Global Inequality in Historical & Comparative Perspective

Thomas Piketty

Lahore, Pakistan, January 24 2026

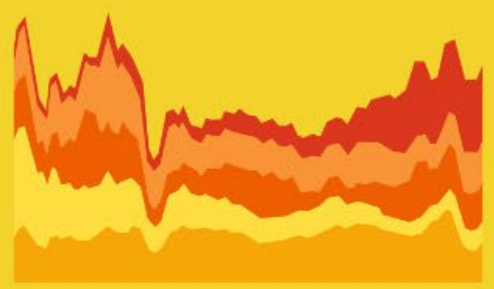
WORLD | BY COUNTRY | DATA | METHODOLOGY | ABOUT US | NEWS

WORLD INEQUALITY DATABASE

WORLD VIEW

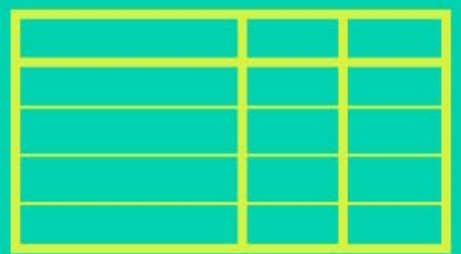
Compare inequality between countries on an interactive world map

COUNTRY GRAPHS



Follow the evolution of inequality within countries with user-friendly graphs

DATA TABLES



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WORLD INEQUALITY REPORT 2026

The latest data and analysis on global inequalities to inform the public debate.

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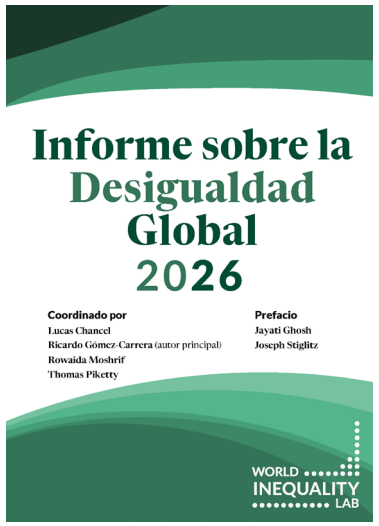

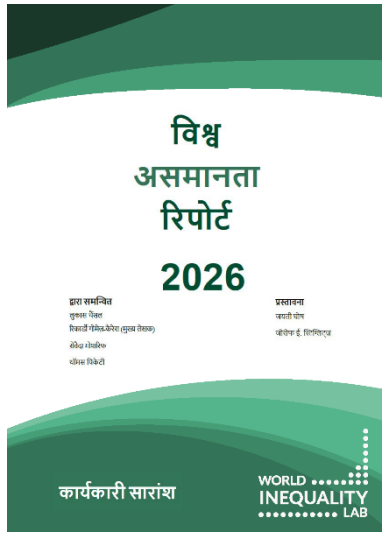

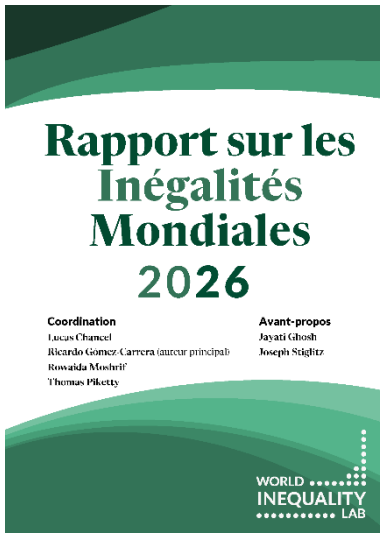

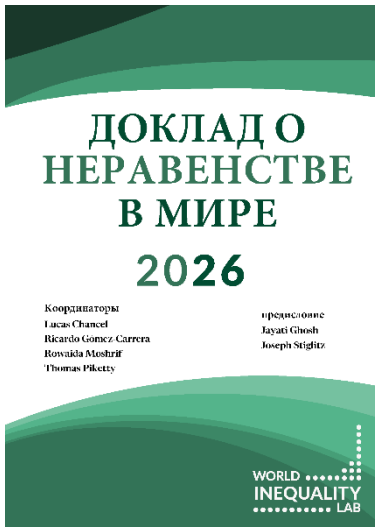

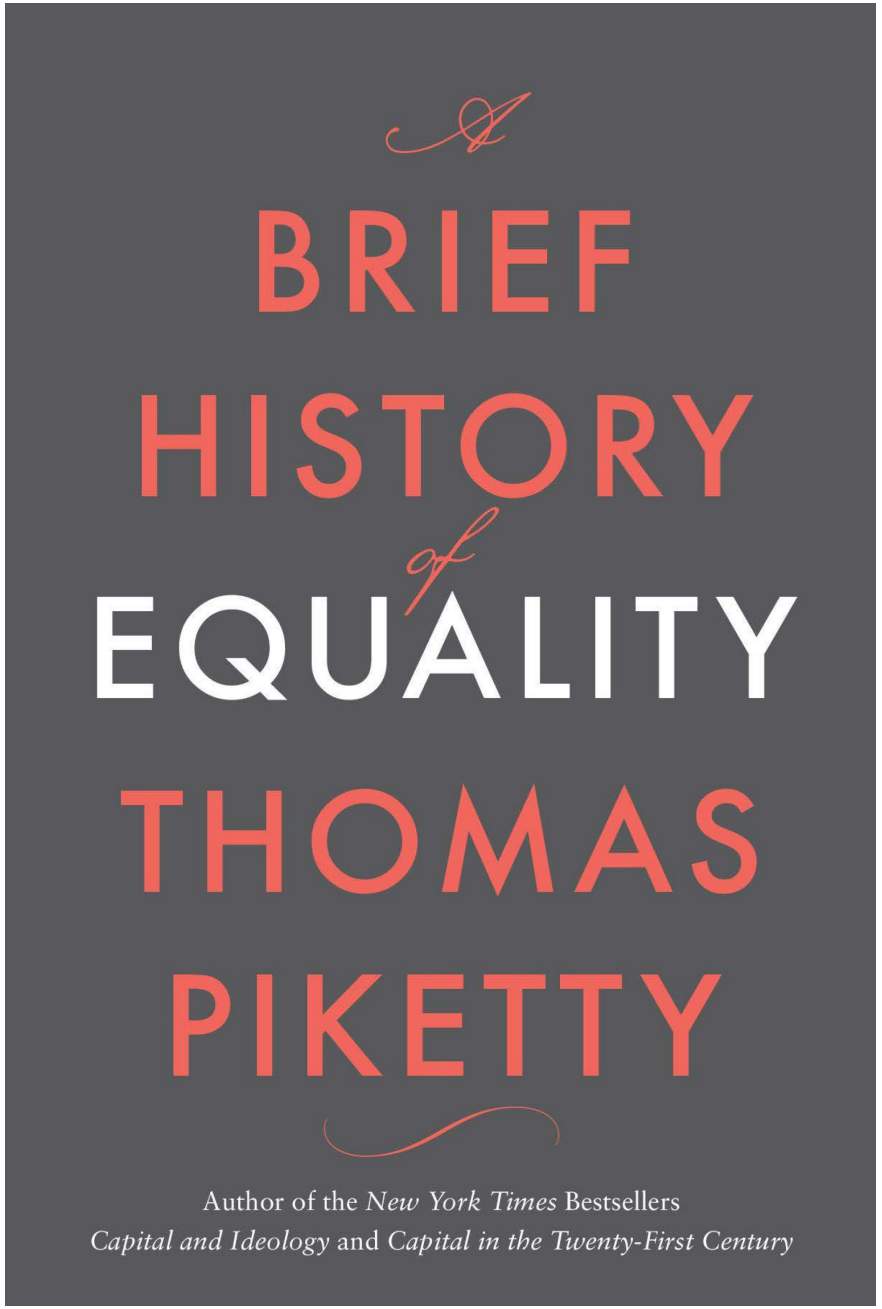
A
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THOMAS
PIKETTY
Author of the *New York Times* Bestsellers
Capital and Ideology and *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*

2022

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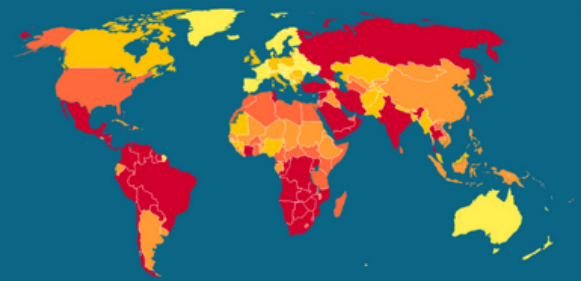

Visit the most comprehensive open source database for global inequality data.

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GLOBAL JUSTICE PROJECT

Find out more about this upcoming collective research initiative aimed at shaping a fairer, more democratic and sustainable 21st century.

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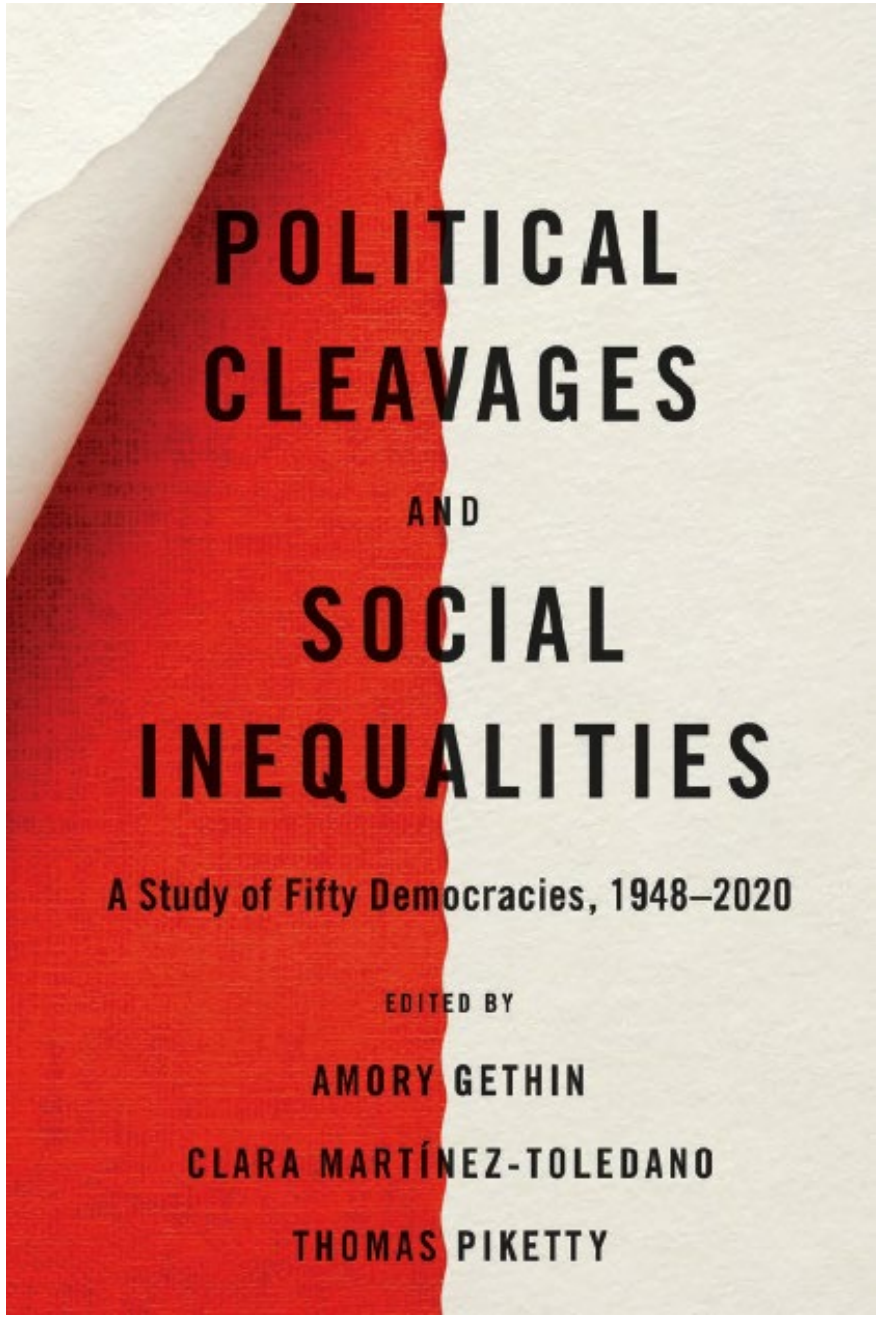
POLITICAL CLEAVAGES AND SOCIAL INEQUALITIES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A Study of Fifty Democracies, 1948–2020
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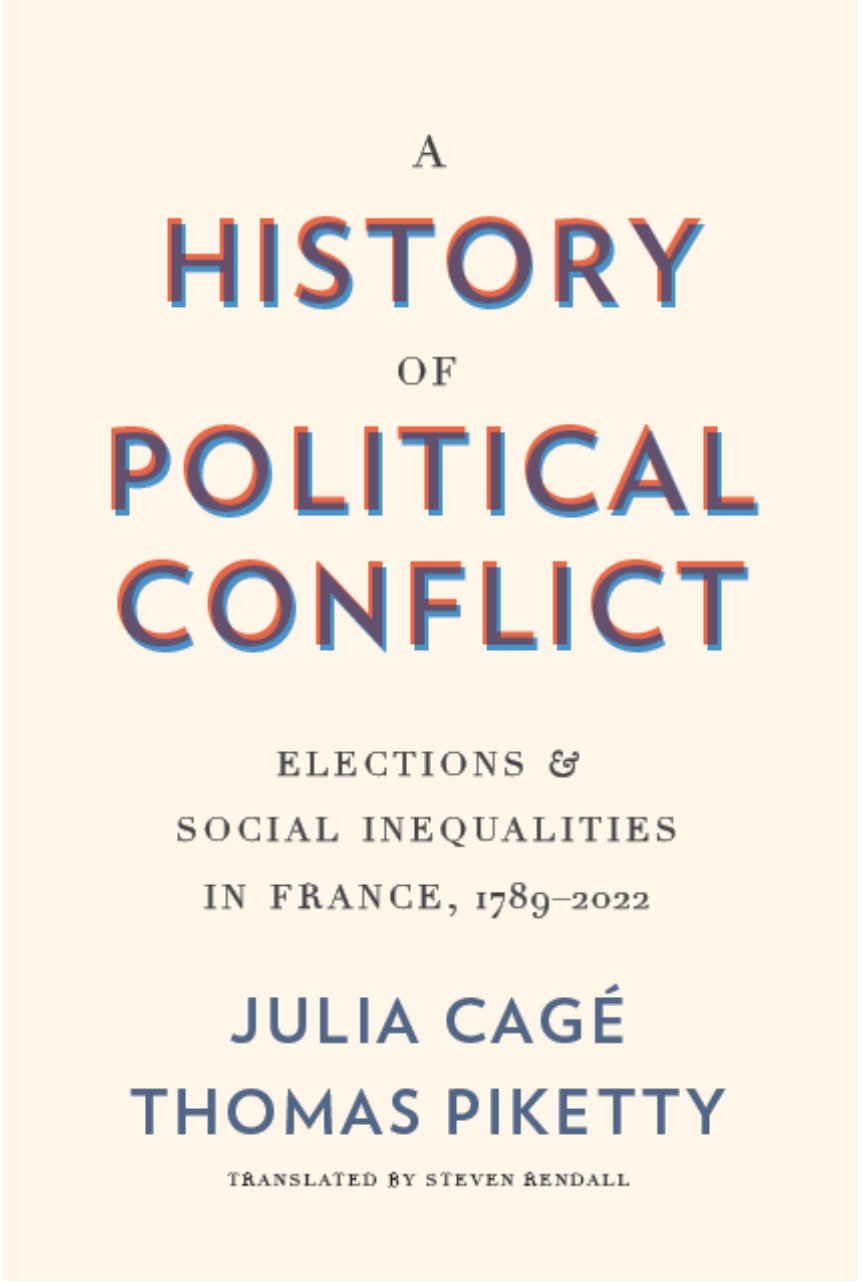
2021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TRANSLATED BY STEVEN RENDALL

2025

COUNTRY & REGION

KEY INDICATORS

AVERAGE INCOME
- Per adult national income
- Per adult GDP

INCOME INEQUALITY
- Top 10% share
- Bottom 50% share
- Top 1% share

AVERAGE WEALTH
- Per adult national wealth
- Wealth-income ratio

WEALTH INEQUALITY
- Top 10% share
- Bottom 50% share
- Top 1% share

CARBON INEQUALITY [NEW]
- Top 10% carbon emitters

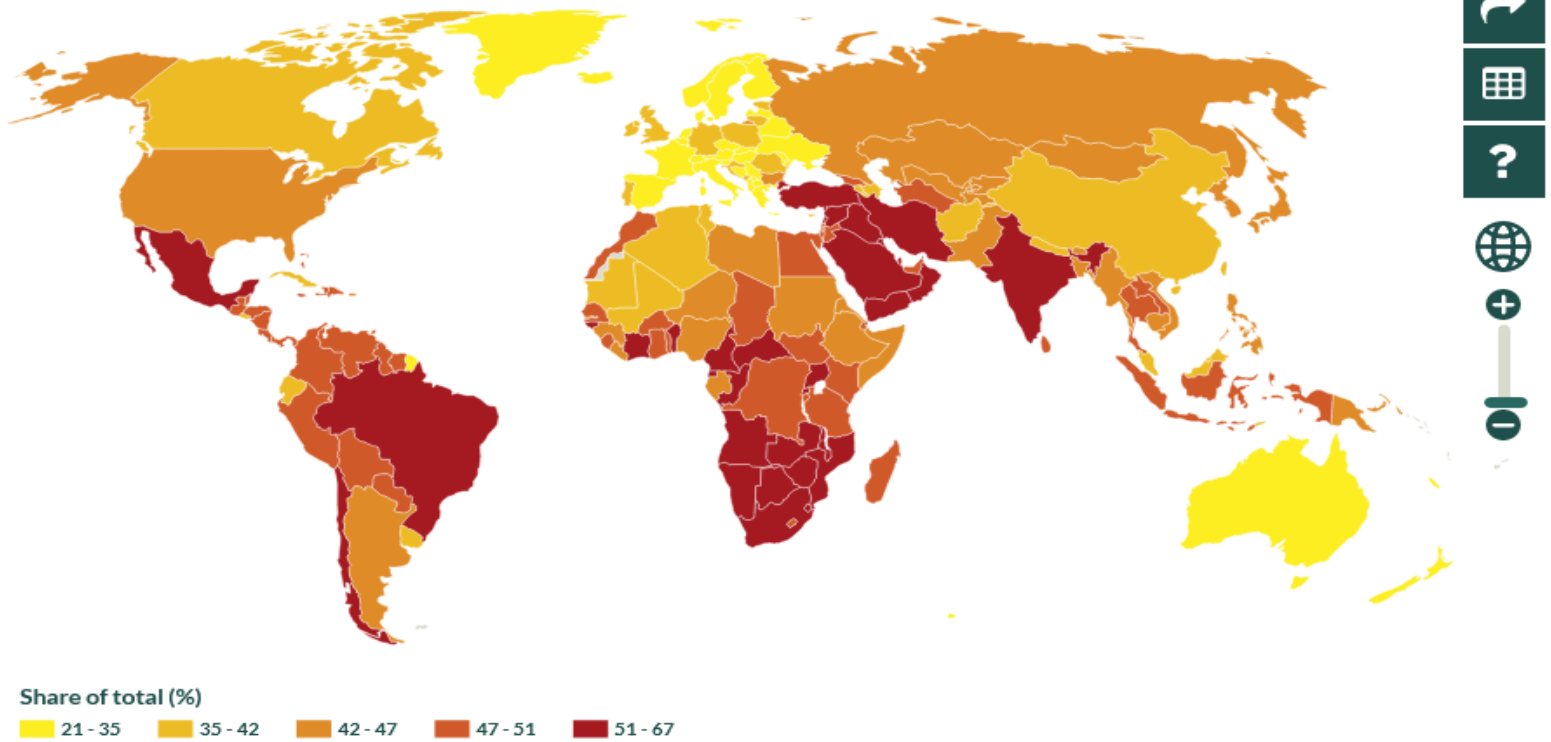
GENDER INEQUALITY [NEW]
- Female labor income share

MORE INDICATORS

Top 10% national income share

Region View | Country View

Latest year



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Bottom 50% national income share

Region View | Country View

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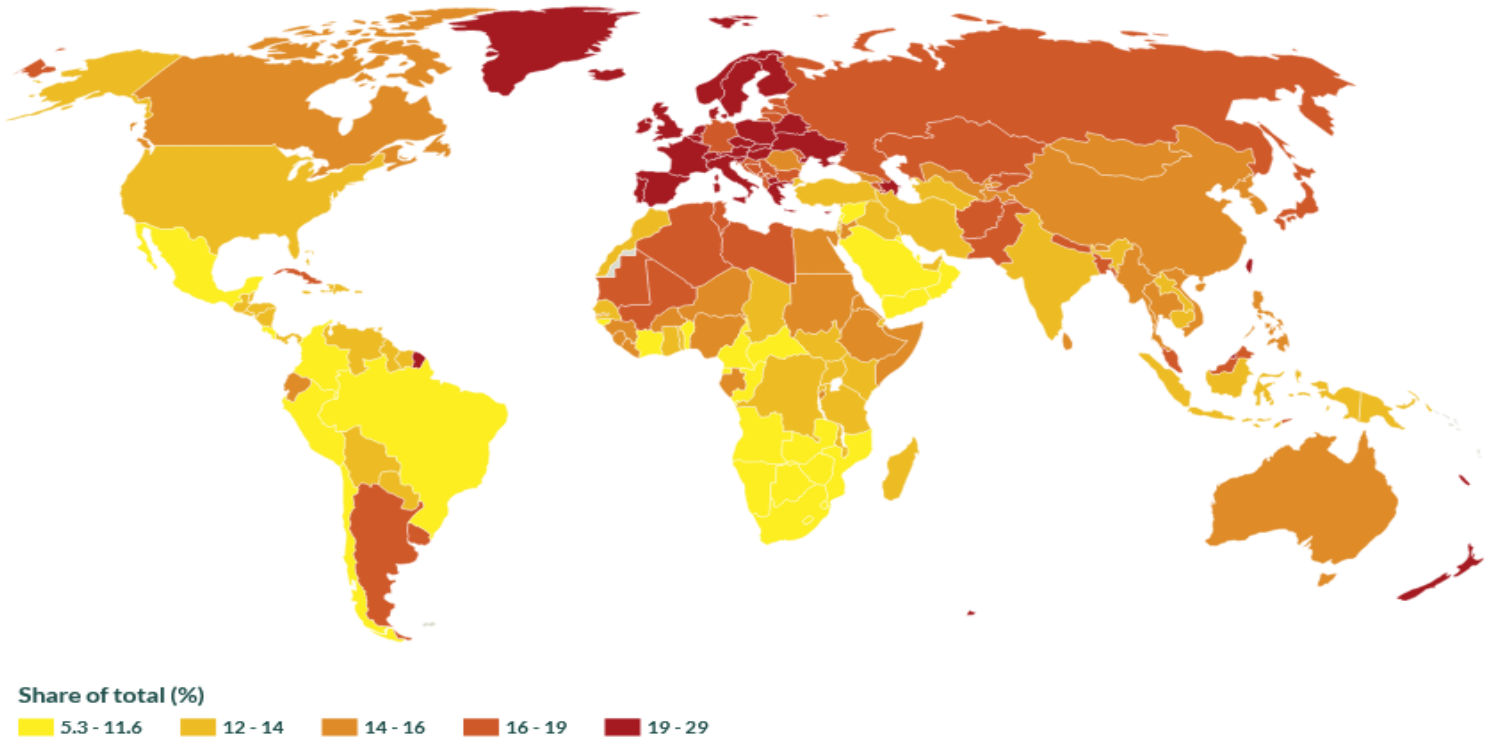
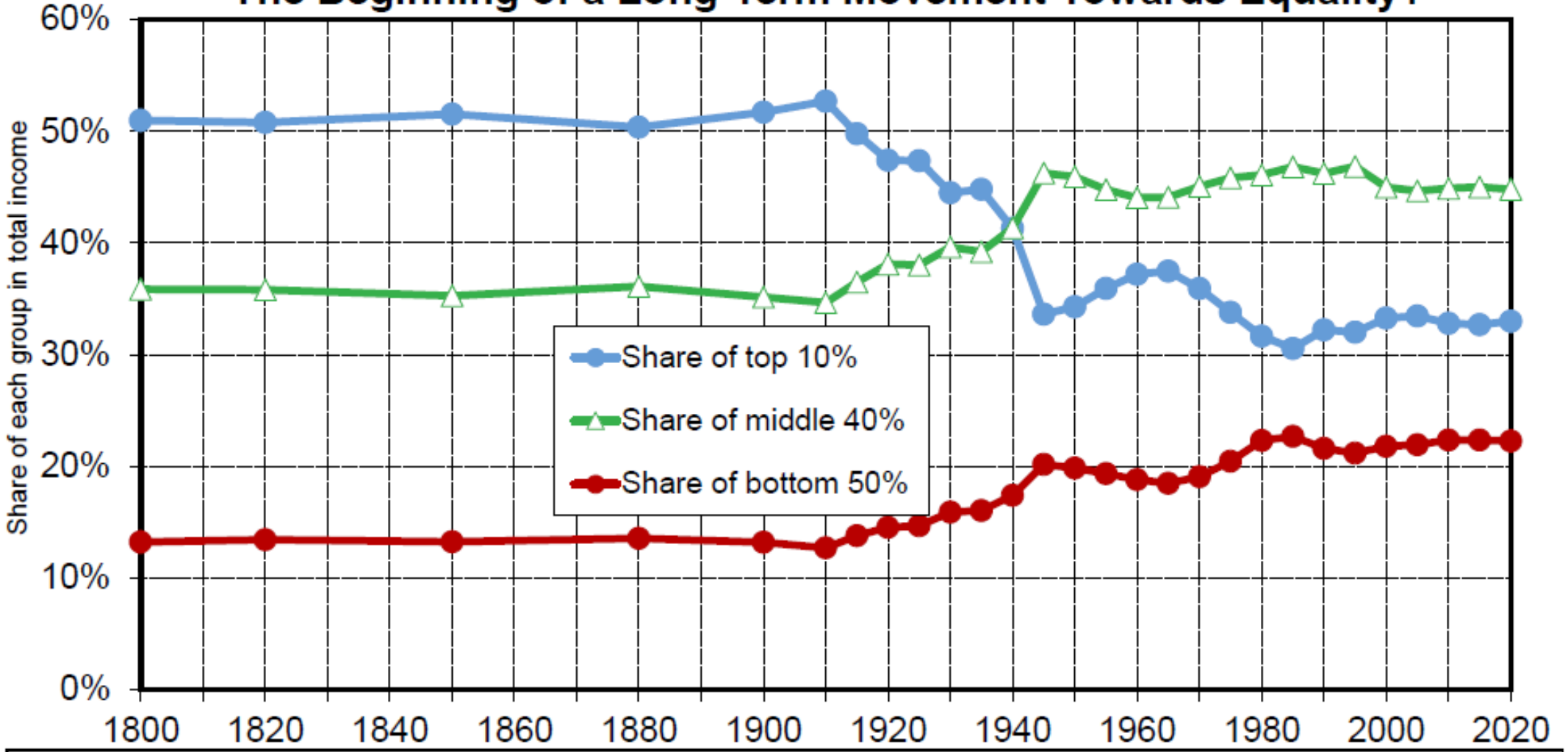
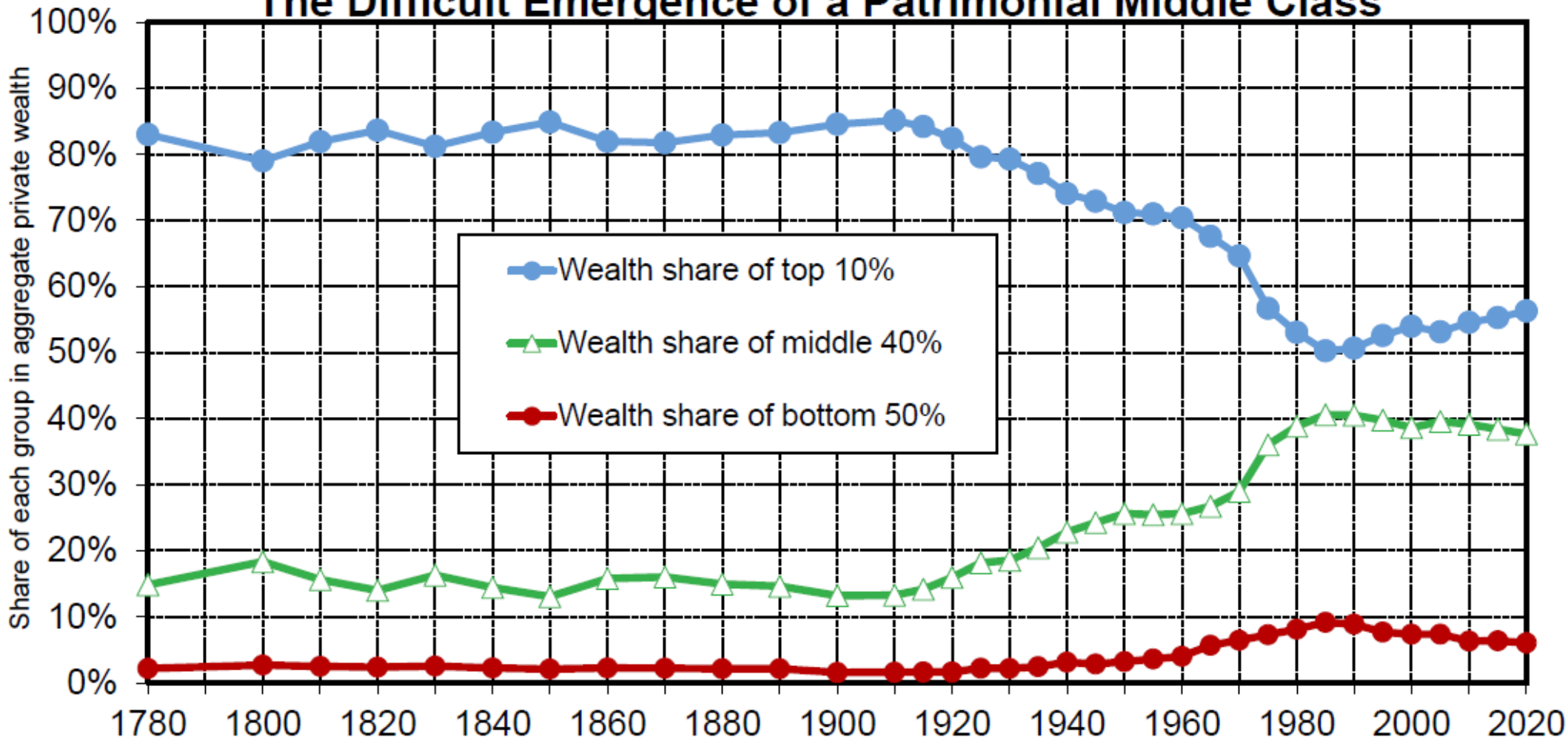


Income Distribution in France, 1800-2020: The Beginning of a Long-Term Movement Towards Equality?



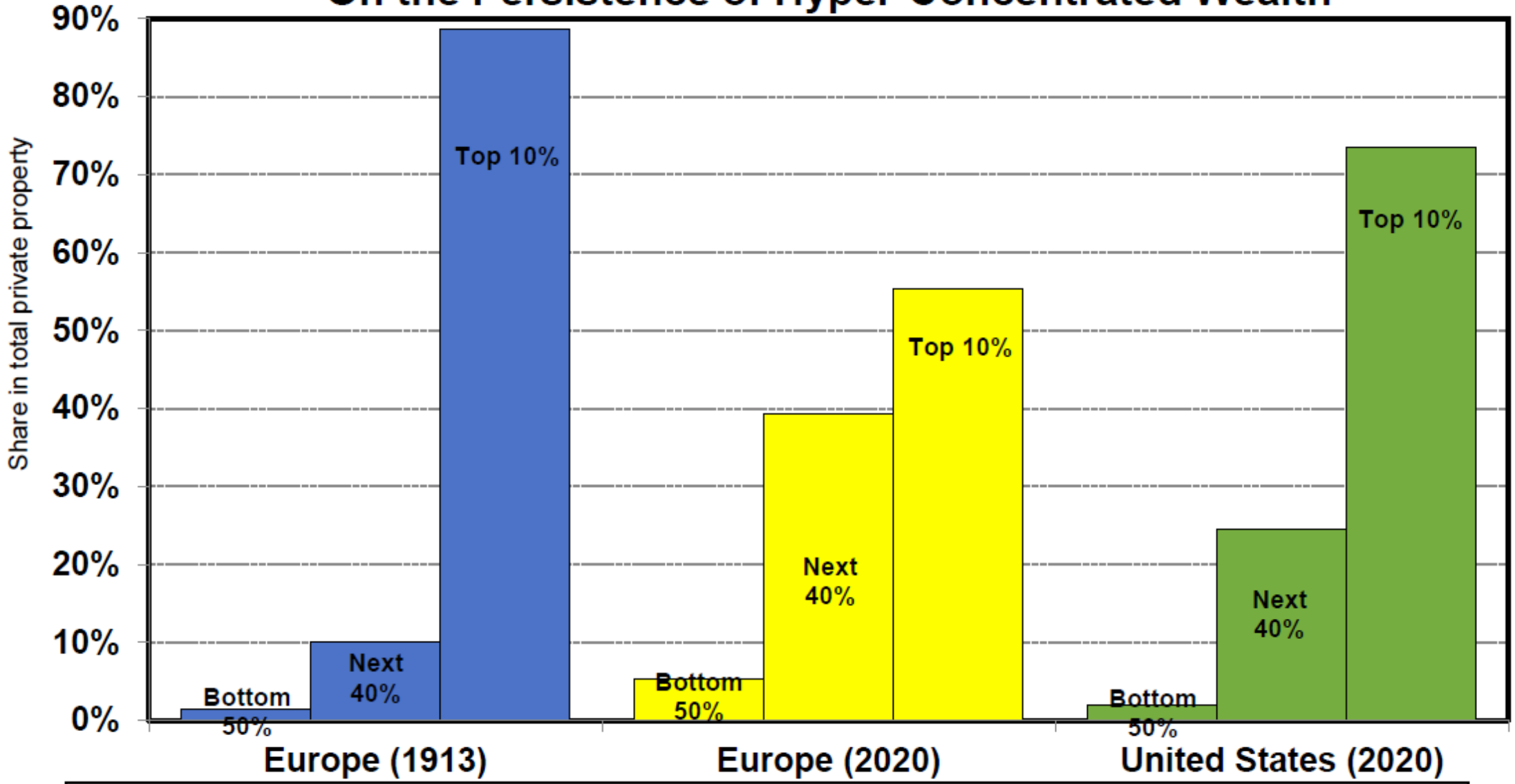
Interpretation. The share of the top 10% highest incomes in total income (including capital income - rent, dividends, interest, profits - & labour income - wages, self-employment income, pensions, unemployment benefits) was about 50% in France from the 1780s to the 1910s. The fall in the concentration of income started after World War 1 and occured to the benefit of the "lower classes" (the bottom 50% lowest incomes) and the "middle classes" (the next 40%), at the expense of the "upper classes" (the top 10%). **Sources and series**: see piketty.pse.ens.fr/equality (figure 7)

Wealth Distribution in France, 1780-2020: The Difficult Emergence of a Patrimonial Middle Class



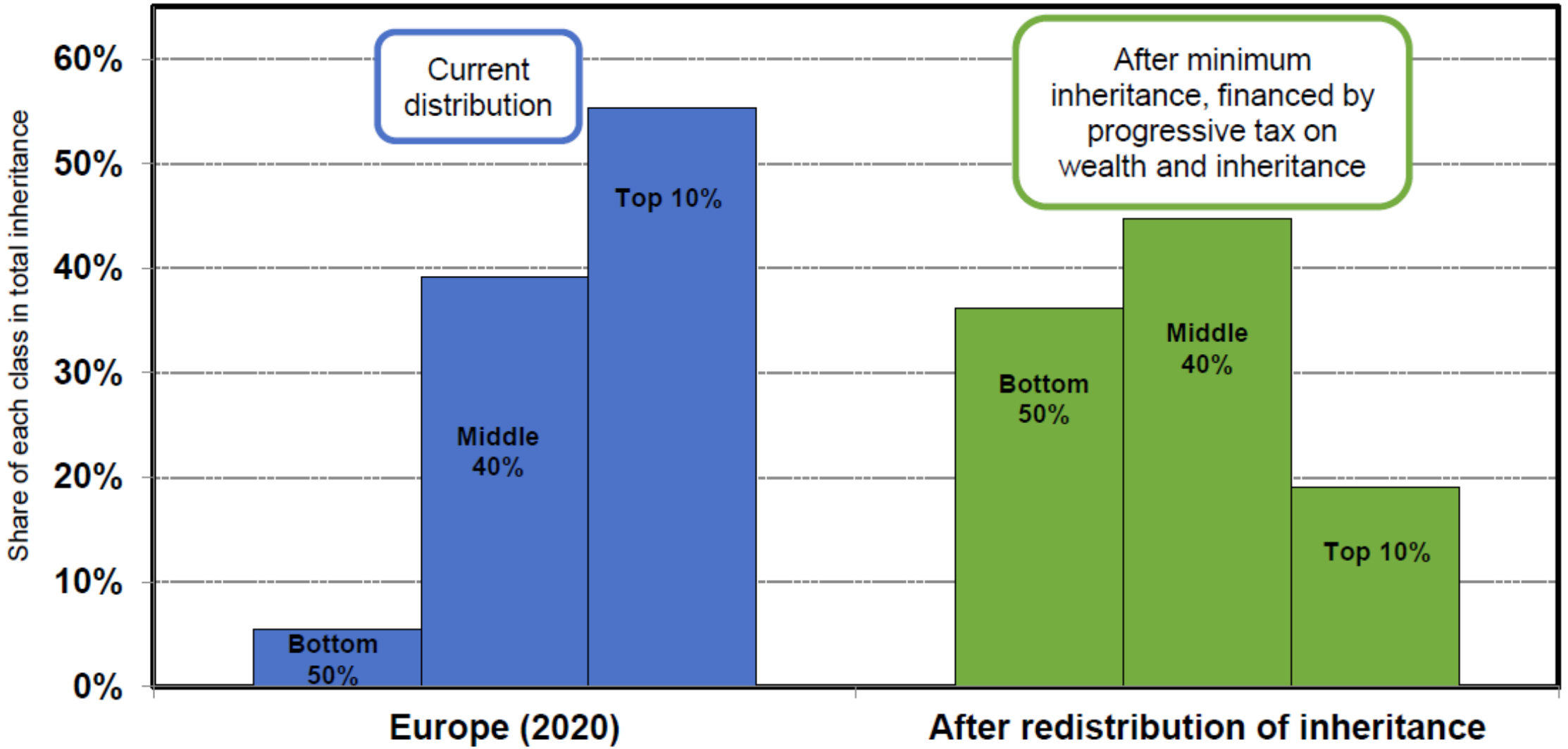
Interpretation. The share of top 10% wealth holders in aggregate private wealth (real estate, business and financial assets, net of debt) was around 80%-90% in France between 1780 and 1910. The decline in wealth concentration begins with World War I and stops in the 1980s. It benefited mostly to the "patrimonial middle class" (the middle 40%), which is defined here as the intermediate group between the top 10% and the bottom 50% of the wealth distribution. **Sources and series**: see piketty.pse.ens.fr/equality (figure 6)

On the Persistence of Hyper-Concentrated Wealth



Reading. The share of the richest 10% in total private property was 89% in Europe (average of Britain, France and Sweden) in 1913 (compared with 1% for the bottom 50%), 55% in Europe in 2020 (compared to 5% for the bottom 50%) and 74% in the United States in 2020 (compared to 2% for the bottom 50%). **Sources and series**: see piketty.pse.ens.fr/equality (figure 27)

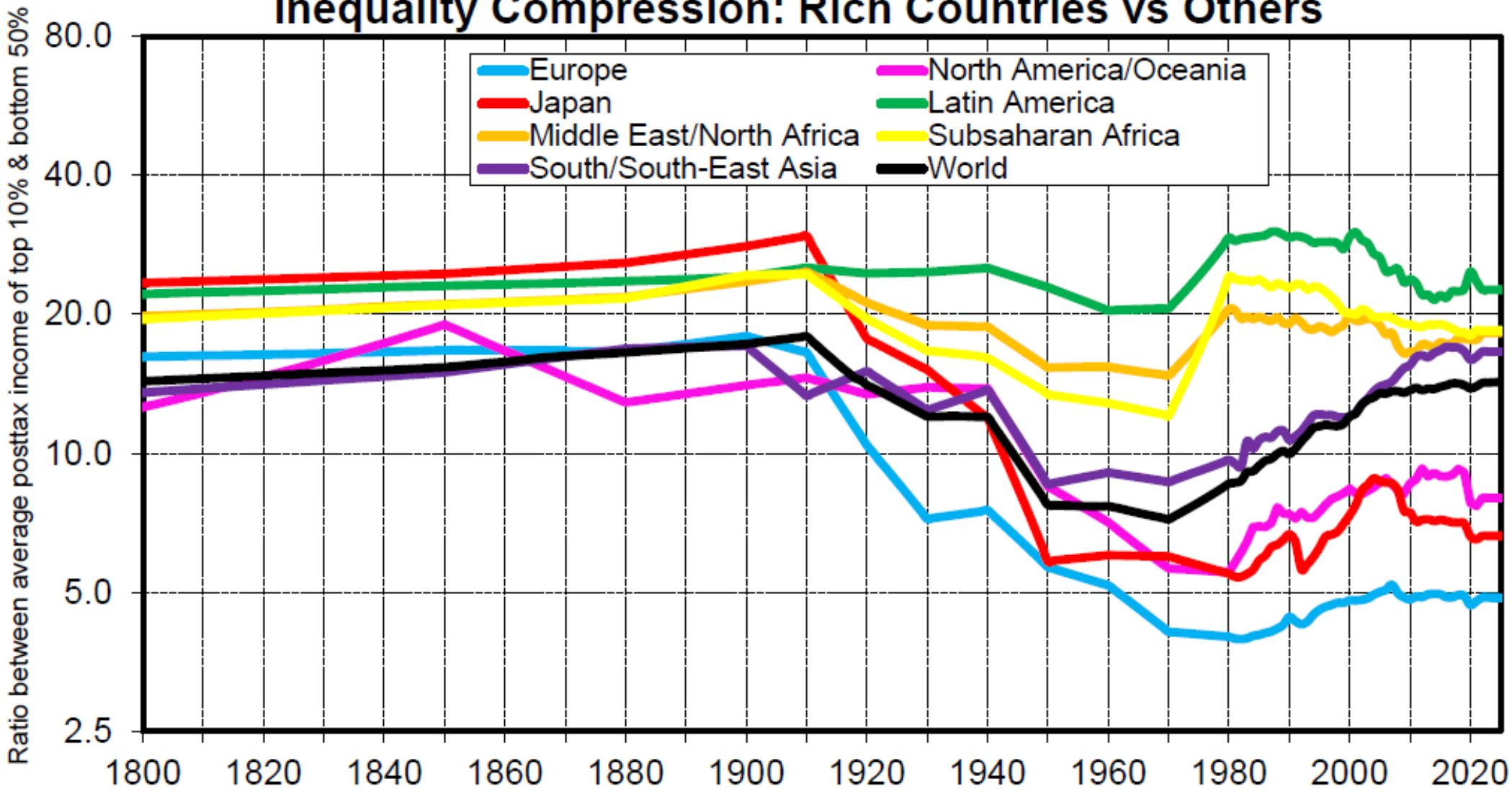
The Redistribution of Inheritance



Interpretation. The share of the poorest 50% in total inheritance is 6% in Europe in 2020, vs 39% for the next 40% and 55% for the richest 10%. After implementation of inheritance for all (minimum inheritance equal to 60% of average wealth, allocated at 25-year-old), financed by a progressive tax on wealth and inheritance, this share would be equal to 36% (vs 45% and 19%).

Note: Europe: average Britain-France-Sweden. **Sources and series**: see piketty.pse.ens.fr/equality (figure 30)

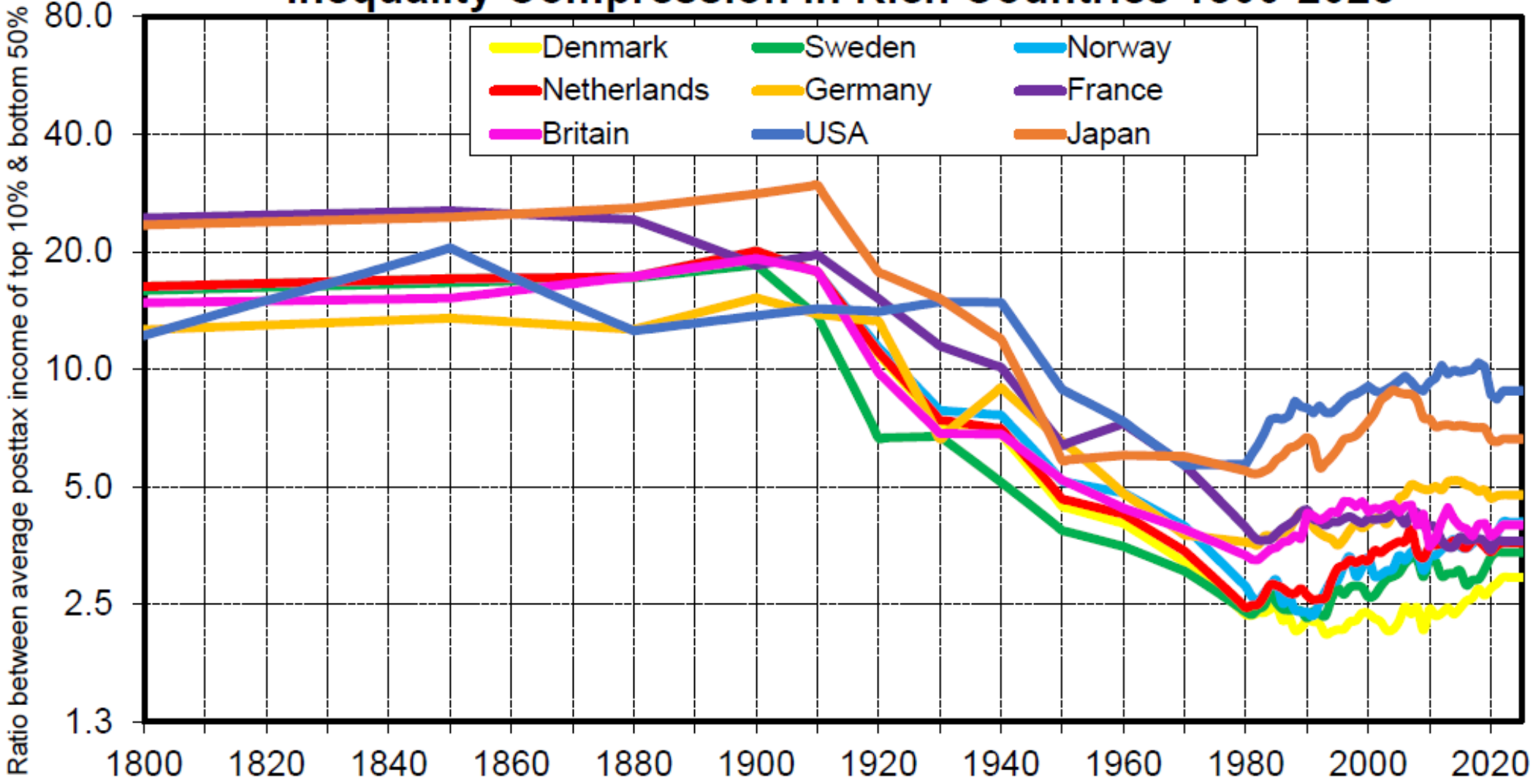
Inequality Compression: Rich Countries vs Others



Interpretation. The income scale was substantially compressed during the 20th century in the world's richest countries. I.e. the ratio between the average disposable income (posttax posttransfer income) of the top 10% and the bottom 50% was about 15-20 in Europe, North America/Oceania and Japan until WW1, and it is about 5 in Europe and 6-8 in NAOC and Japan in 2020-2025.

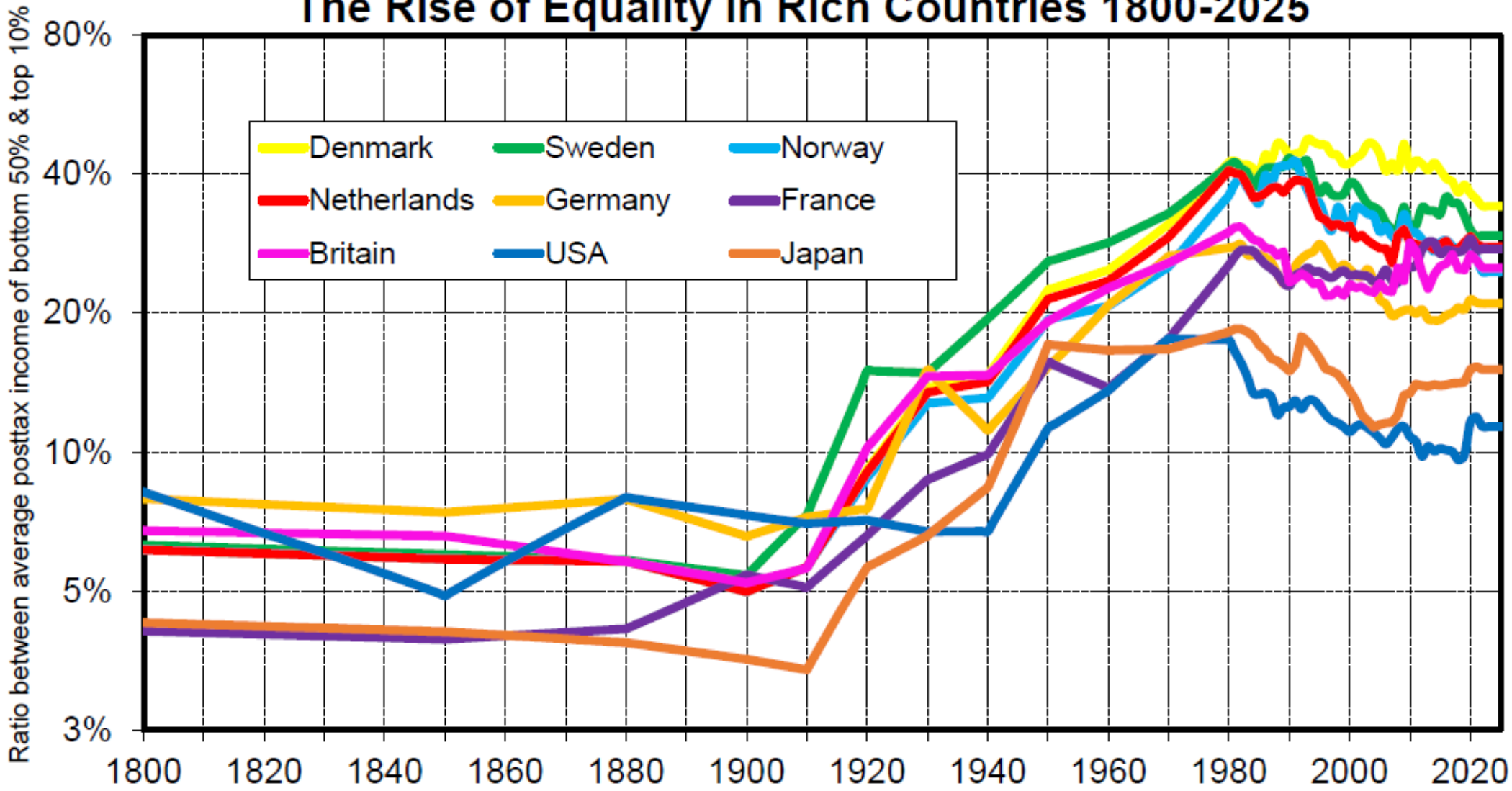
Sources and series: see wid.world/equality

Inequality Compression in Rich Countries 1800-2025



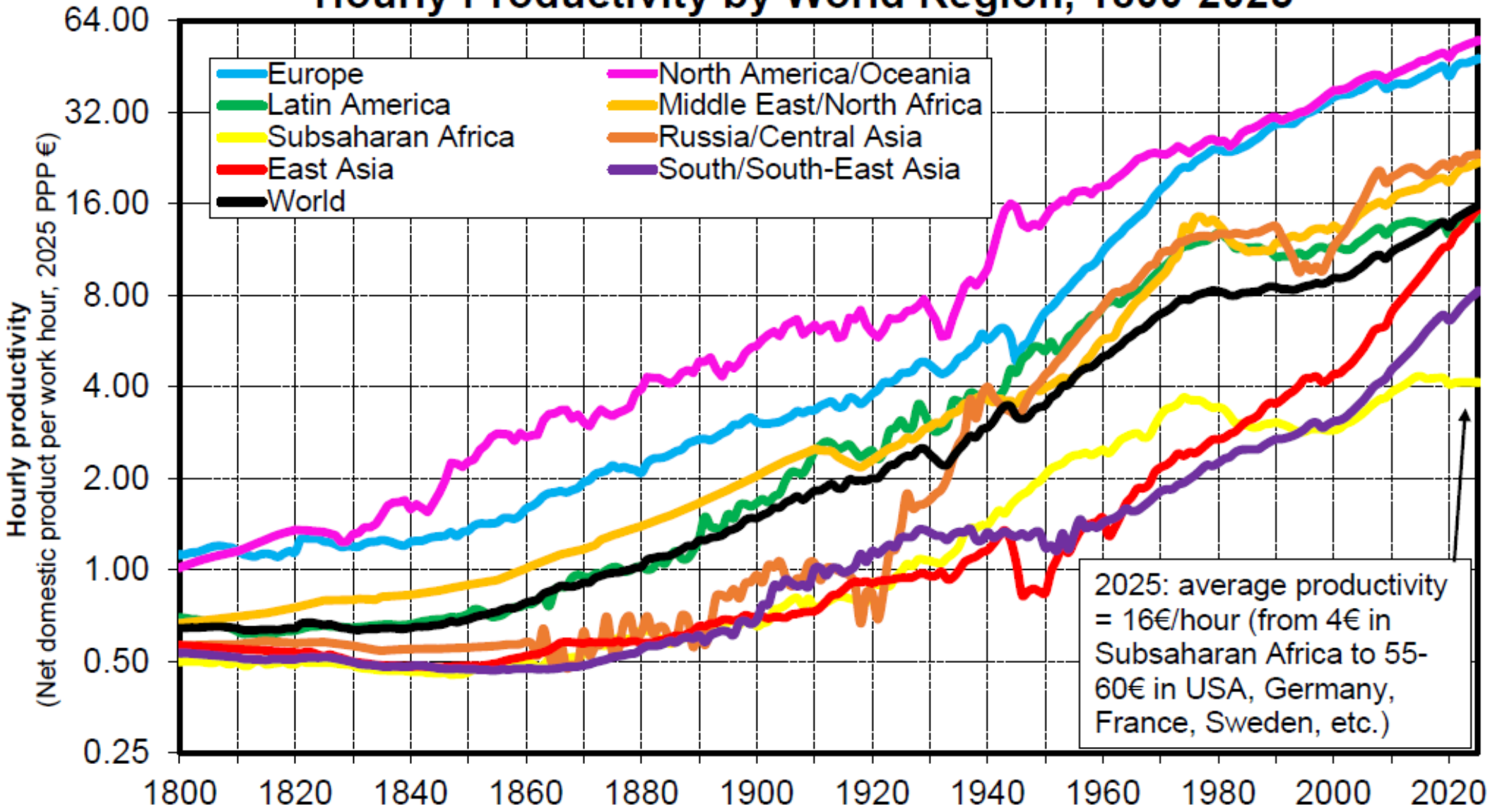
Interpretation. The long-run compression of Europe's income scale has been particularly strong in North and West Europe. Over the 1980-2025 period, the T10/50 income ratio has been around 2,5-3 on average in Sweden, Denmark, Norway and the Netherlands (and around 4-5 in Germany, France and Britain), as opposed to 15-20 or more before WW1. We also observe a long-run compression of the income scale in other rich countries, including US and Japan, albeit of smaller magnitude. **Sources and series**: see wid.world

The Rise of Equality in Rich Countries 1800-2025



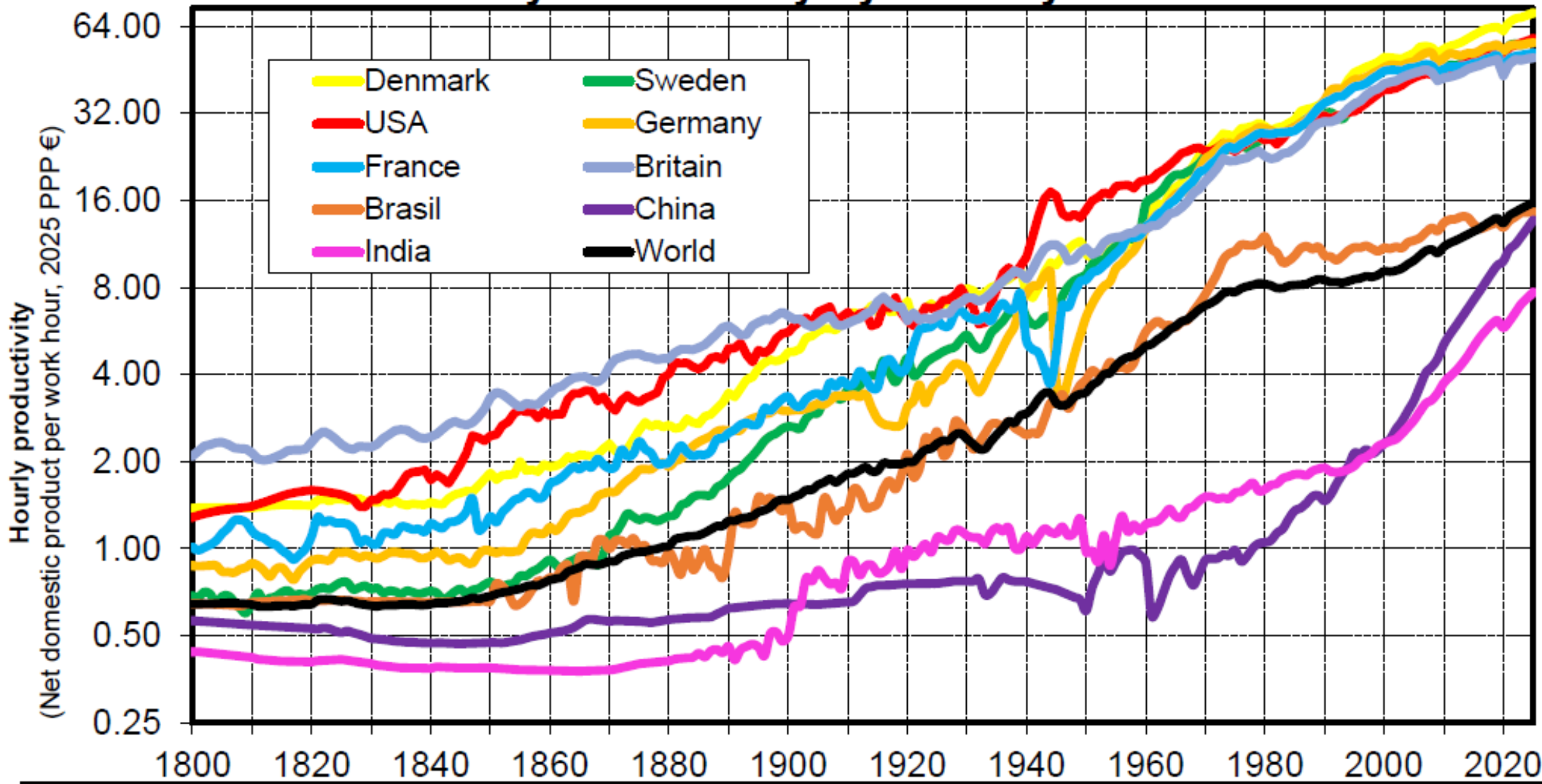
Interpretation. The average posttax income of the bottom 50% was about 5-10% of the average posttax income of the top 10% in most countries before WW1 (corresponding to an income scale of 1-to-10 or 1-to-20). During the 20th century, the ratio between the average posttax income of bottom 50% and top 10% rose to about 40% in a number of European countries (corresponding to an income scale of 1-to-2.5). **Sources and series**: see wid.world

Hourly Productivity by World Region, 1800-2025



Interpretation. Expressed in 2025 PPP €, hourly productivity (net domestic product per labour hour) rose from about 0.7€ in 1800 to 16€ in 2025 at the global level. Europe's productivity was about half of North America/Oceania level in 1950 and has been approximately the same since 1980-1990. **Sources and series**: see wid.world

Hourly Productivity by Country 1800-2025



Interpretation. Top European countries (DE, DK, FR, GB, NL, NO, SE) exhibit similar or higher productivity as the US since 1980. Within Europe, the highest productivity countries tend to be the most equal (like DK, NL, NO or SE), reflecting the increasing role of human capital & inclusiveness for prosperity. This was not the case in 1800-1900, when the productivity leader (GB) was as unequal as other countries, reflecting the role of other factors (coal, cotton, colonies, etc.). In 1900-1970, the productivity leader (US) did exhibit large educational advance over all other countries (incl. GB, FR, DE, JP, etc.) and was also less unequal. **Sources and series**: see wid.world

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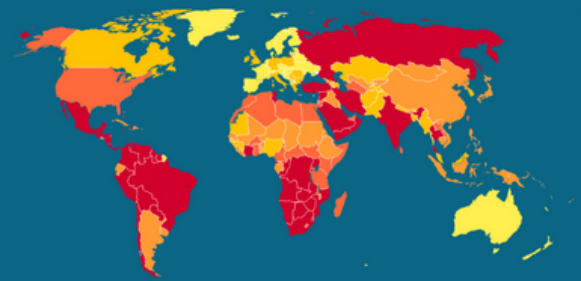

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POLITICAL CLEAVAGES AND SOCIAL INEQUALITIES

WHAT IS THE GLOBAL JUSTICE PROJECT?

The **Global Justice Project** (GJP) is a collective research initiative developed by the World Inequality Lab.

Combining comparative historical data series from the World Inequality Database with global input-output tables, environmental accounts, labour force surveys and other sources, the project explores what a just distribution of socio-economic and environmental resources could look like at the global level from 2025 to 2100 – both between and within countries – in a way that is compatible with planetary boundaries.

The project partly builds on the analysis and proposals set out in Thomas Piketty's *Brief History of Equality*, extending them into a broader and more comprehensive global framework.

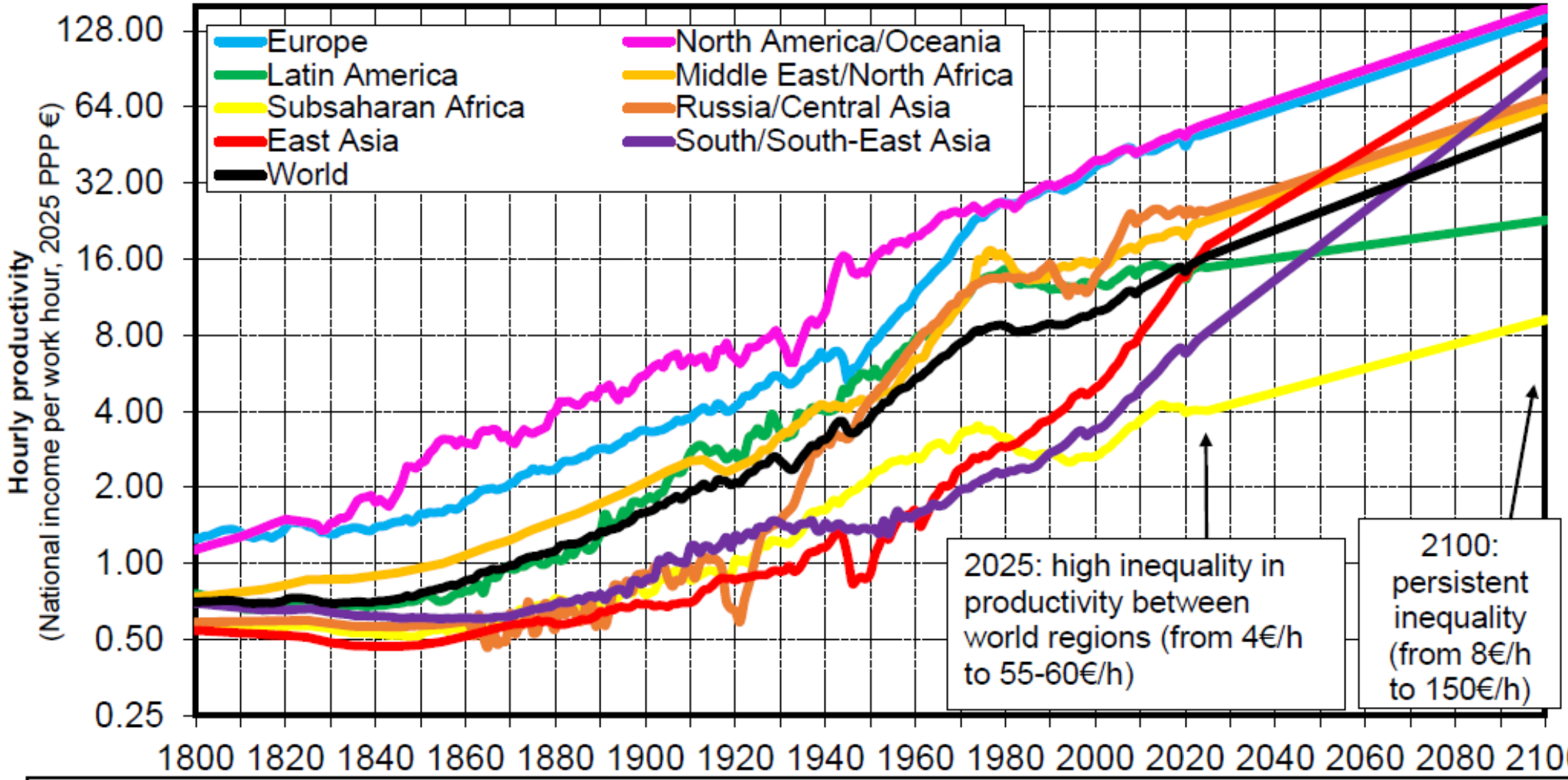
WHAT ARE THE GOALS?

The centrepiece of the GJP will be "global convergence" scenarios that combine two key goals:

1. **Socio-economic equality**: Full economic convergence between countries, full gender equality in labour hours and pay, sharp compression of within country income scale and wealth scale, combined with fair access to education, healthcare and effective participation in all aspects of social, economic, cultural and political life.

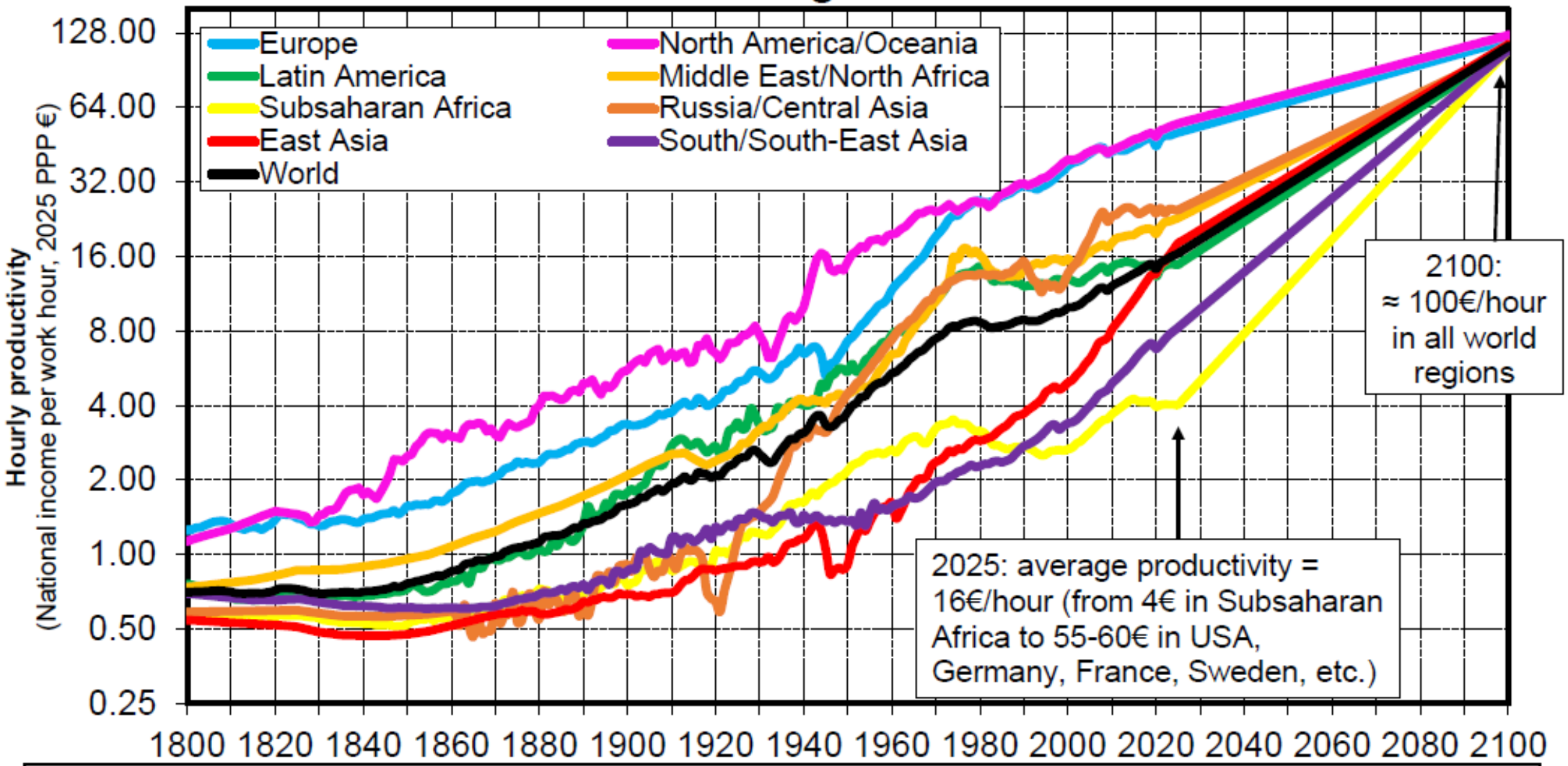
2. **Planetary habitability:** Aligning global resource use within ecological boundaries, accounting for carbon budgets, raw material constraints and the preservation of biodiversity.

World Productivity Trends 2025-2100: Business-As-Usual Scenario



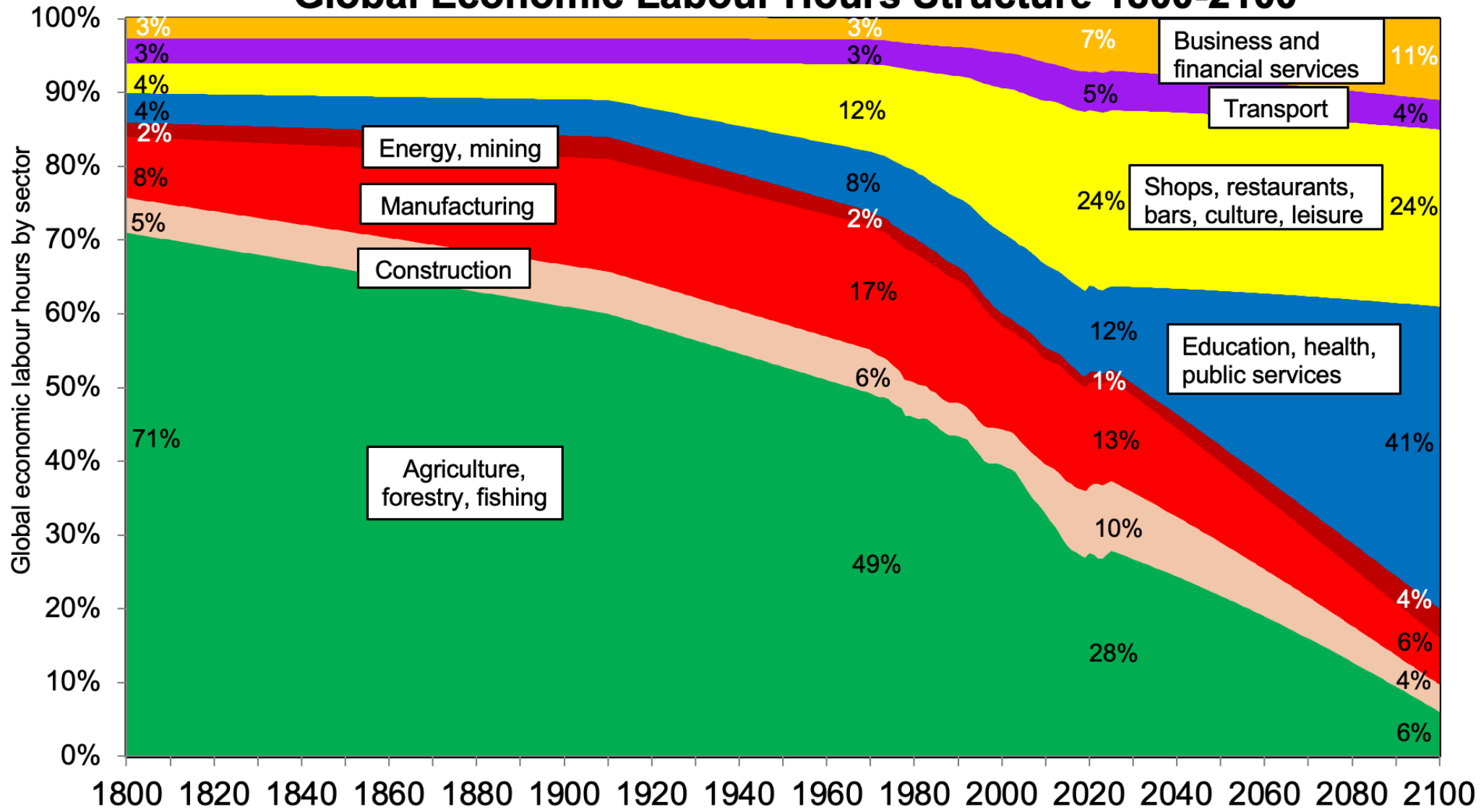
Interpretation. Under the "business-as-usual" scenario (same productivity growth rates as in 1990-2025, with minor changes), inequality in hourly productivity is projected to remain very high between world regions by 2100. In particular, productivity in 2100 would be only 9€/hour in Subsaharan Africa (with a population reaching 3.3b in 2100, vs 1.3b in 2025 according to UN central scenario). **Sources and series**: see wid.world

World Productivity Trends 2025-2100: Global Convergence Scenario



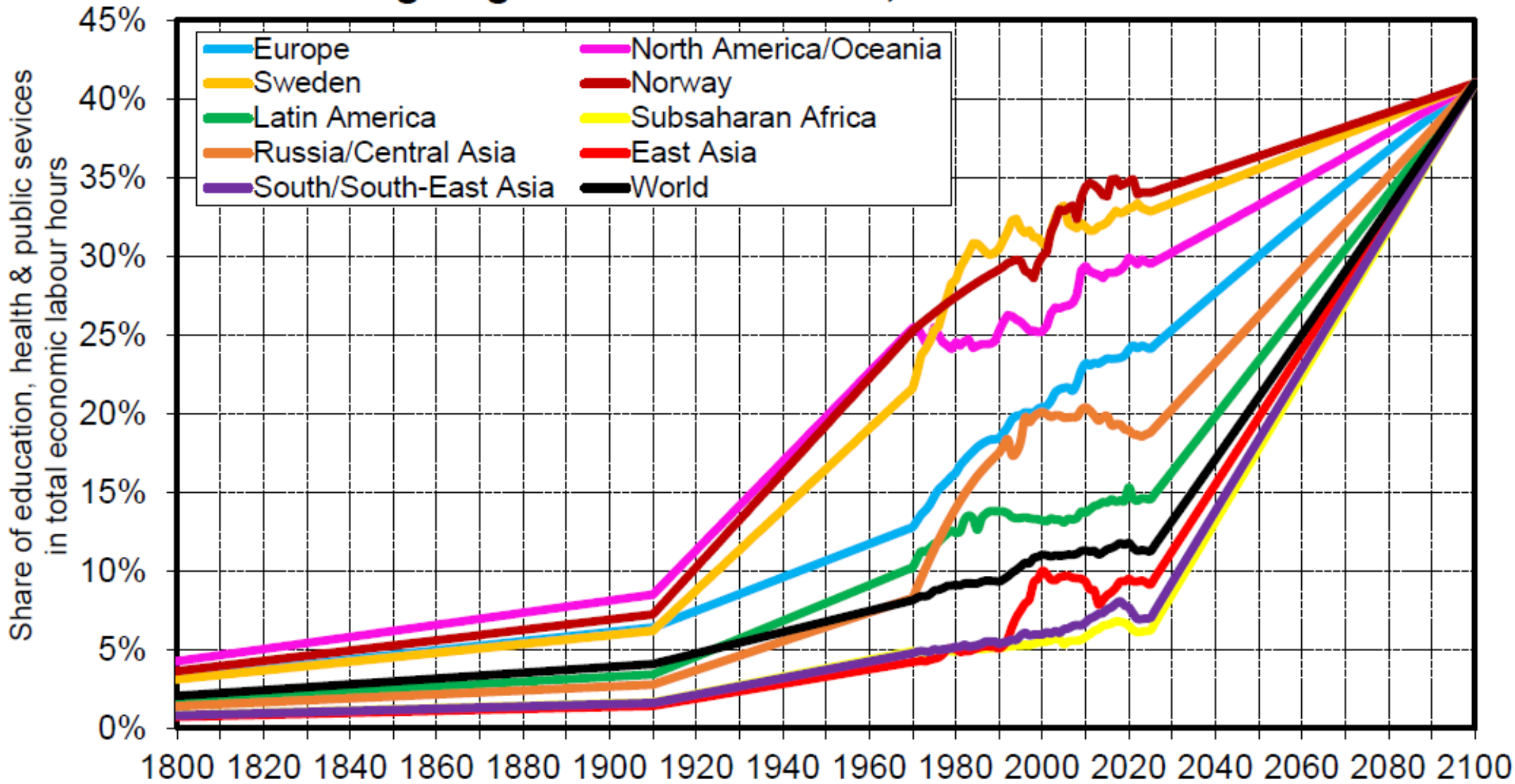
Interpretation. Under the "global convergence" scenario, productivity growth rates are assumed to be such that all regions converge to about 100-120€/hour by 2100. This requires in particular a large acceleration of productivity growth in Subsaharan Africa (4.5% per year over 2025-2100 period, i.e. about the same as in East Asia 1990-2025). **Sources and series**: see wid.world

Planetary Habitability & Structural Transformation: Global Economic Labour Hours Structure 1800-2100



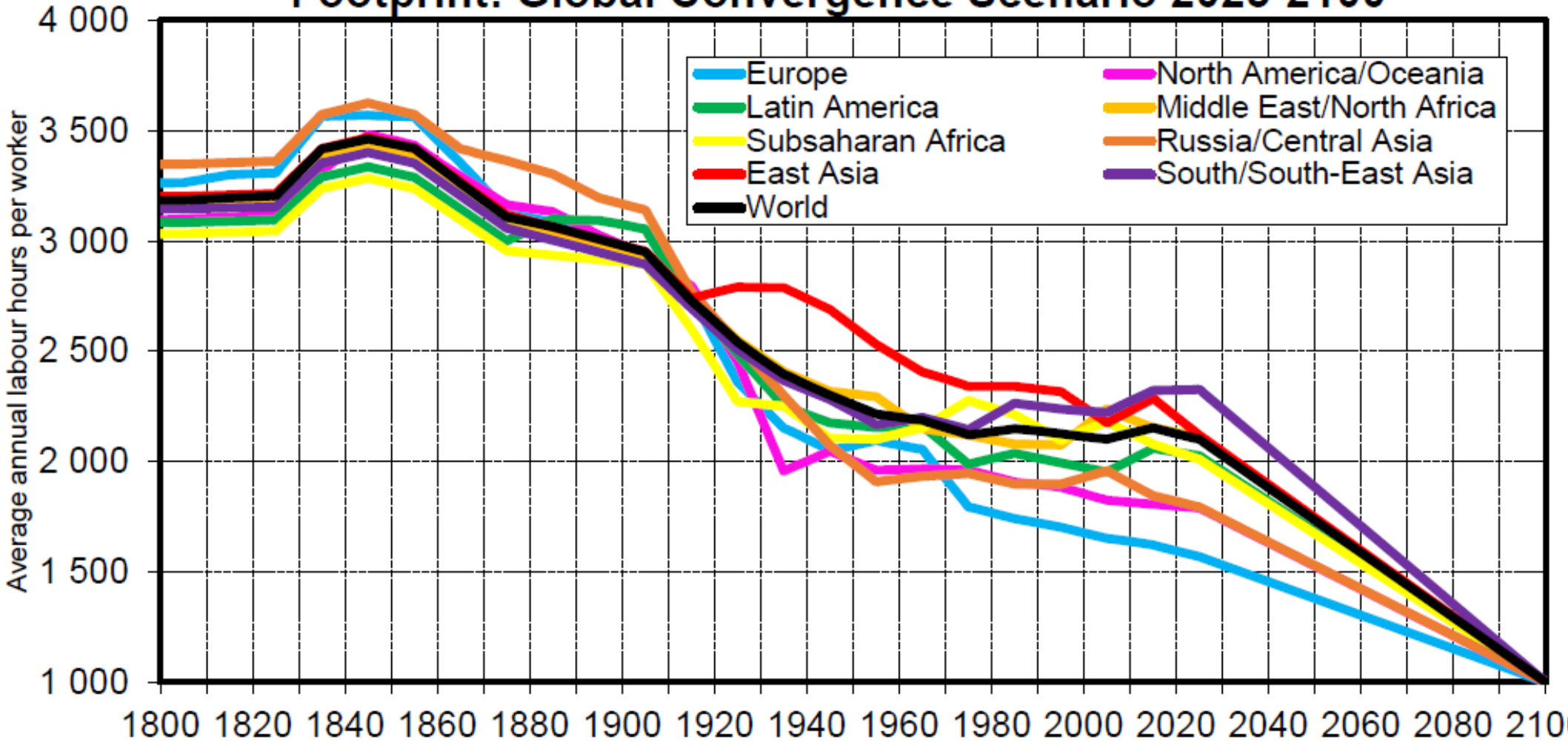
Interpretation. At the world level, the share of agriculture in total economic labour hours dropped from 71% in 1800 to 49% in 1970 and 28% in 2025, and could further drop to about 6% by 2100. **Sources and series** : see wid.world

The Ongoing Rise of Education, Health & Public Services



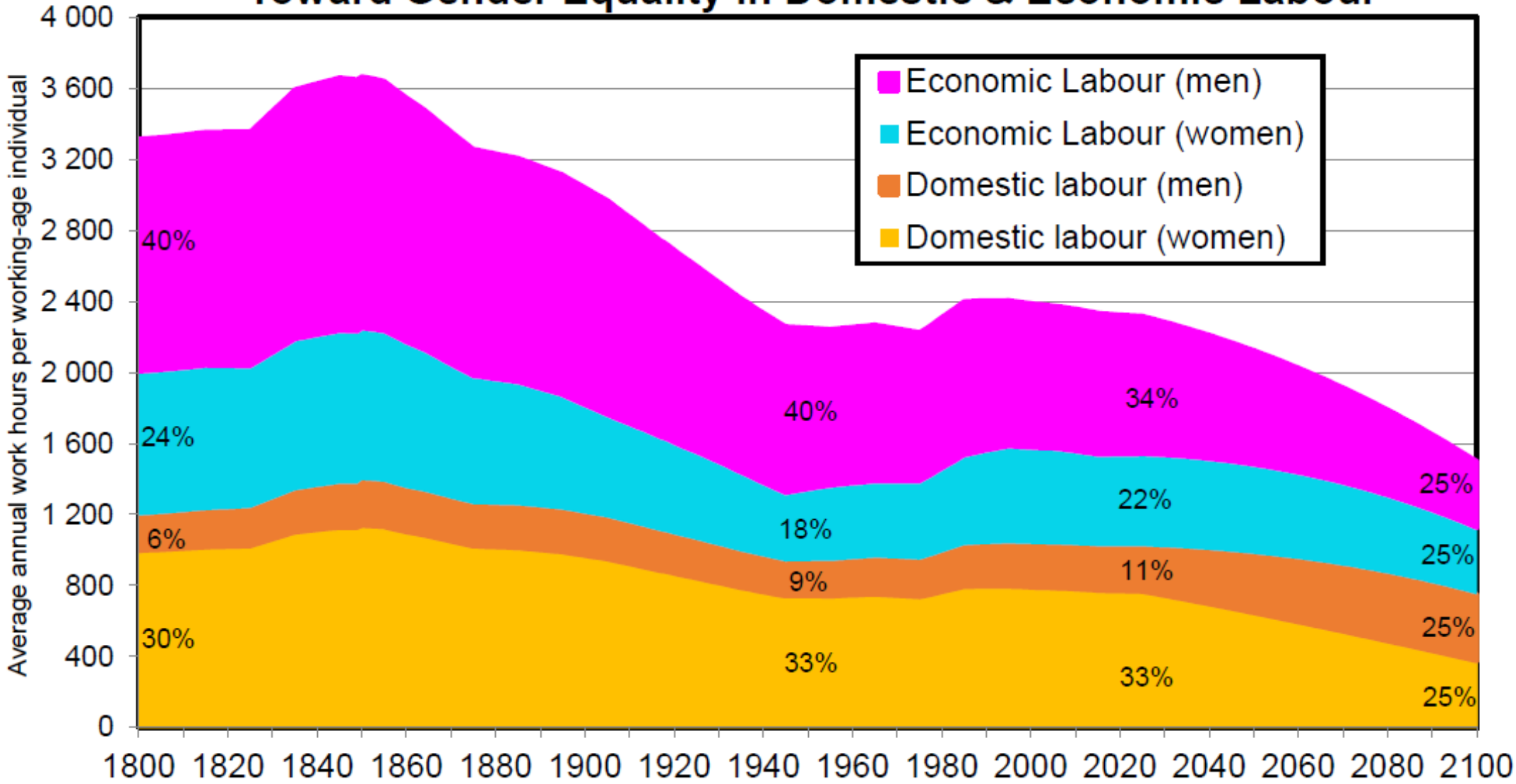
Interpretation. At the world level, the share of education, health and public services in total economic labour hours rose from 2% in 1800 to 8% in 1970, 12% in 2025 and is scheduled to rise to 41% by 2100. In 2025, it is already around 25% of total economic labour hours in Europe, 30% in North America/Oceania and 33-34% in Sweden and Norway. **Sources and series**: see wid.world

Using Productivity Gains to Reduce Work Hours & Material Footprint: Global Convergence Scenario 2025-2100

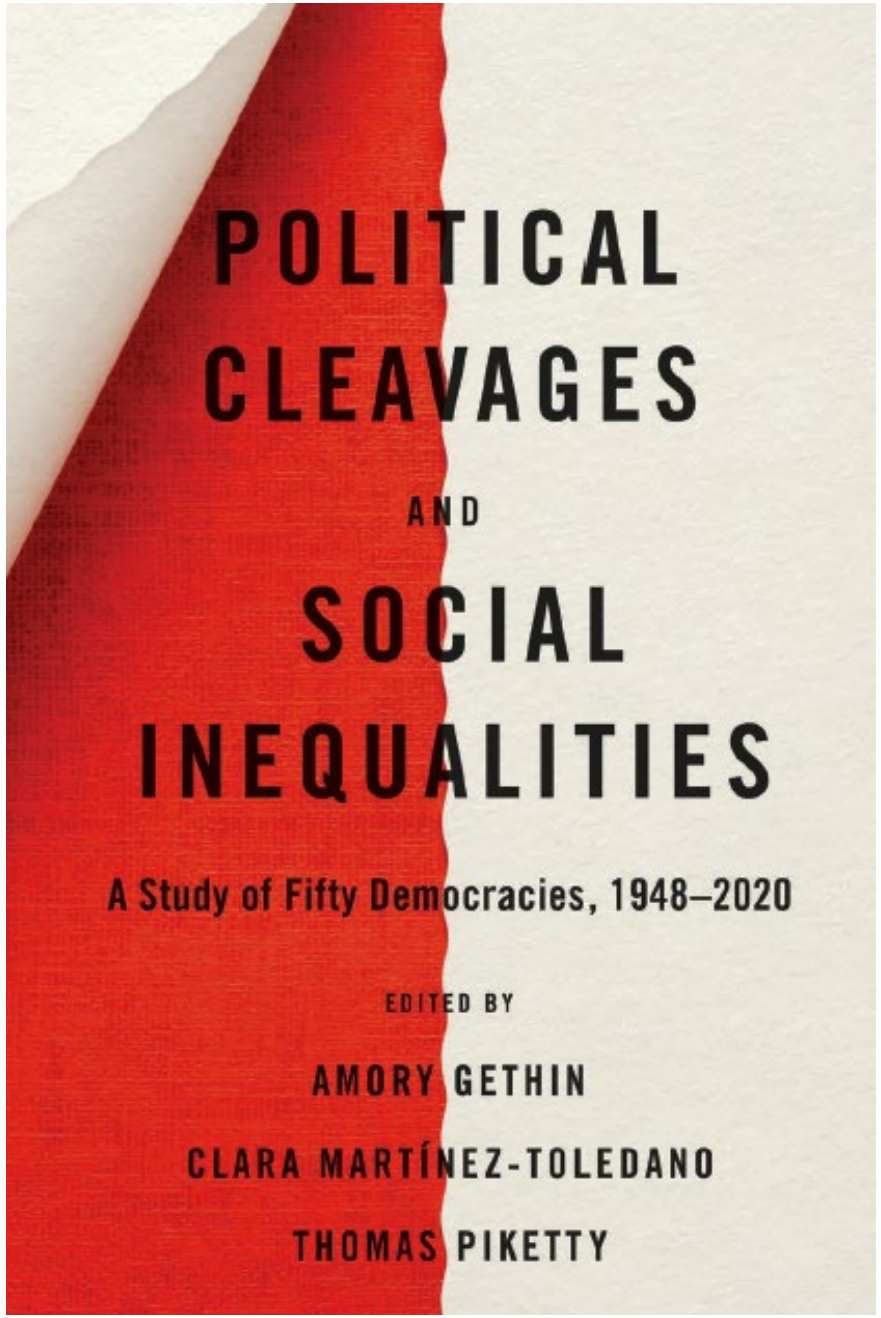


Interpretation. According to the global convergence scenario, annual labour hours per work should decline around 1250 hours per worker in all world regions around 2100. Note. Annual labour hours around 3000-3500 hours correspond to about 60-65 hours per week all year long. Annual hours around 2000 hours correspond to 40 hours per week during 50 weeks (2 weeks in paid vacation); annual hours around 1600 hours correspond to 35 hours per week during 47 weeks (5 weeks in paid vacation); annual hours around 1000 hours correspond to 25 hours per week during 40 weeks (12 weeks in paid vacation). **Sources and series**: see wid.world

The Structual Transformation of Work 1800-2100: Toward Gender Equality in Domestic & Economic Labour



Interpretation. In the global convergence scenario, working-age men and women are projected to supply the same quantity of economic labour and domestic labour and to receive equal average pay. This would represent a continuation of the trend toward gender equality observed between 1950 and 2025, albeit with a major acceleration. **Sources and series**: wid.world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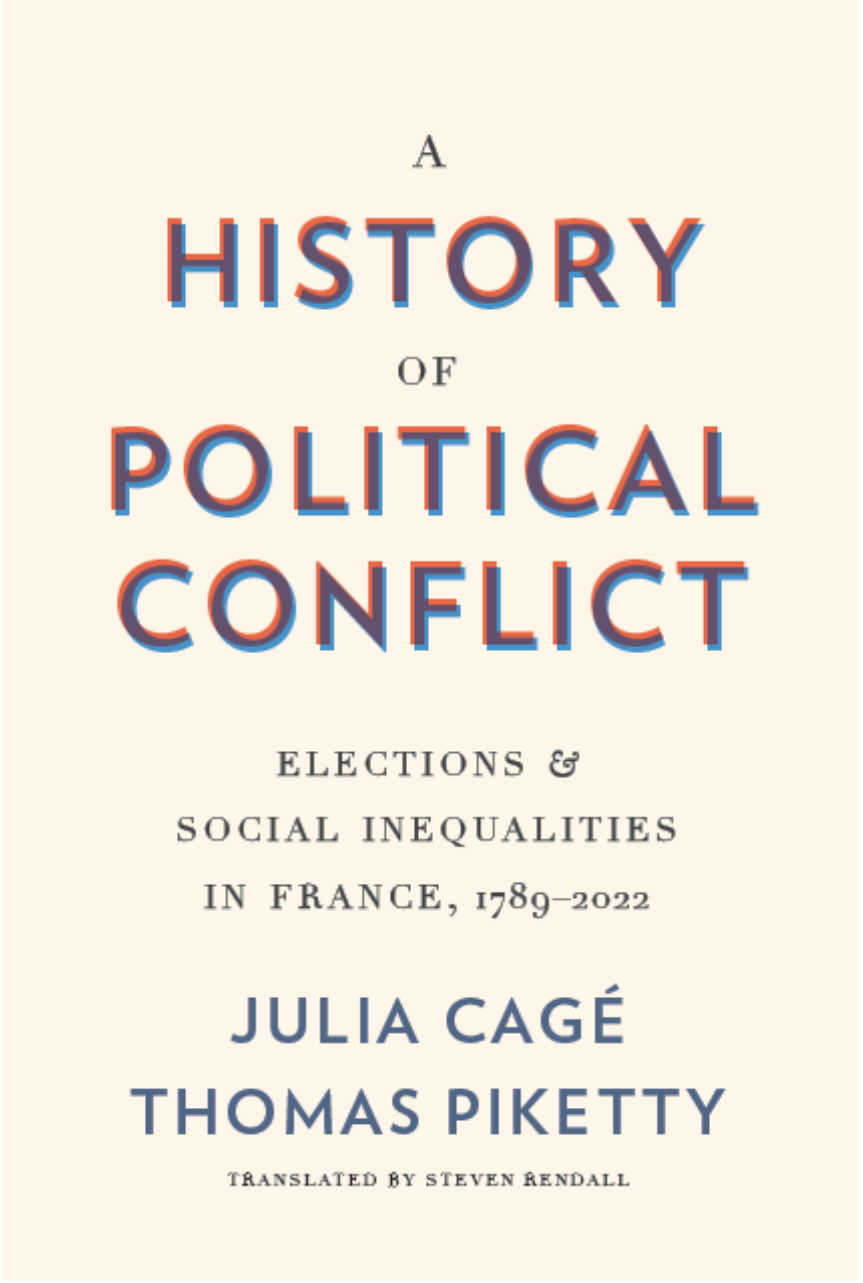
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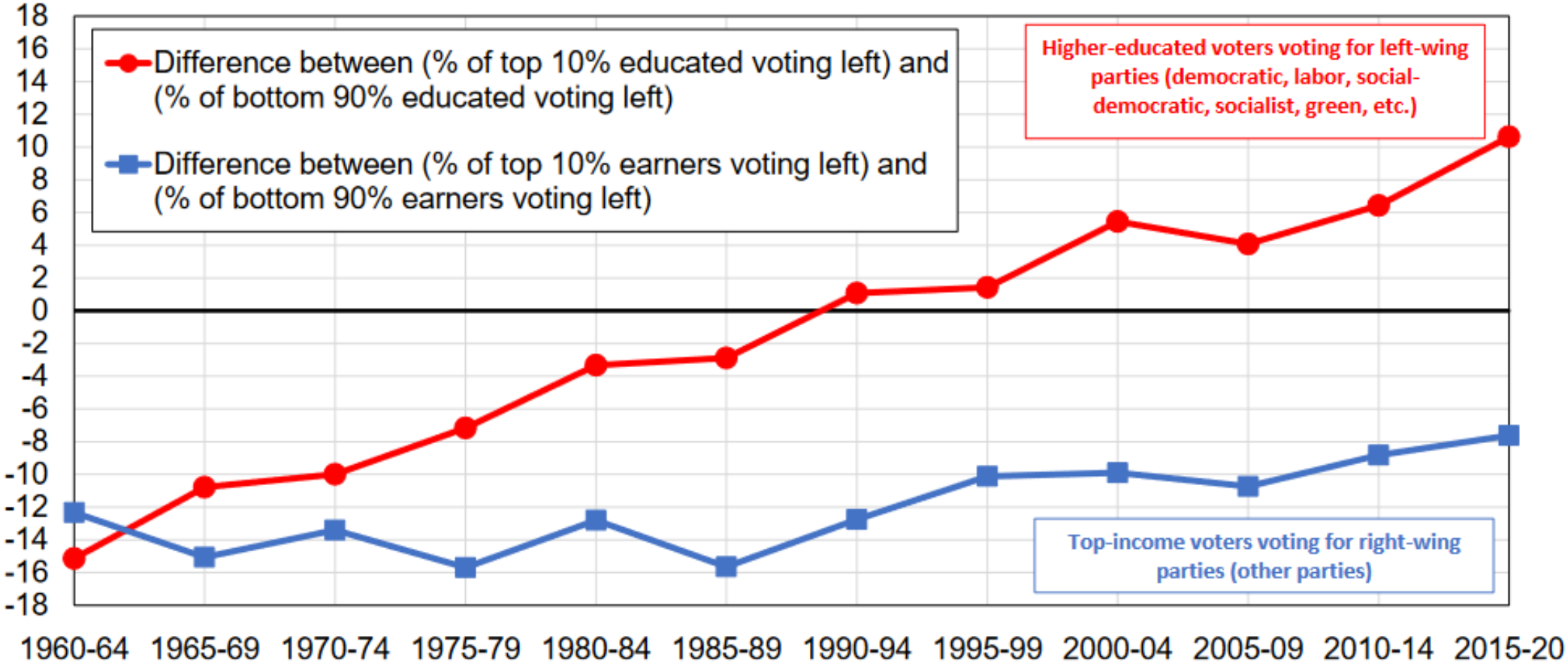
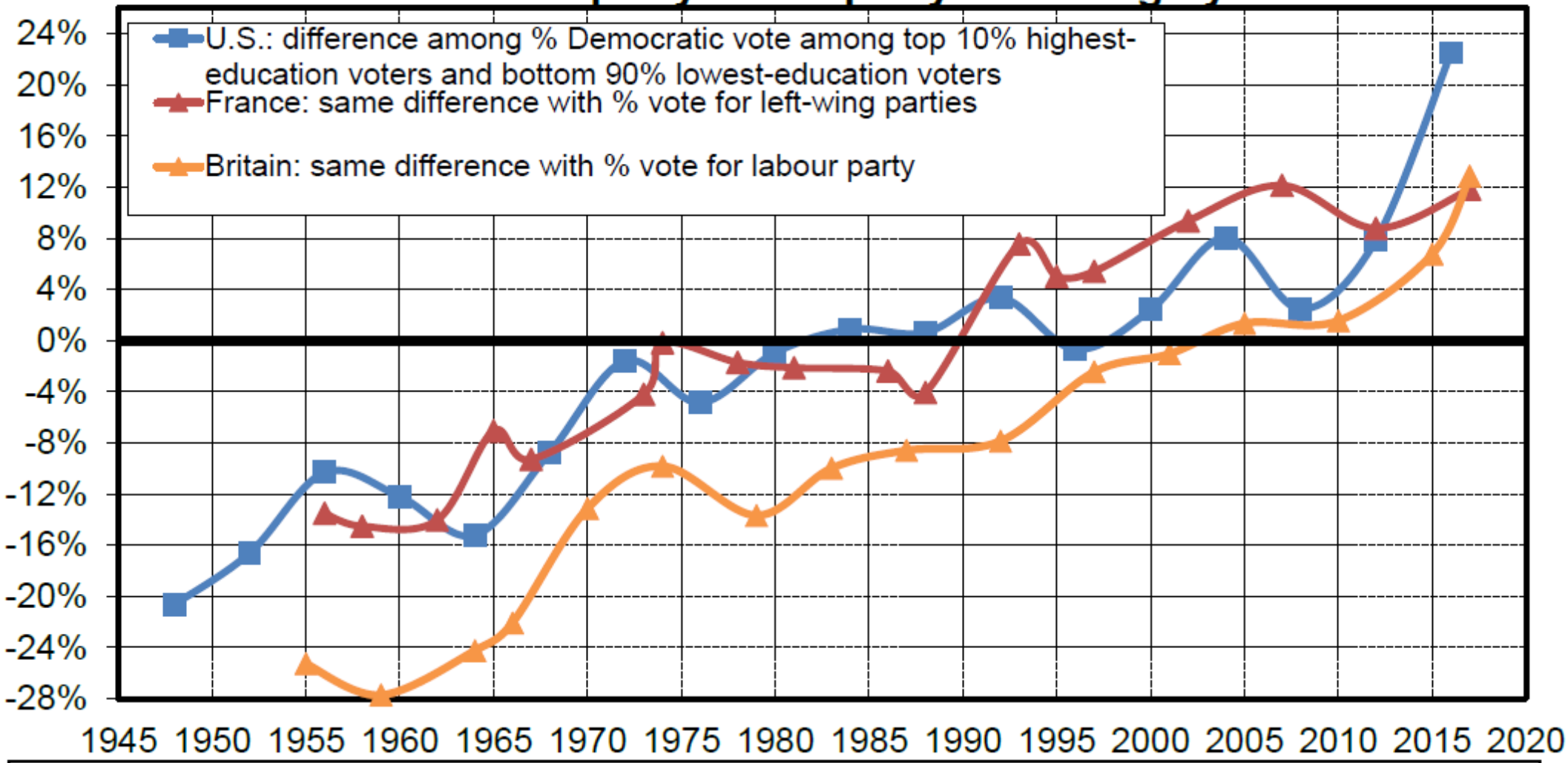
Figure 1 - The emergence of multi-elite party systems in Western democracies



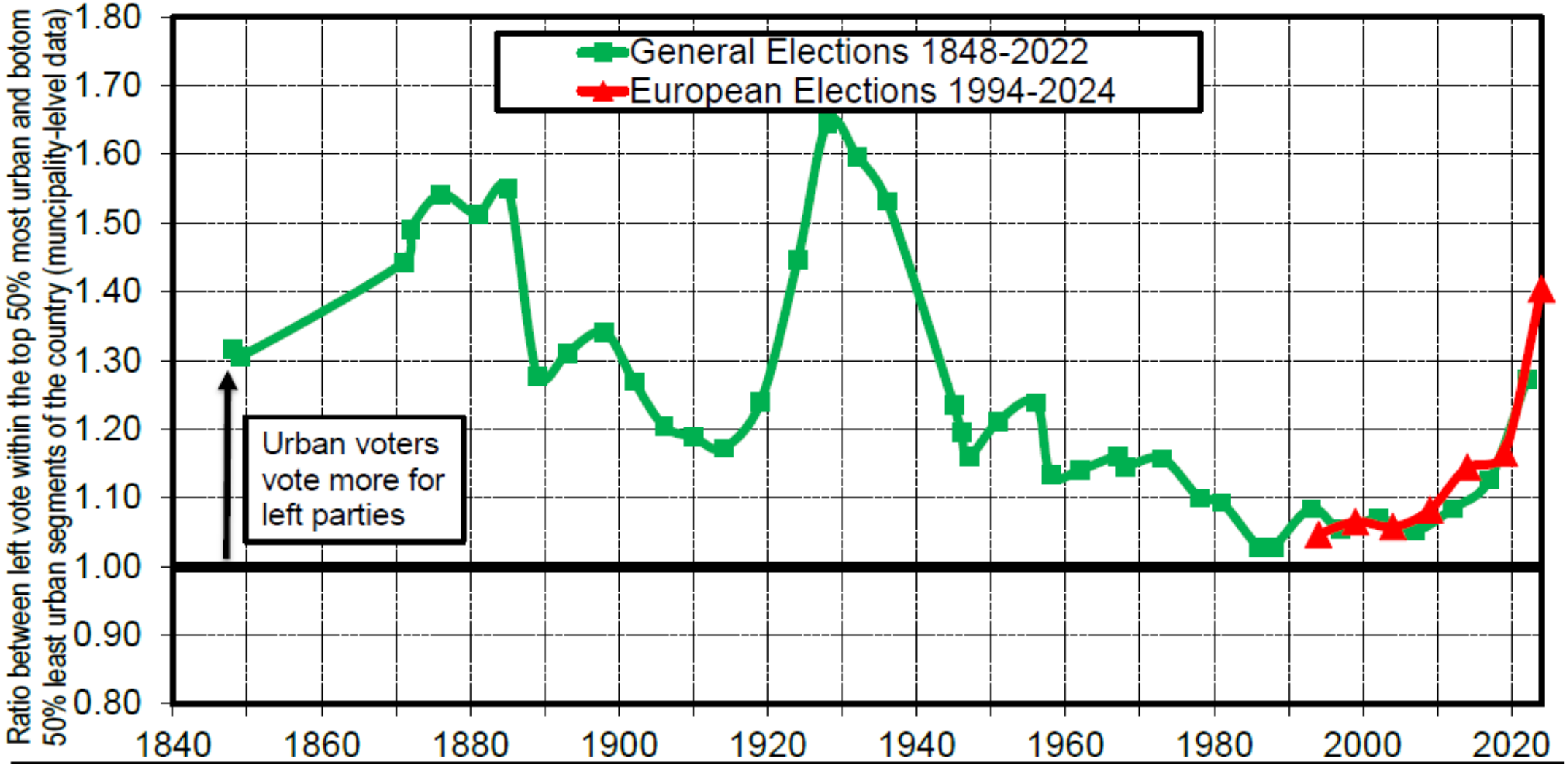
Source: authors' computations using the World Political Cleavages and Inequality Database.
Note: in the 1960s, both higher-educated and high-income voters were less likely to vote for left-wing (democratic / labor / social-democratic / socialist / green) parties than lower-educated and low-income voters by more than 10 percentage points. The left vote has gradually become associated with higher education voters, giving rising to a "multi-elite party system". Figures correspond to five-year averages for Australia, Britain, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the US. Estimates control for income/education, age, gender, religion, church attendance, rural/urban, region, race/ethnicity, employment status, and marital status (in country-years for which these variables are available).

The electoral left in Europe & the US, 1945-2020: from the workers' party to the party of the highly educated



Interpration. During the 1950-1970 period, the vote for the democratic party in the U.S., left-wing parties in France (socialists-communists-radicals-greens) in France and the labour party in Britain was associated with the voters with the lowest educational diplomas; in the 1990-2010 period is became associated with the voters with the highest education diplomas. The British evolution is slightly lagging behind the French and U.S. evolutions but goes in the same direction. **Sources and series:** see piketty.pse.ens.fr/ideology (figure 15.13)

Return of the Territorial Divide: France 1848-2024



Interpretation. The territorial divide, as measured by the ratio between left vote share within the top 50% most urban and bottom 50% least urban segments of the country (based on municipality-level voting data and conurbation size), rose enormously in recent decades. It is now back to the levels observed at the end of the 19th century and during interwar period. **Sources & series**: see unehistoireduconflitpolitique.fr

Concluding comments

- **There has been a substantial & successul (but incomplete) historical movement toward more socioeconomic & political equality in 19c-20c**

- **The movement can & should continue in 21c**: this is the only way to address our social-environmental challenges and the unending aspiration for equal participation & dignity

- **Social science research on inequality & equality dynamics is more needed than ever. Long life to equality!**