

# Voters: preferences, competence, and measurement issues

The Domestic Politics of the United  
States

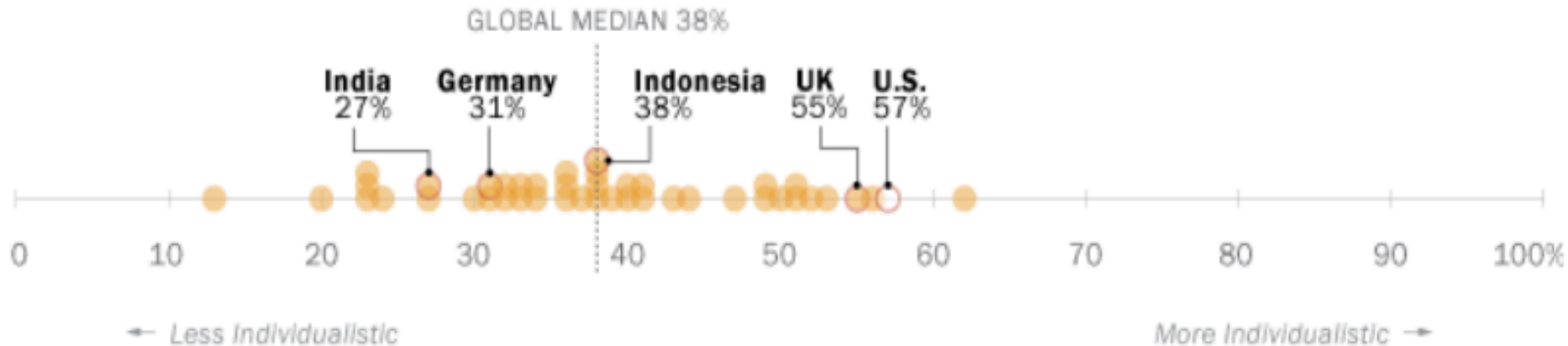
# Individualism

- Hard work pays off
- Outside forces do not “determine” success in life
- Religion is important
- Optimism

# Individualism

## Americans Stand Out on Individualism

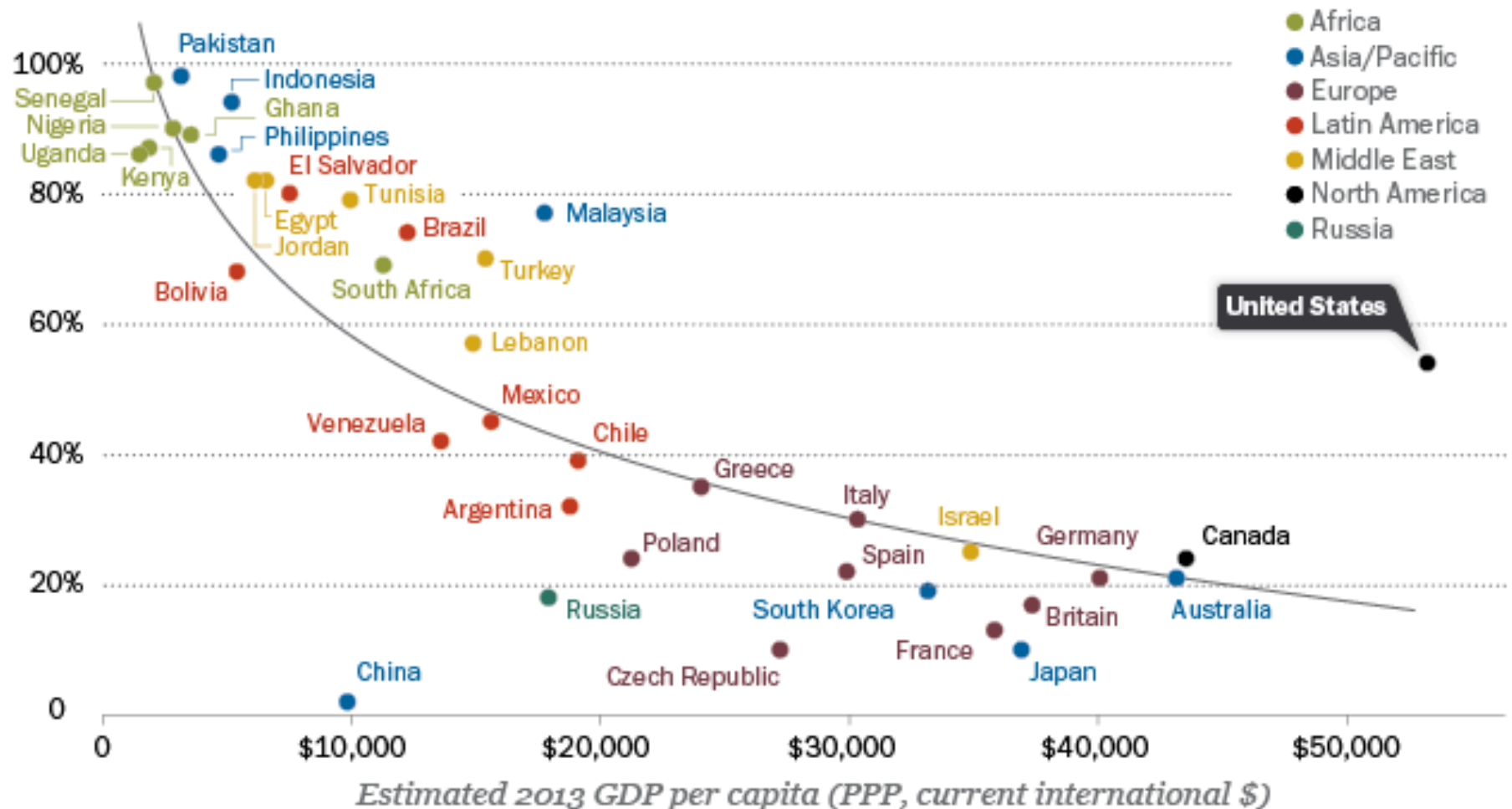
*Percent who disagree that success in life is pretty much determined by forces outside our control*



# Religiosity

## Wealthier Nations Tend to Be Less Religious, But U.S. a Prominent Exception

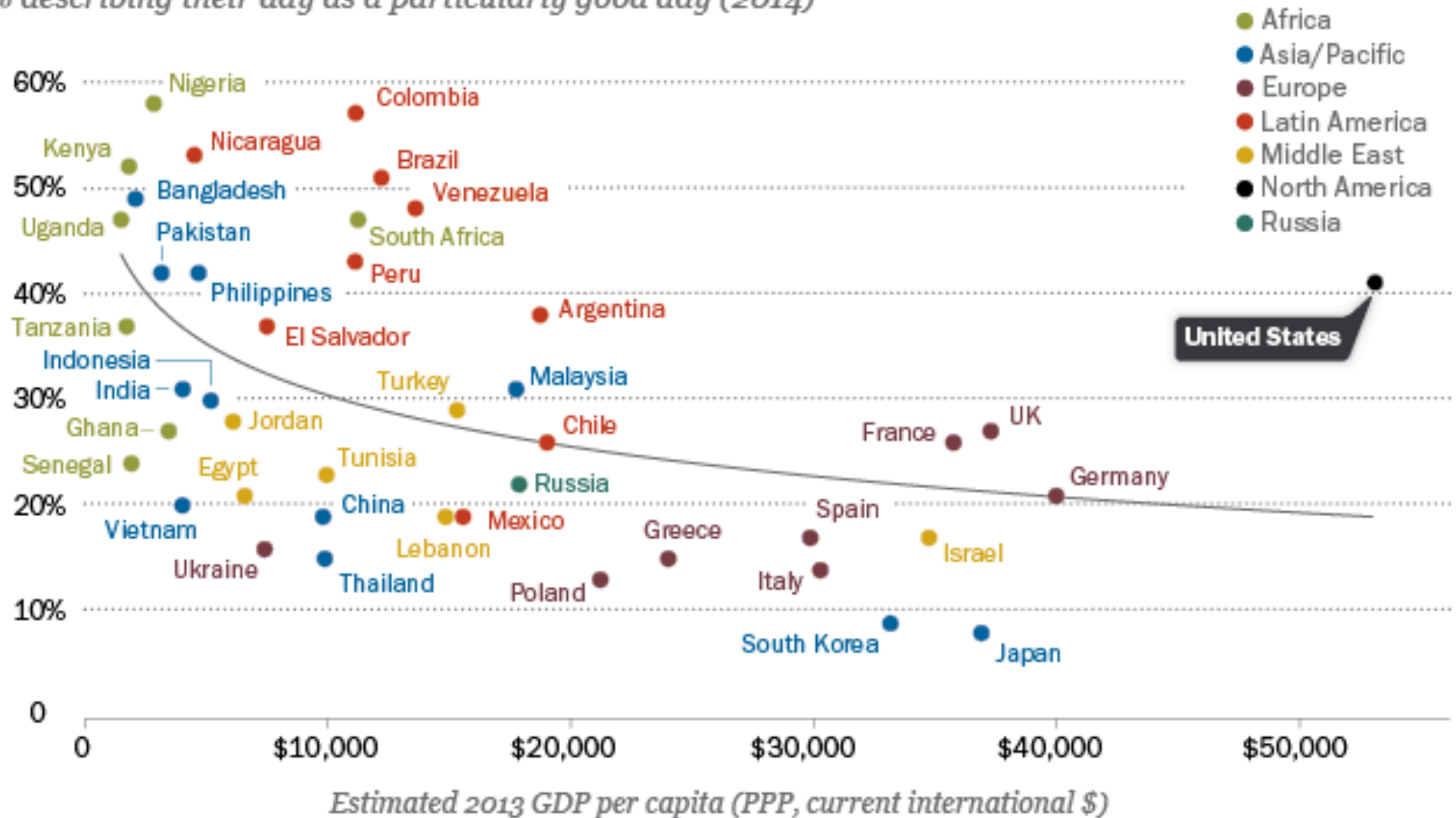
*% saying religion plays a very important role in their lives (2011-2013)*



# Mood: Americans are more upbeat

## Fewer in Rich Countries Say Today Is a Good Day; U.S. an Exception

*% describing their day as a particularly good day (2014)*



# Complications

- The findings comport with popular stereotypes. But differences b/w European and Americans may be overstated

“Success in life is pretty much determined by forces outside our control”

- U.S.:  $36\% + 21\% = 57\%$  mostly + completely disagree
- Spain:  $36\% + 11\% = 47\%$
- U.K.:  $37\% + 18\% = 55\%$
- Mexico:  $29 + 20 = 49\%$

# Complications

- 43% believe that college education is a "gamble" (rather than a smart investment)

## **PRRI / The Atlantic 2016 White Working Class Survey**

- 42% do not believe America is a "fair society where everyone has the opportunity to get ahead".

## **2016 VOTER Survey**

- 60% of Americans believe that children will be worse off financially than their parents.

## **Pew Research**

- 55% of respondents said it was somewhat unlikely or very unlikely that "today's youth will have a better life than their parents."

## **Gallup**

- 48% of Young Americans: the American Dream is "dead"

## **2015 Harvard IOP Poll**

# Egan and Mullin (2012)

## **Research question**

- Does personal experience shape individual attitudes?
- Research design is typically inadequate
  - Non-random exposure to experiences
  - Possibly biased self-reports of experience

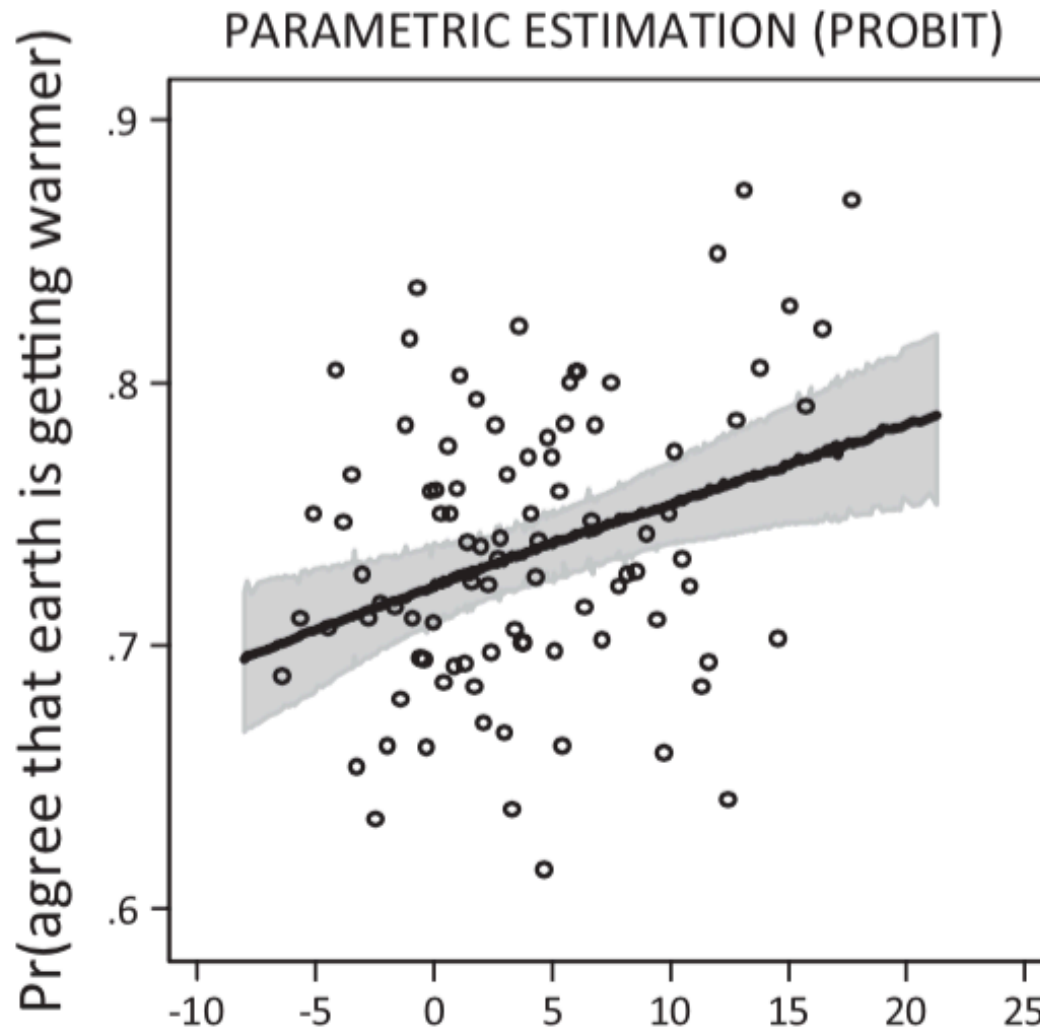


# Egan and Mullin (2012)

## Contribution

- Data
  - 5 waves of surveys
    - “From what you’ve read and heard, is there solid evidence that the average temperature on earth has been getting warmer over the past few decades, or not?”
  - Local weather conditions
    - Departure from daily normal average temperature
    - Average departure over a week prior to the survey
    - Normal temperature is calculated over 1971-2000

# Egan and Mullin (results)



Departure from local normal temperature

# Egan and Mullin (comments)

- After adding Party ID + Ideology (and other controls), expected % correctly predicted opinions rises from 59.7% to 63.1%.
- Is politics revealing as much as we thought?
- Benchmark/normal temperature is the same for everyone. Could be interesting to see “how much people remember” by expanding the time intervals or using “age-appropriate” benchmarks

# Ansolabehere, Rodden and Snyder (2008) **Research question**

- Are voters' attitudes inconsistent over time?
- Claim: core values and predispositions are fairly stable.
- Justification: Measurement errors are large but they can be corrected.
- Data: 4 NES panel datasets

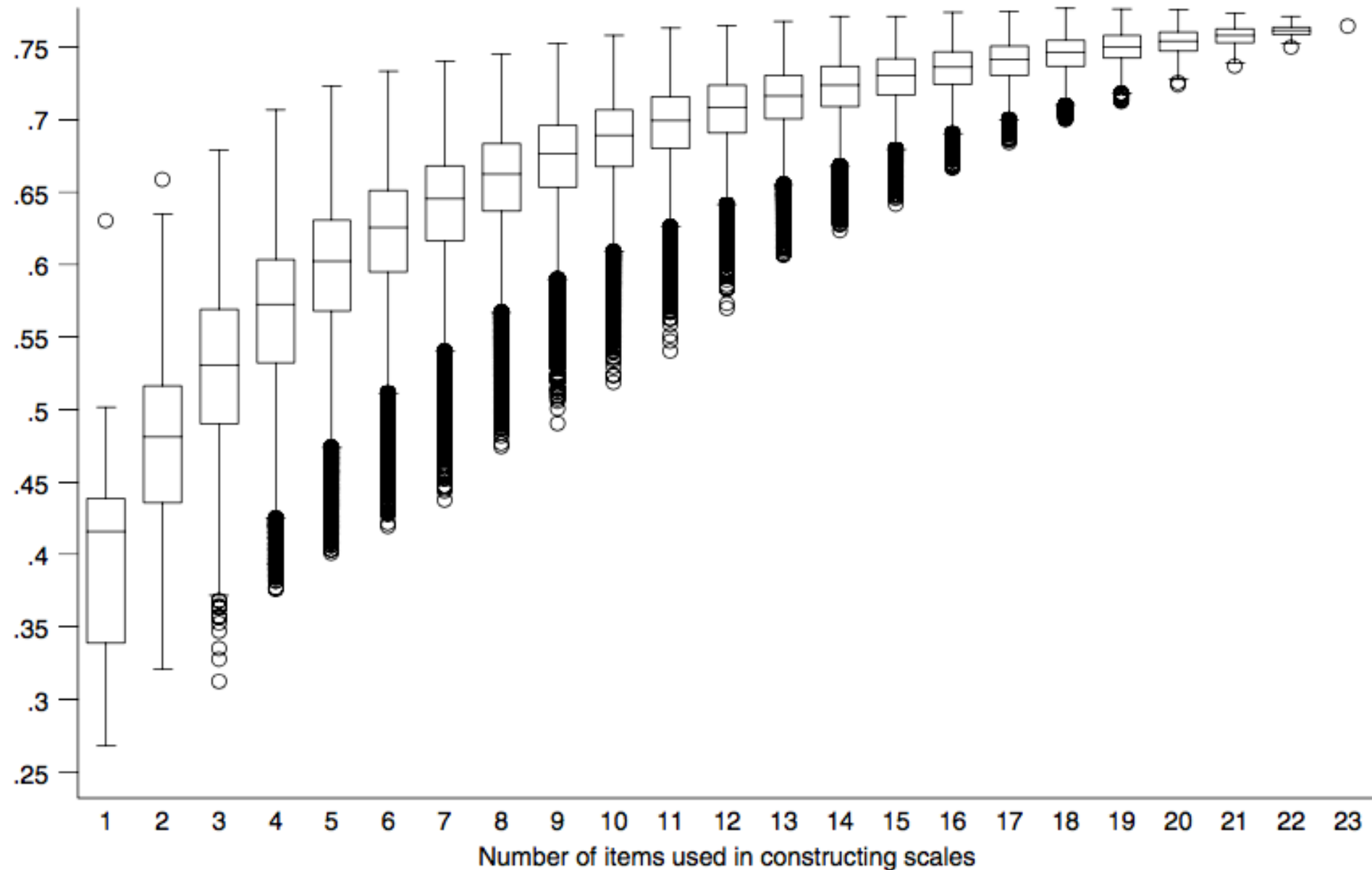
# Ansolabehere, Rodden and Snyder (2008) **Main findings**

- Constructing issue scales leads to high correlations of answers across waves
- E.g. using 5 answers to questions pertaining to economic issues raises the correlation between 1990 and 1992 answers from about .4 to .6

# Ansolabehere, Rodden and Snyder (2008) **Main findings**

- It is true that pair-wise correlations of individuals items can be as low as .4
- Small variation between topics (economic / racial / moral / women's issues; law and order)
- Constructing issue scales leads to high correlations of answers across waves
  - E.g. using 5 answers to questions pertaining to economic issues raises the correlation between 1990 and 1992 answers from about .4 to .6

# Correlation between 1990 and 1992 economic issues scales



# Ansolabehere, Rodden and Snyder (2008) **Comments/concerns**

- Practitioner's concerns
  - Should you be averaging responses
  - Or do factor analysis?
  - IRT?
- Is having stable predispositions “good enough” for democracy? Lost nuance?