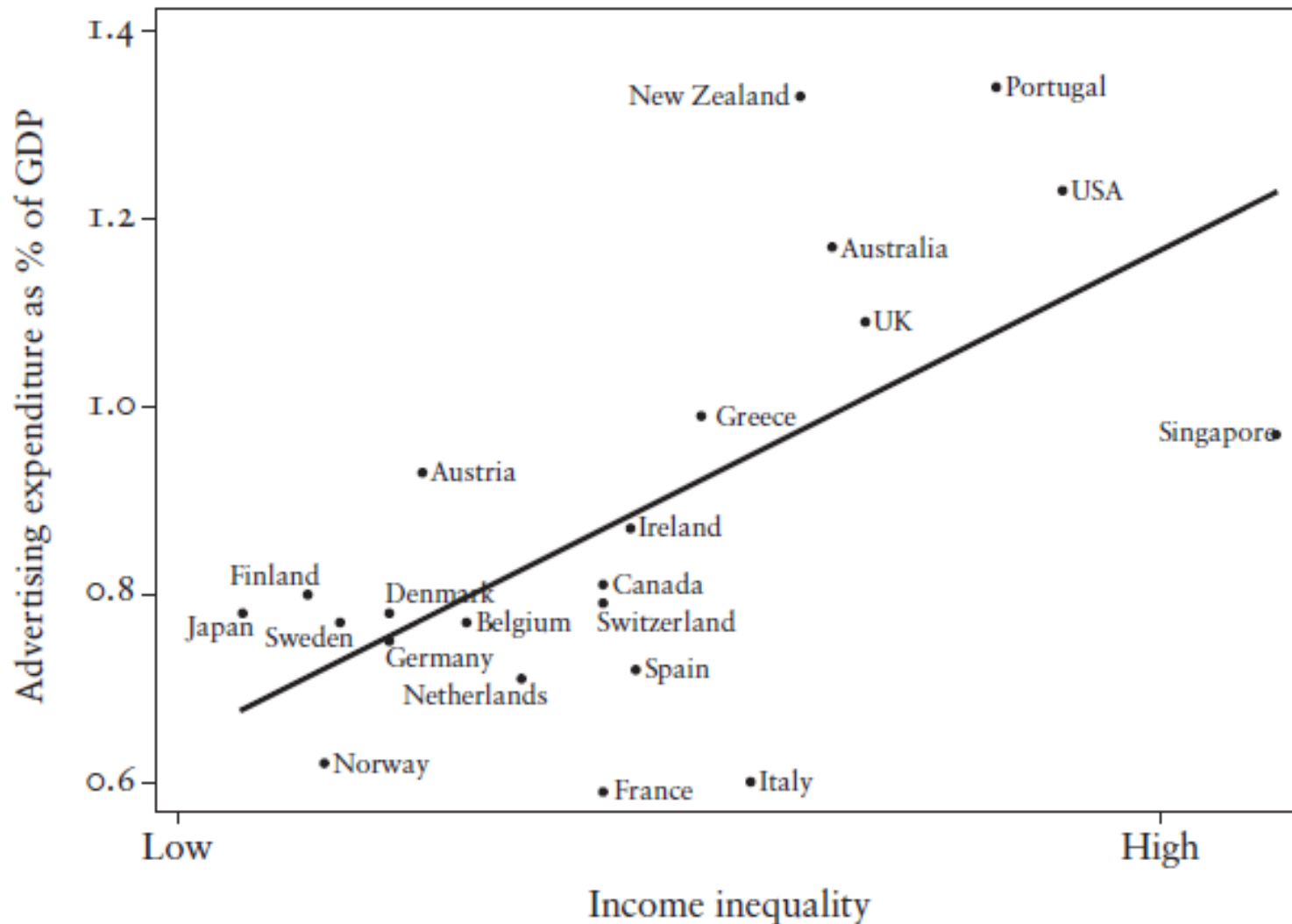


CHANEL

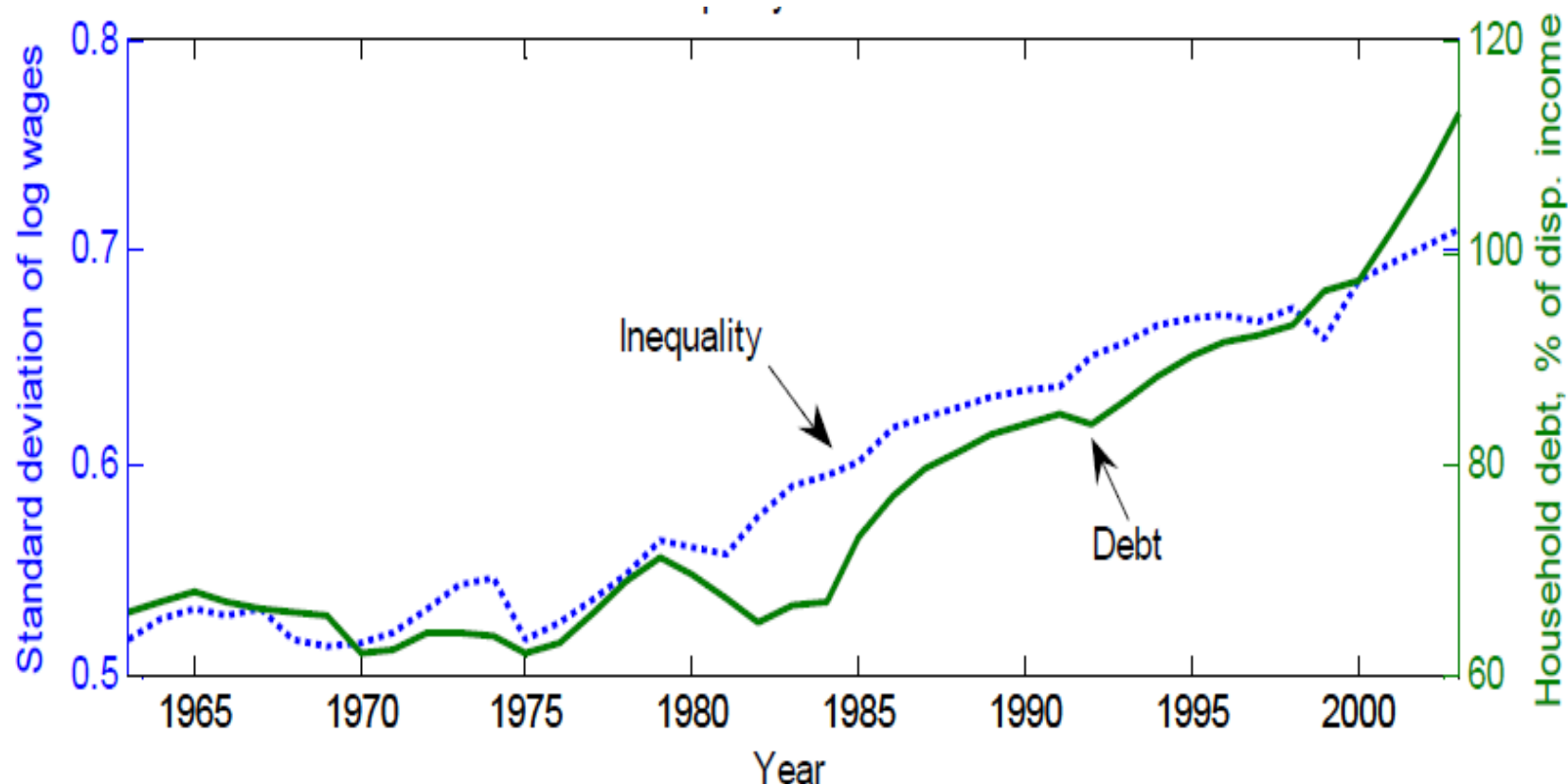
GUCCI

BROWN THOMAS

# There is more advertising in more unequal countries



# Household Debt and Income Inequality USA



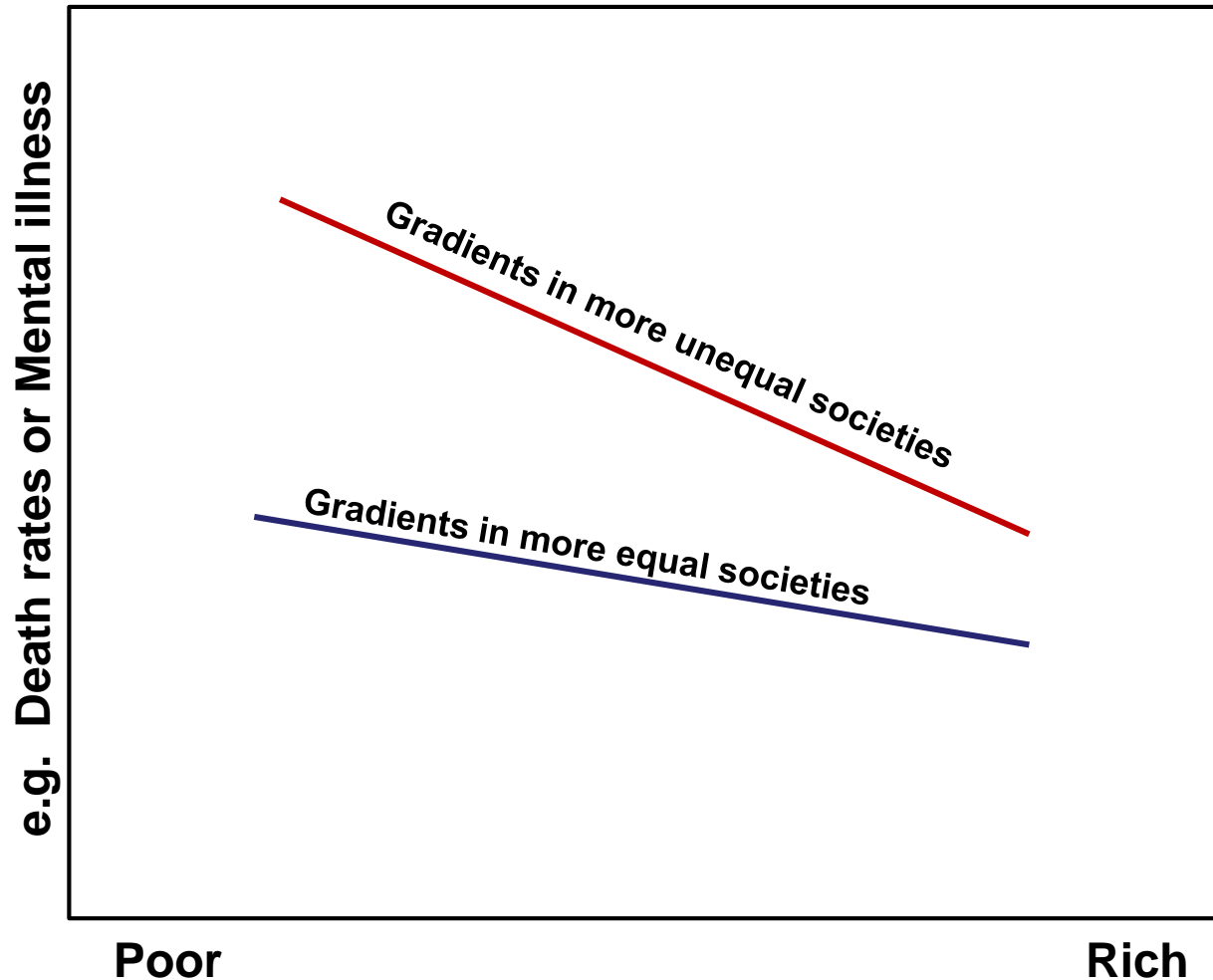
Iacoviello M. Household Debt and Income Inequality, 1963–2003. *Journal of Money, Credit and Banking* 2008;40(5):929-65.



**Robert Walker *et al.***  
**Poverty in global  
perspective**  
***Journal of Social Policy***  
**2013; 42, 215-233**



## Health and social problems have steeper social gradients in more unequal societies





# The Jekyll & Hyde of Public Health?

- **Social status** (dominance hierarchies, pecking orders) are orderings based on power, coercion and privileged access to resources – regardless of the needs of others.
- **Friendship** in contrast, is based on reciprocity, mutuality, social obligations, sharing and a recognition of each other's needs.

# Companion

**Spanish: Compañero;**

**French: Copain**

**from the Latin “Con” (with)**

**and “Pan” (bread)**

**- someone with whom you eat bread**

“Gifts make friends and  
friends make gifts”



**Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (1974)**

# What can be done?

## Income differences before tax

- Stronger Trade Unions
- Increase company democracy - employee ownership etc
- Promote more directors from within companies



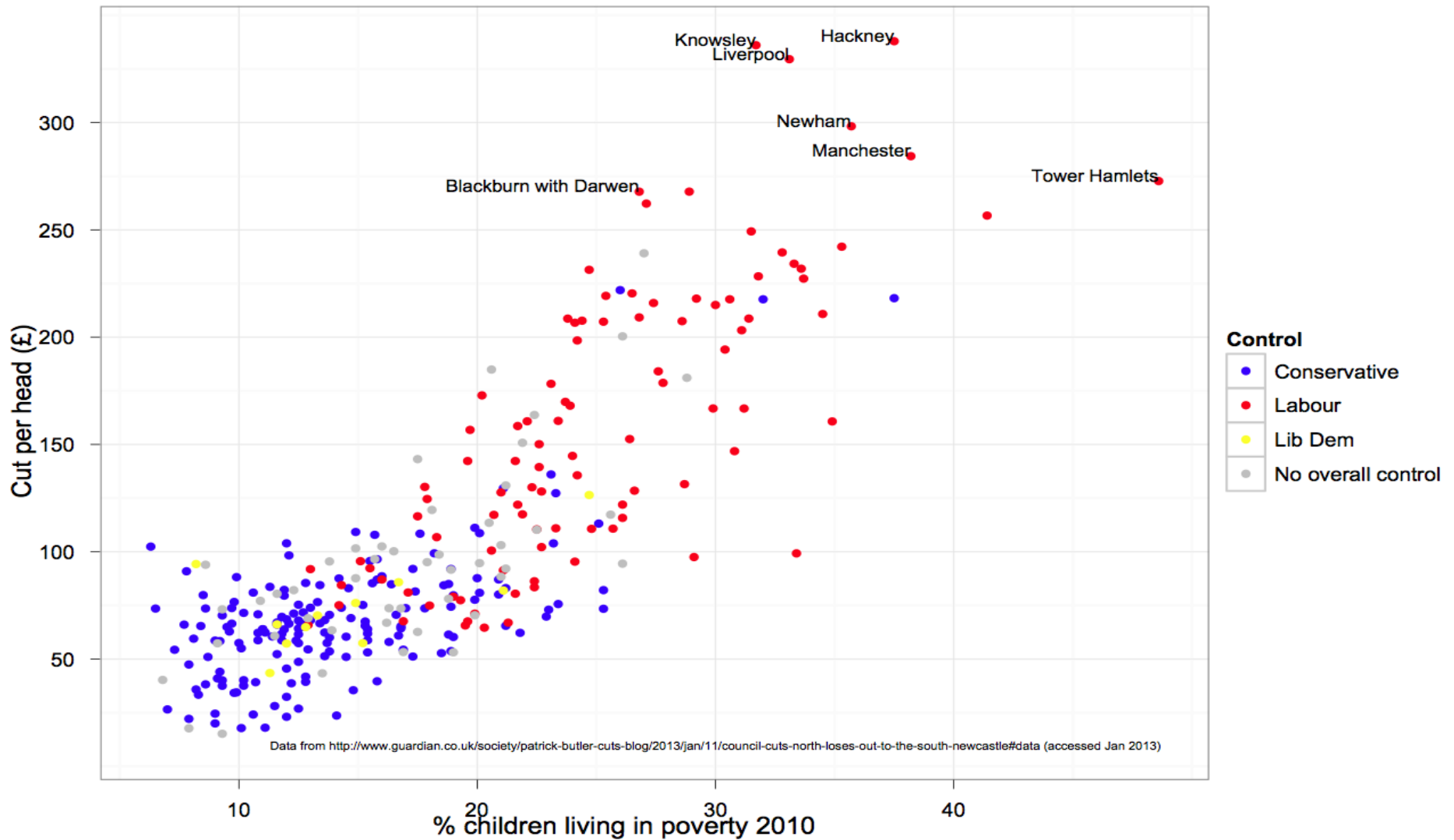
## Taxes & benefits

- Stop tax avoidance
- End tax havens
- Make taxation progressive again

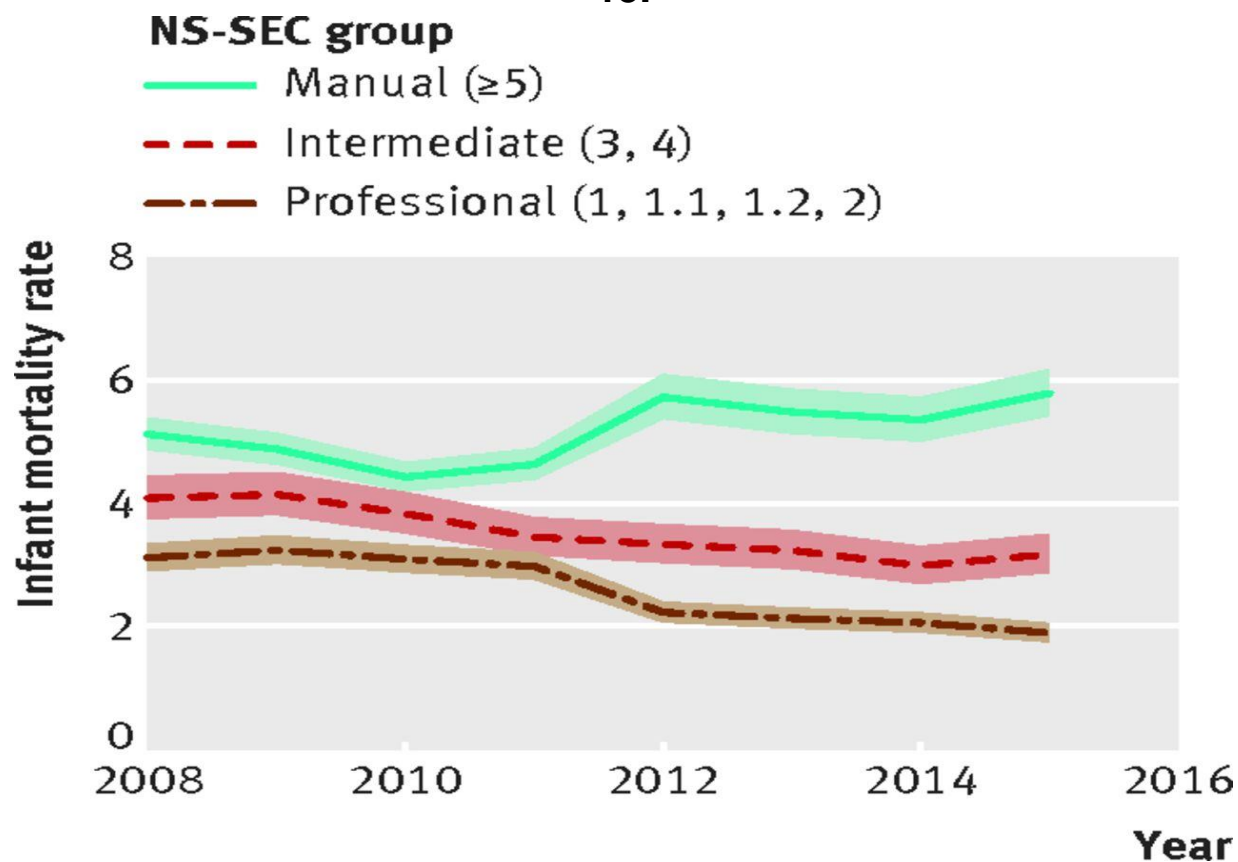
**Sustainability needs  
greater equality**



## Local authority budget cut 2010-11 to 2014-15 versus child poverty



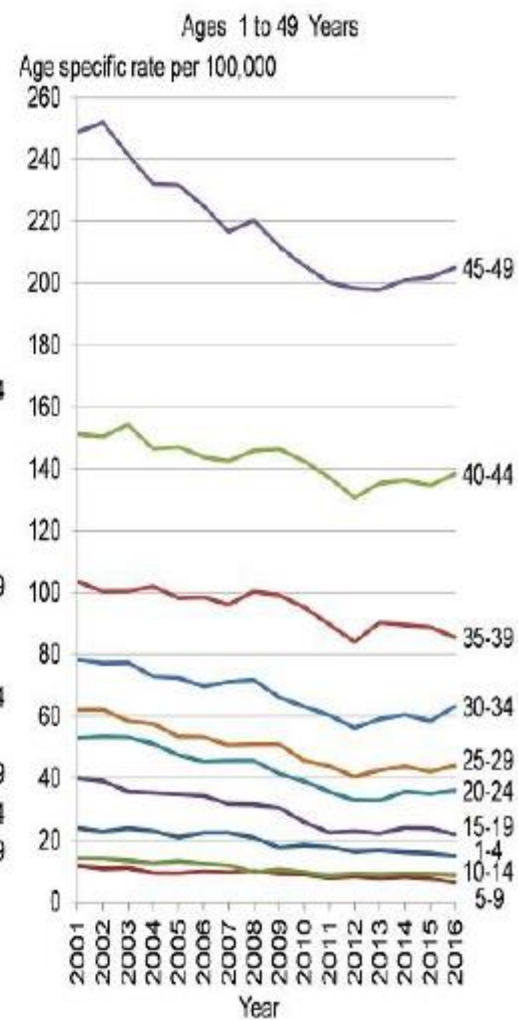
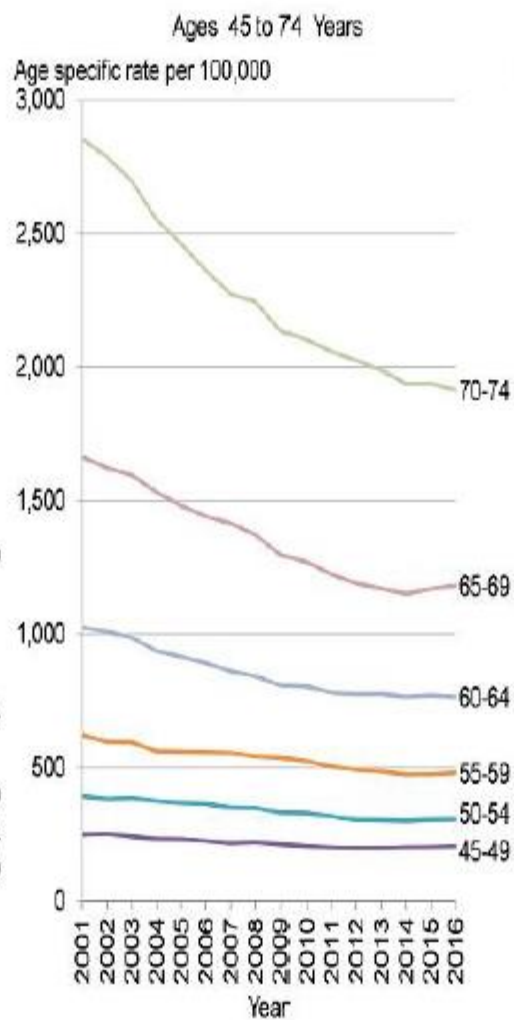
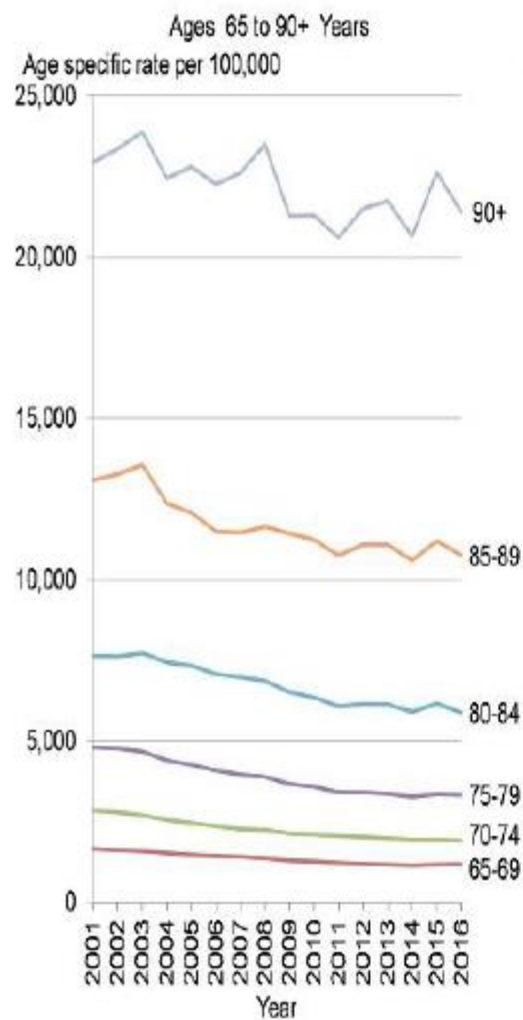
**Fig 1 Infant mortality rate (95% confidence interval) by socioeconomic classification, 2008-15.**



David Taylor-Robinson, and Ben Barr BMJ  
2017;357:bmj.j2258

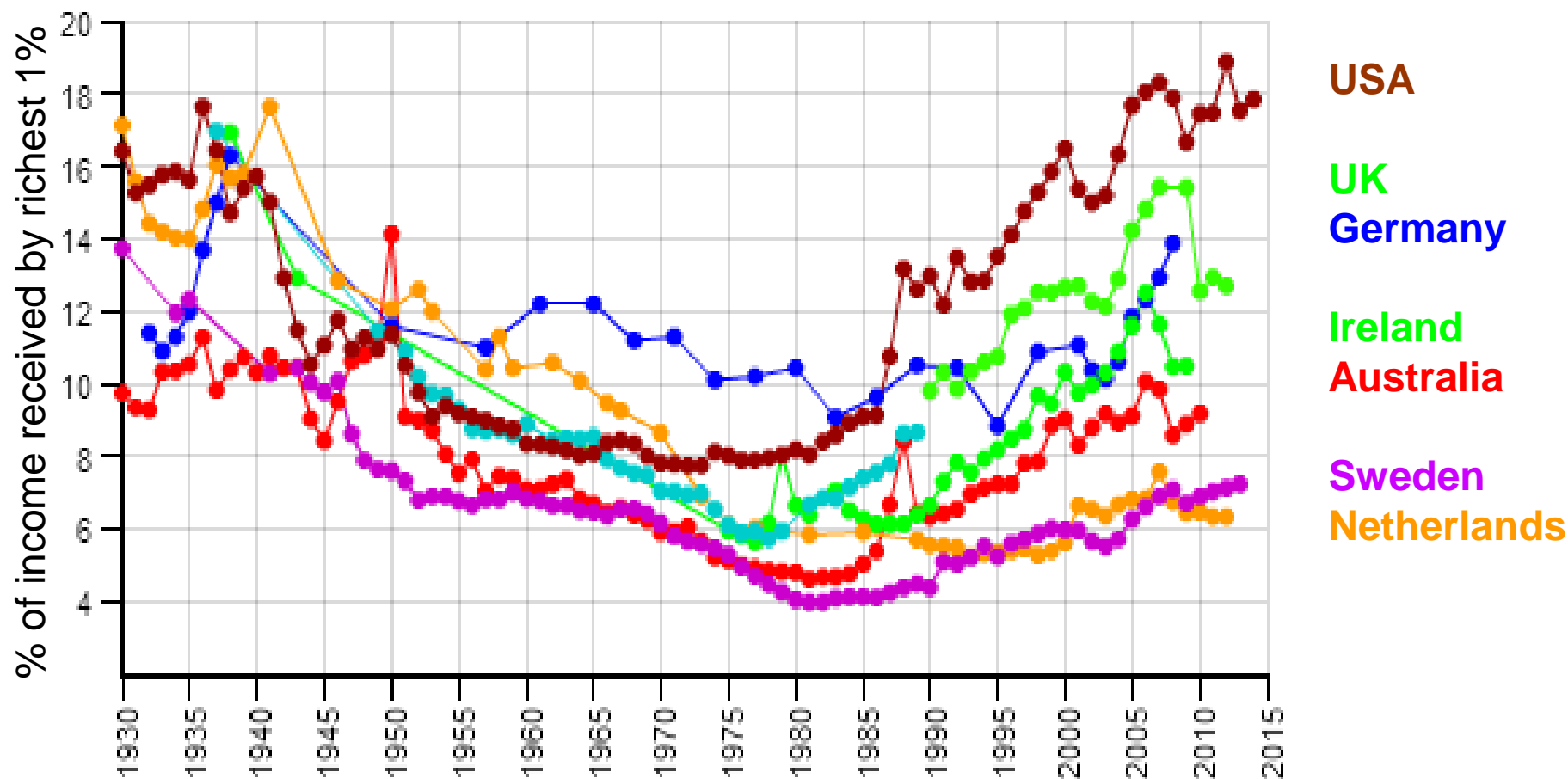






Source: PHE analysis of ONS Mortality data

# Percent of all income going to top 1% 1930-2014



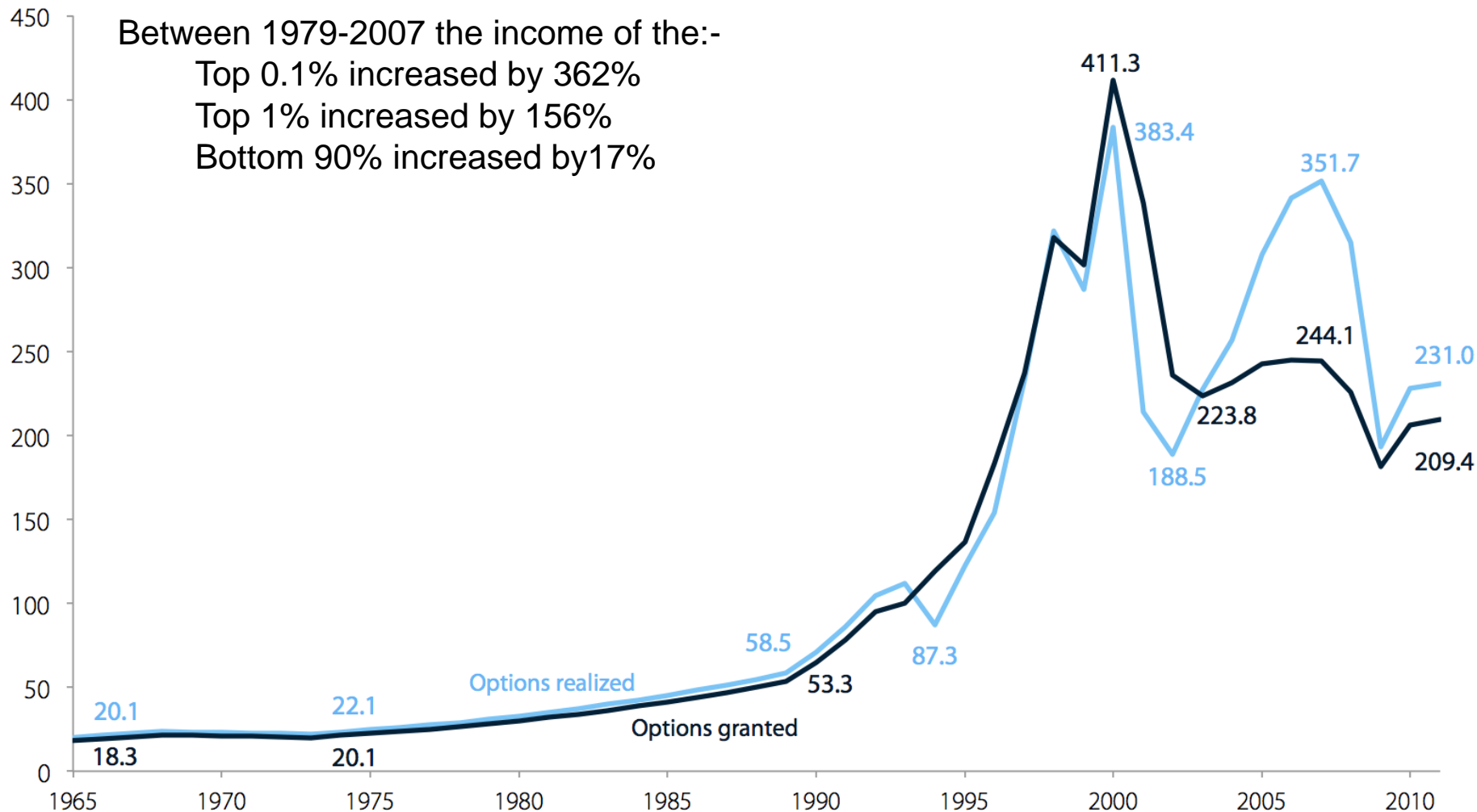
Source: World Top Incomes Database

## Trade Unions membership (% workforce) and Share of Income going to top 10% (USA, 1918-2008)

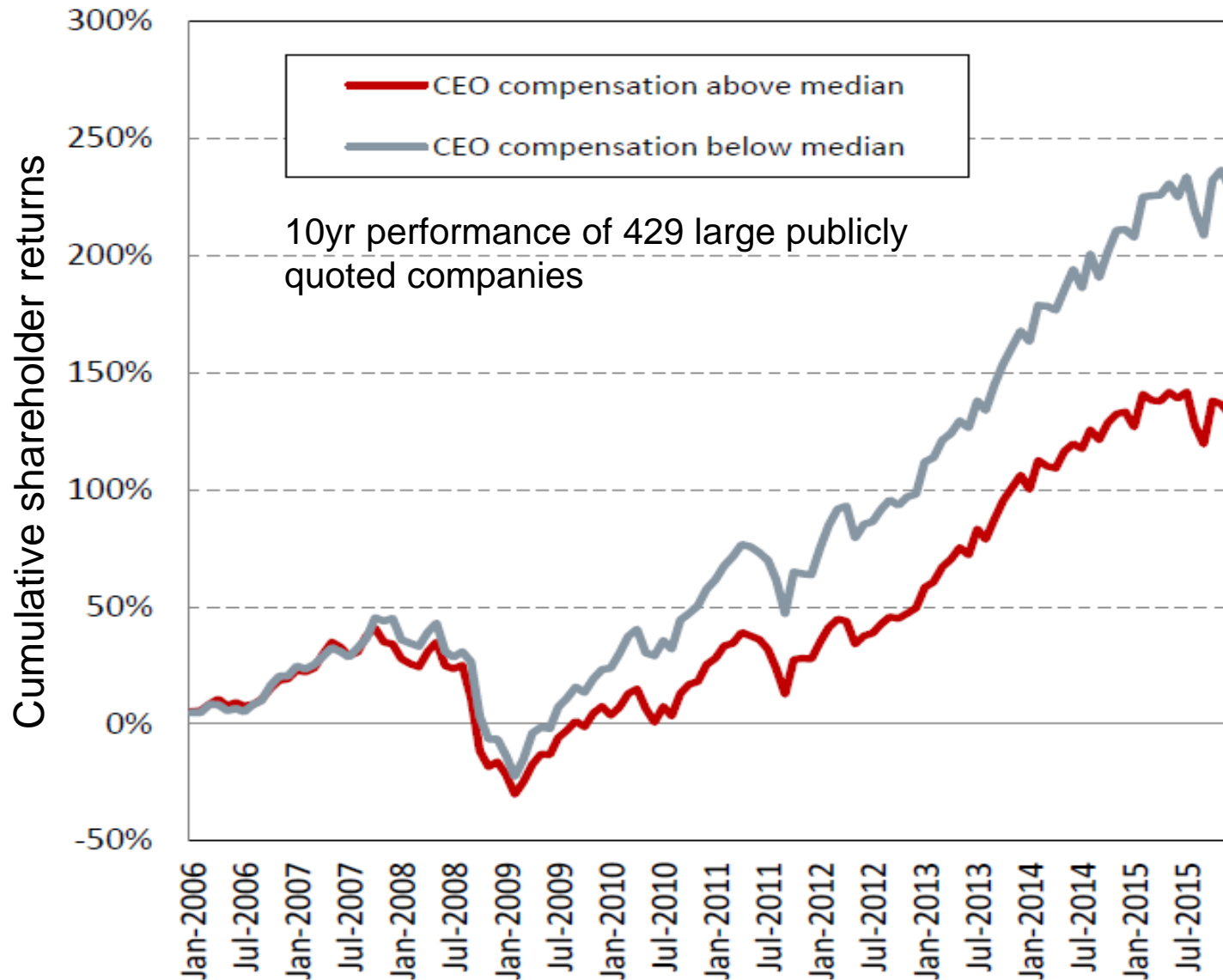


Colin Gordon's analysis of Historical Statistics for the US, [unionstats.com](http://unionstats.com), Piketty and Saez 2003, and World Top Incomes Database. Economic Policy Institute, Washington DC.

# Changing ratio of CEO pay to average pay of production & non-supervisory workers in top 350 US companies



# Companies paying CEOs above the median performed less well than those paying below the median



# **Economic democracy:-**

- **“turns companies from being pieces of property into communities”**
- **reduces pay ratios within companies**
- **transforms the experience of work**
- **redistributes wealth & reduces unearned income**
- **improves productivity**
- **makes companies more environmentally & socially responsible**

**Boards can include employee, community and consumer representatives**

# The Effects of Income inequality

## EVIDENCE OF CAUSALITY

Pickett KE, Wilkinson RG. Income inequality and health: a causal review. *Social Science & Medicine* 2015;128: 316-26

## THEORY & PSYCHOSOCIAL PROCESSES

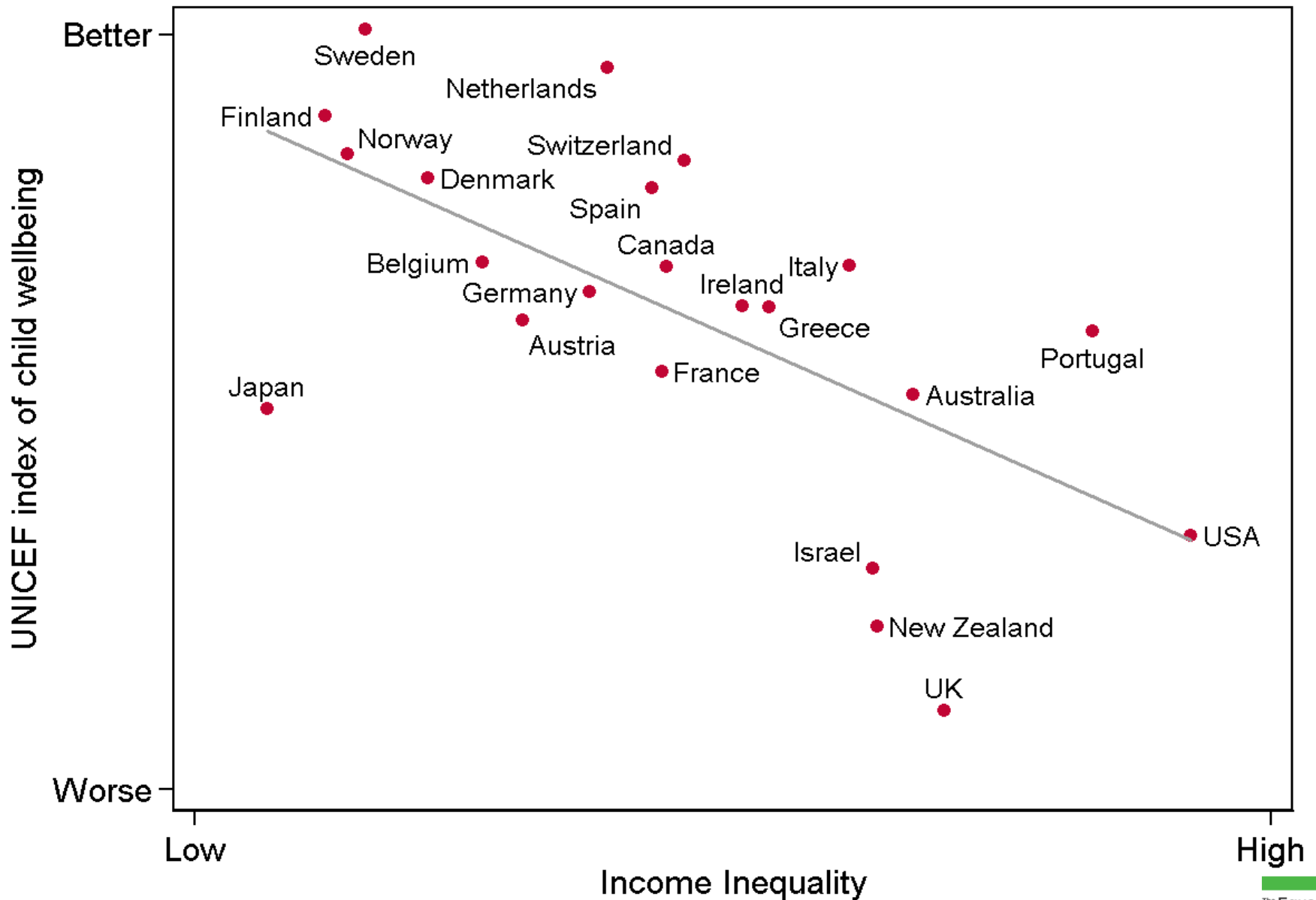
Wilkinson RG, Pickett KE. The enemy between us: The psychological and social costs of inequality. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 2017; 47, 11-24.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2275>

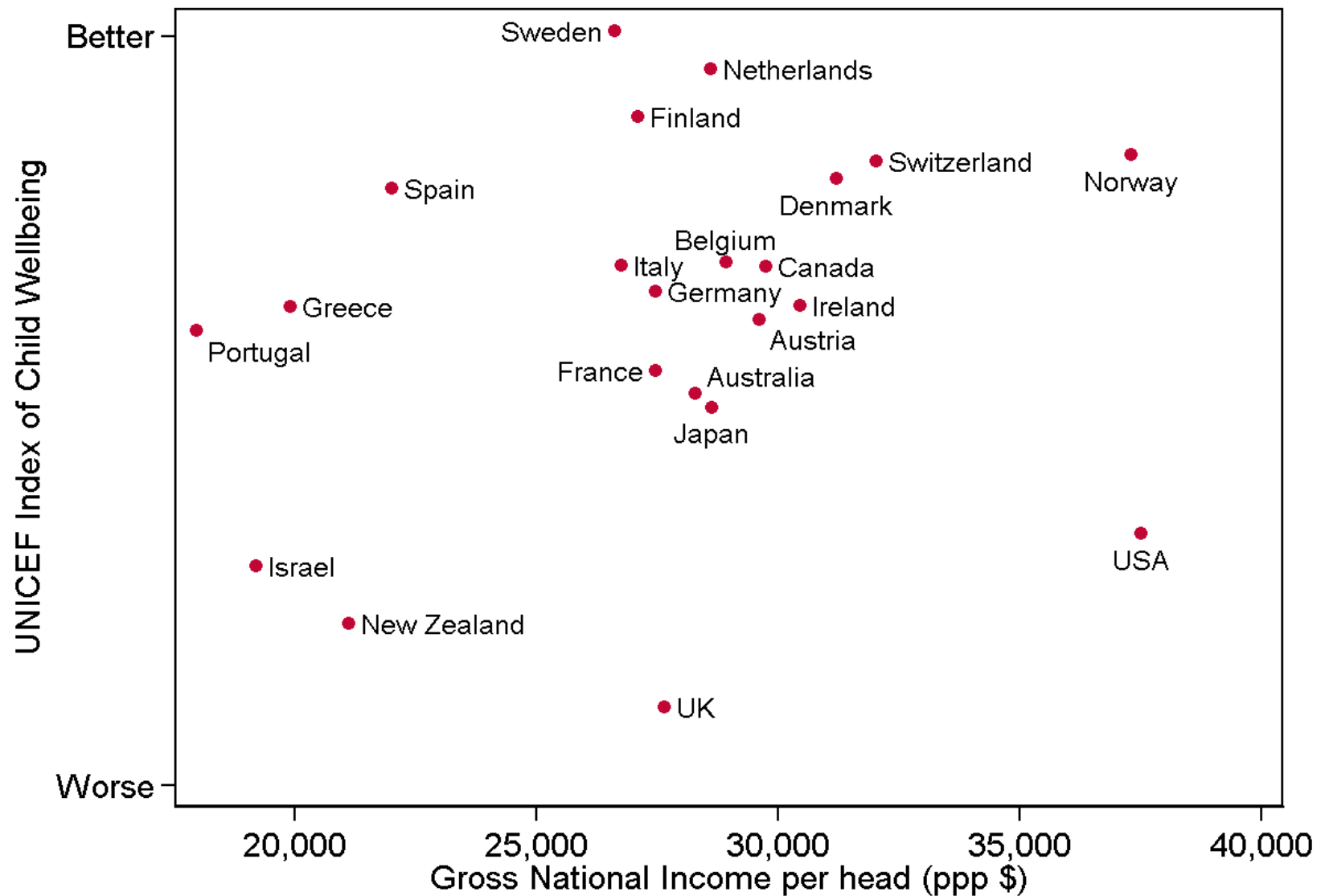




# Child well-being is better in more equal countries



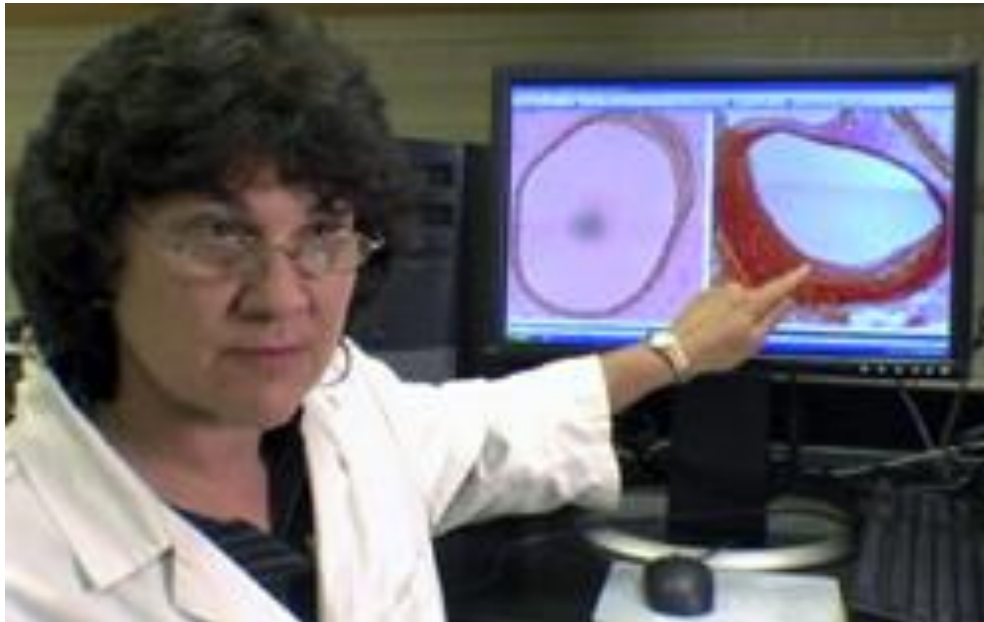
# Child Wellbeing is not related to National Income per head



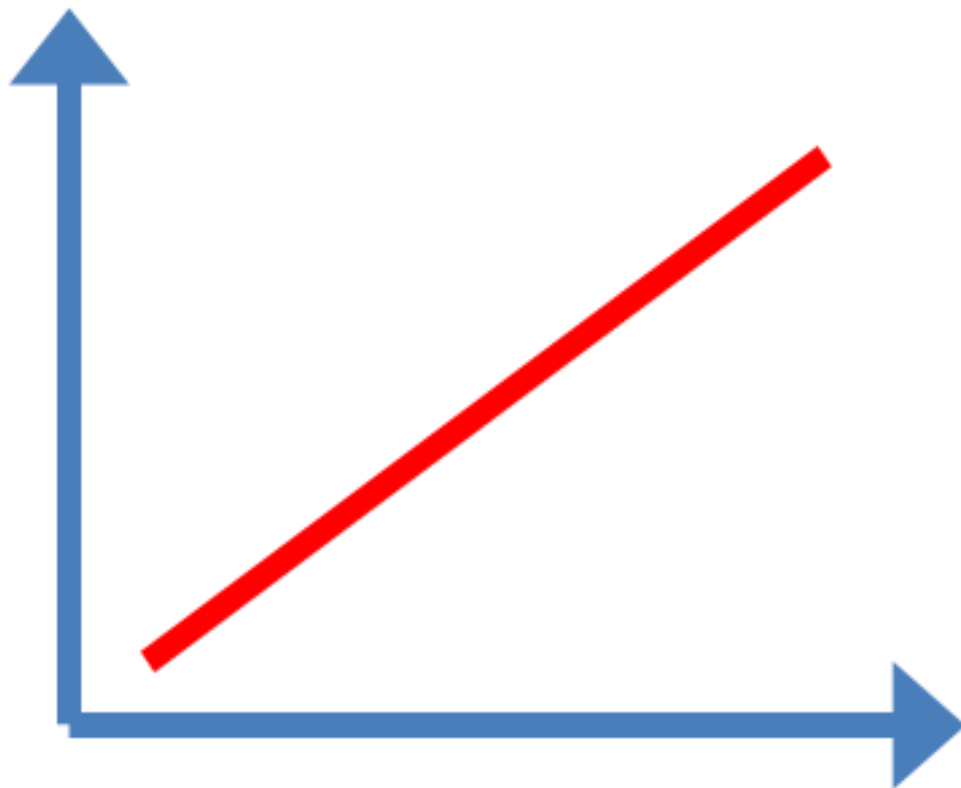
# Social hierarchy in non-human primates

**Robert Sapolsky studies  
baboons in the wild**

**Carol Shively studies  
macaques in captivity**



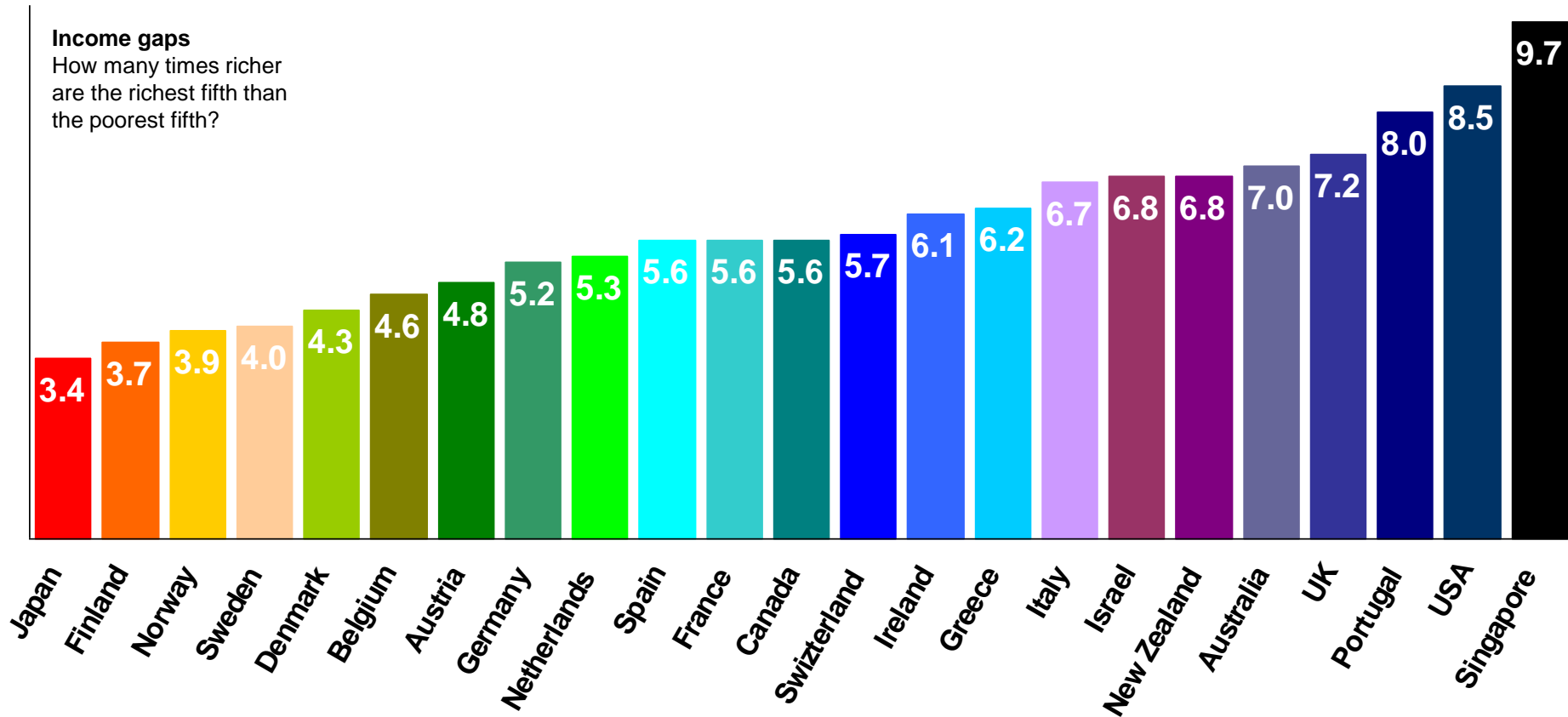
**Problems**



**Income  
inequality**

# Inequality...

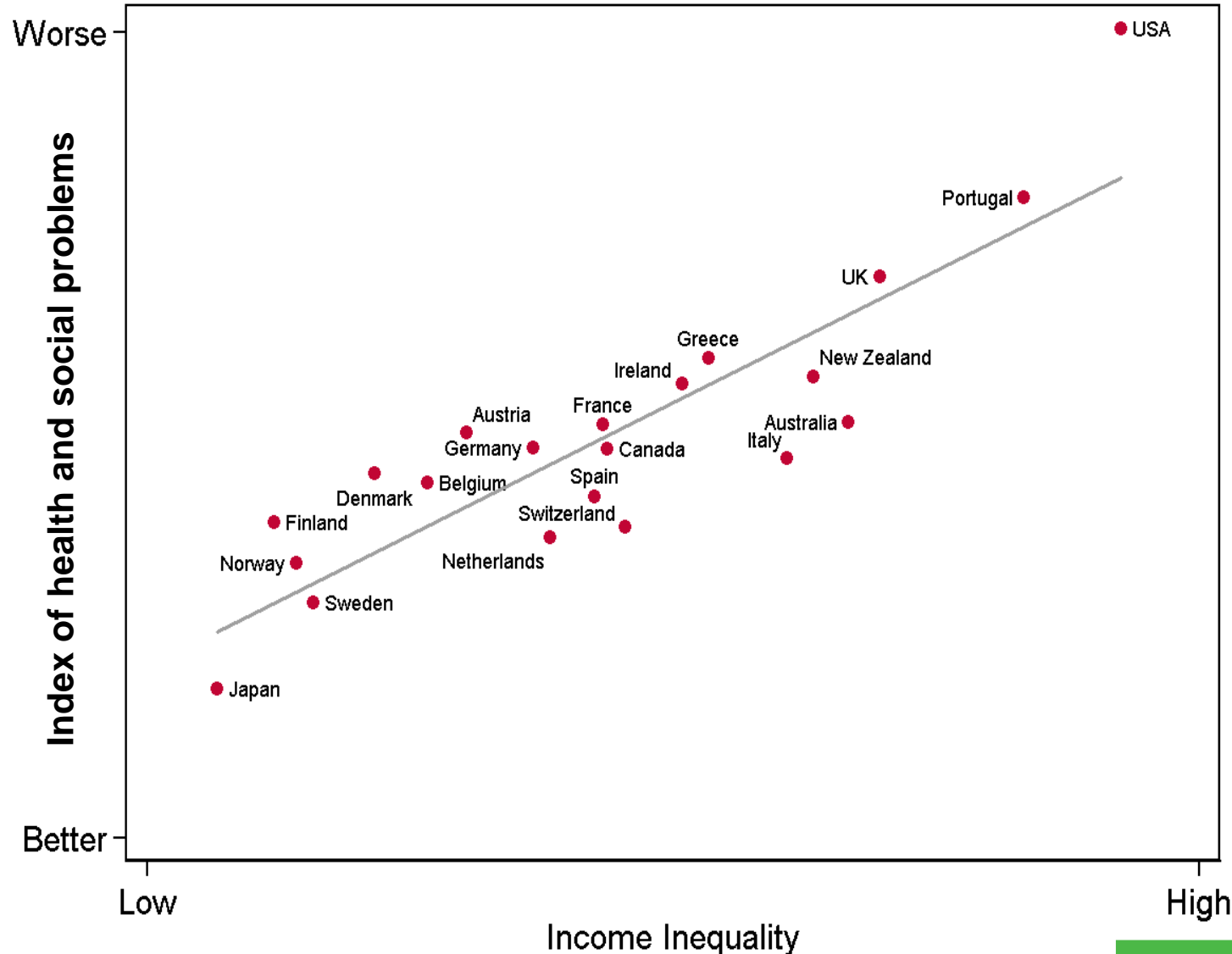
## How much richer are the richest 20% in each country than the poorest 20%?



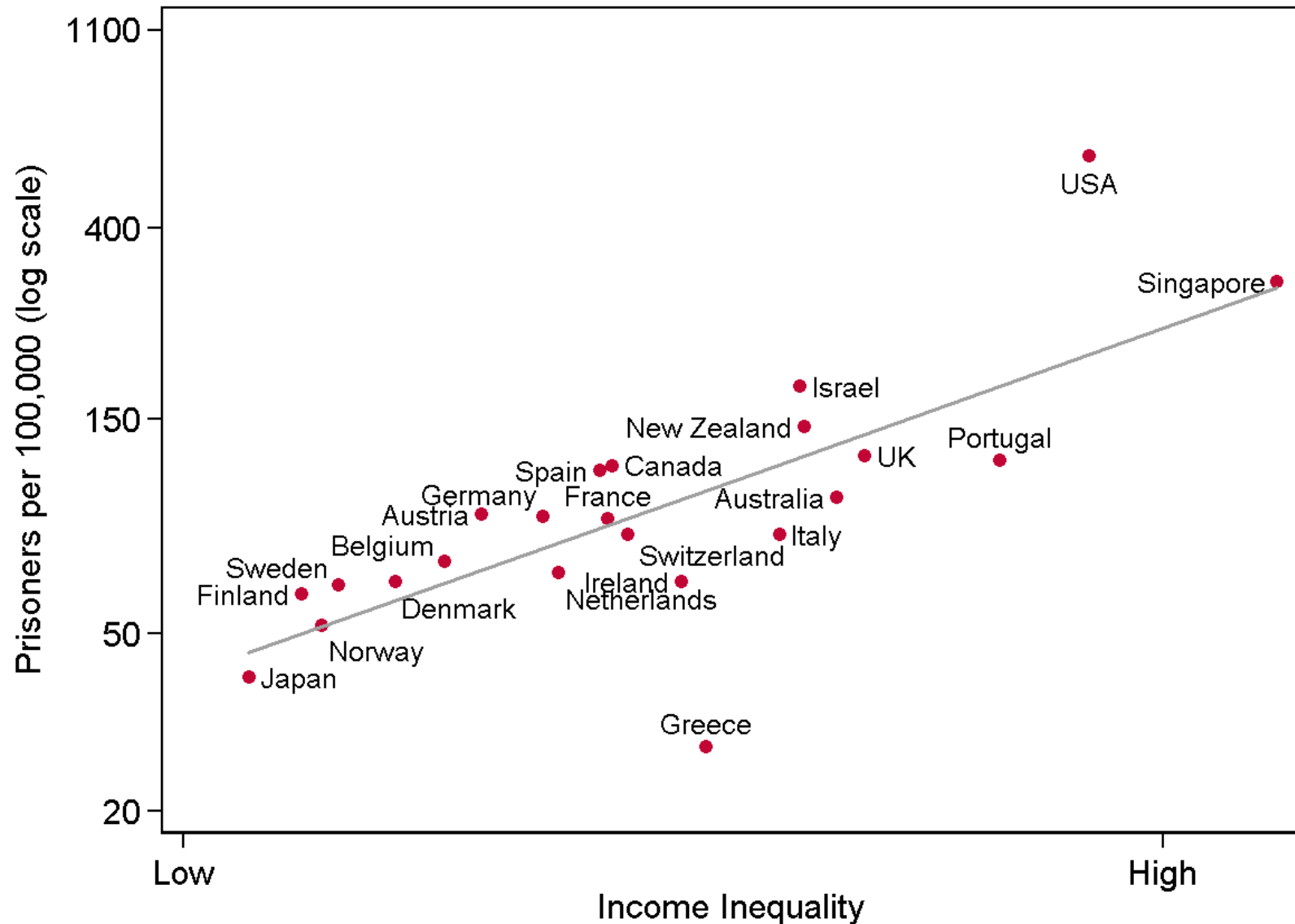
# Health and social problems are worse in more unequal countries

Index of:

- Life expectancy
- Math & Literacy
- Infant mortality
- Homicides
- Imprisonment
- Teenage births
- Trust
- Obesity
- Mental illness – incl. drug & alcohol addiction
- Social mobility



# Imprisonment rates are higher in more unequal countries



# Death rates (Men 25-64 yrs) and income inequality US states and Canadian provinces

