

# Growing up and 'going out': The development and internationalization of Chinese NGOs

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# *The puzzle:* NGOs have emerged in China, but authoritarianism persists

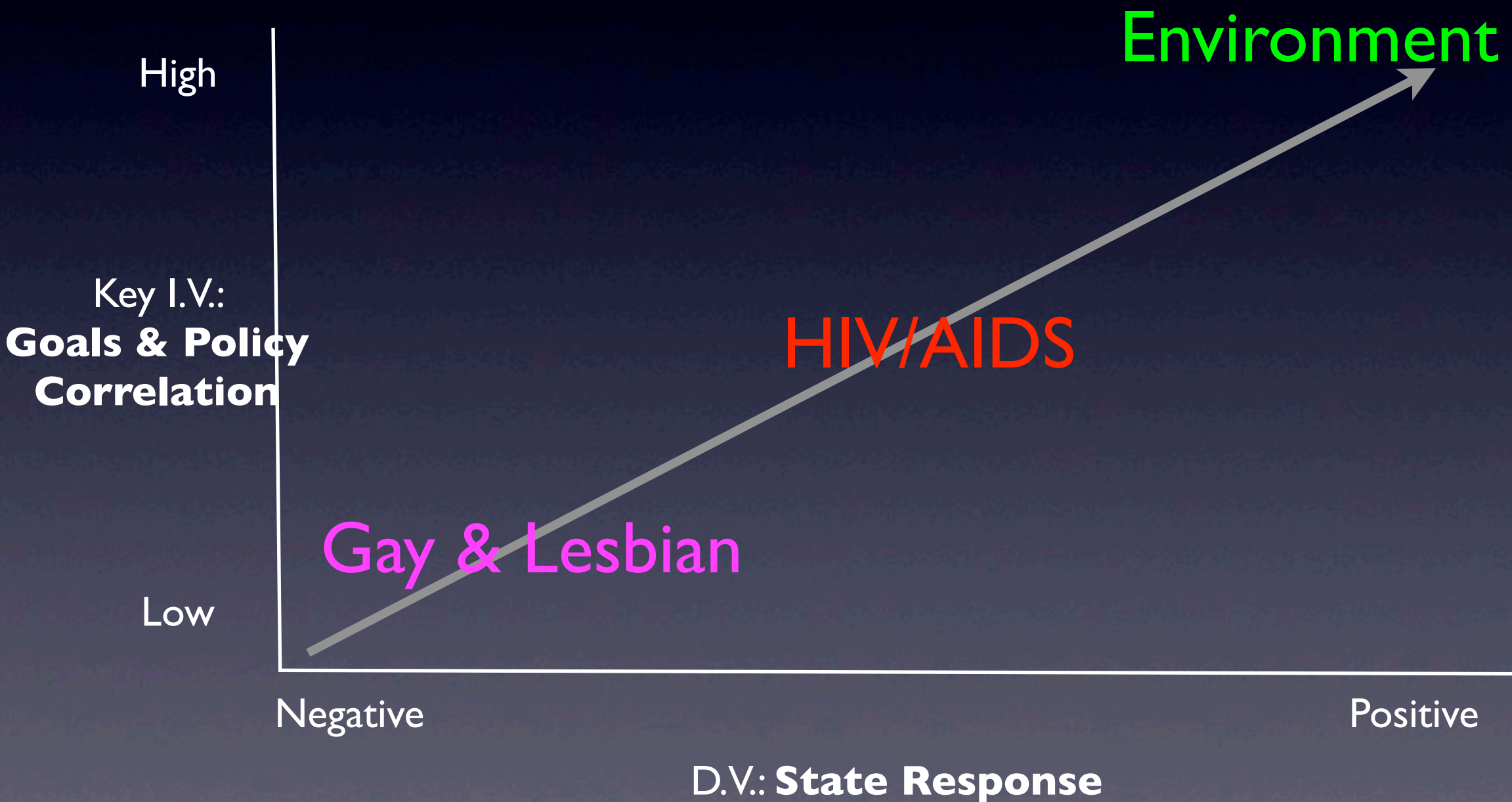
- How *do* NGOs emerge in closed political systems, like China's? What specific steps do they take to survive?
- What effect has the emergence of Chinese NGOs had on the political status quo?
- How will the nature of NGO development affect the future of activism in China? And NGO-state relations elsewhere?



# What makes the book unique?

- Focused on PROCESS, *not* (presumed) RESULT
- A larger-N comparative study of different types of NGOs: environment, HIV/AIDS, gay & lesbian
- ‘Disaggregates’ the state, beyond Beijing
  - Attentive to state, but focused on *society*
- ‘De-romanticizes’ activism: examines leaders as *economic* actors; ‘a career, not just a cause’

# Case selection: reason to expect different response across issue areas



# Multi-method, cross-regional data collection and analyses

- Data collection: Field research in China '07-'08
- *Exploratory*: In-depth, semi-structured interviews with NGO leaders (~80)
- *Confirmatory*: Web-based, nationwide survey (~100)
- Analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively





# What do NGOs have to work with?

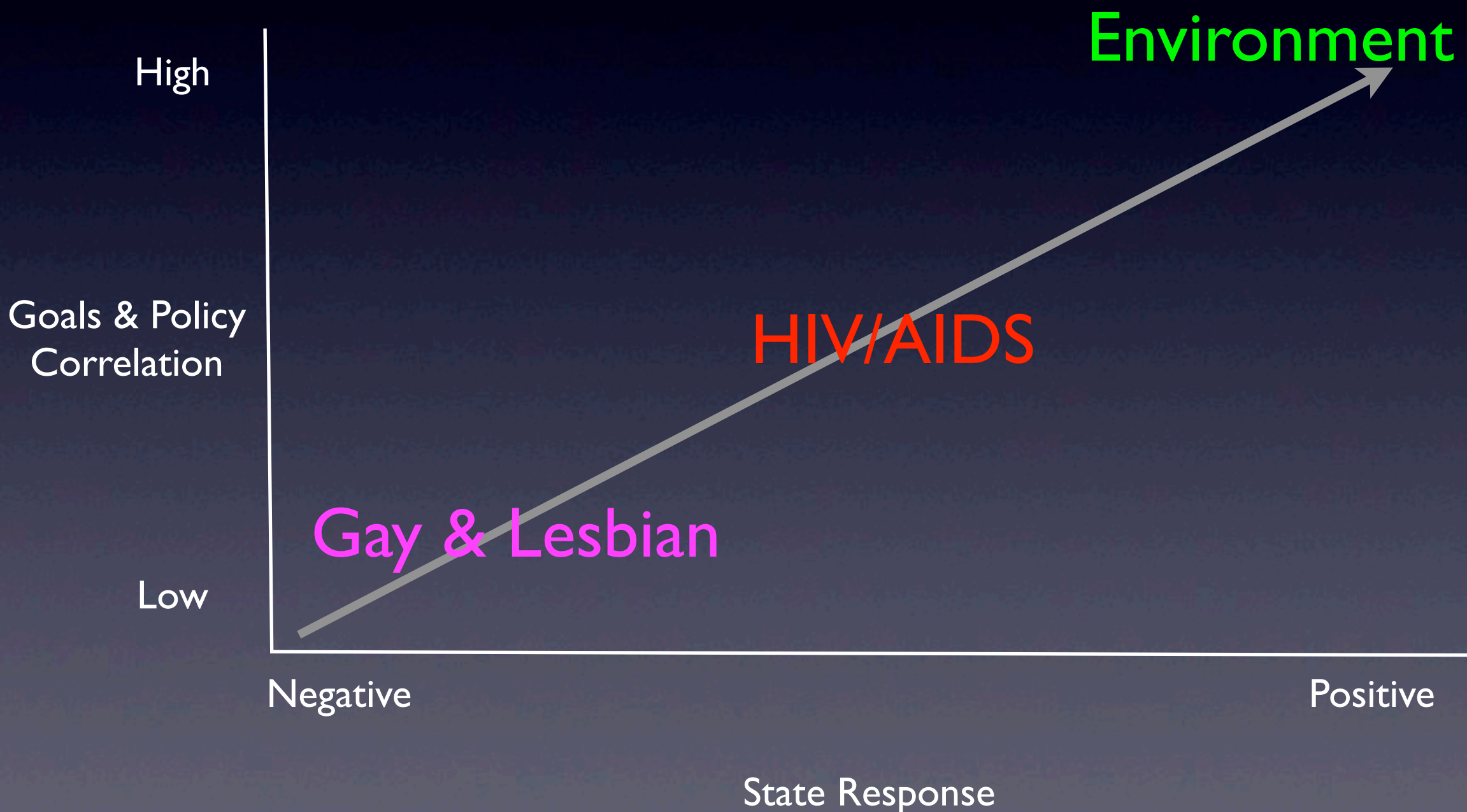
## The analytical framework

- *Political Opportunities*: small 'policy windows', not 'big opportunities'
- *Economic Opportunities*: financial resources, often tied to political opportunities
- *Personal Opportunities*: strong, but fickle and fleeting relationships

# Opportunities emerge by accident and design

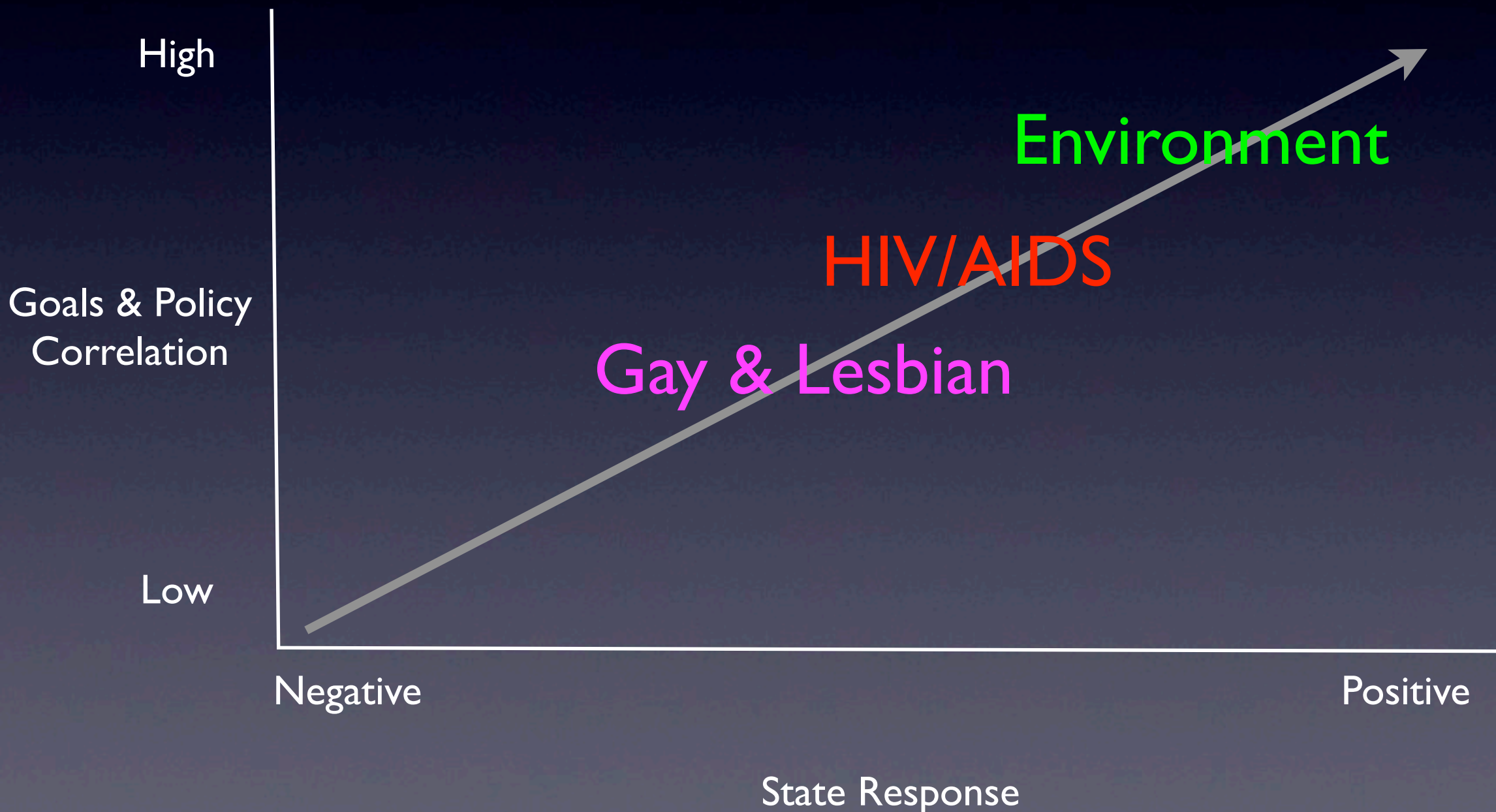
- Economic development has side effects; state knows problems need to be solved
- Decentralization and the retreating state (*small state, big society* / 小政府，大社会)
- State management through legal registration (see *The China Quarterly* 2011)

# Received wisdom: expect different relations across issue areas





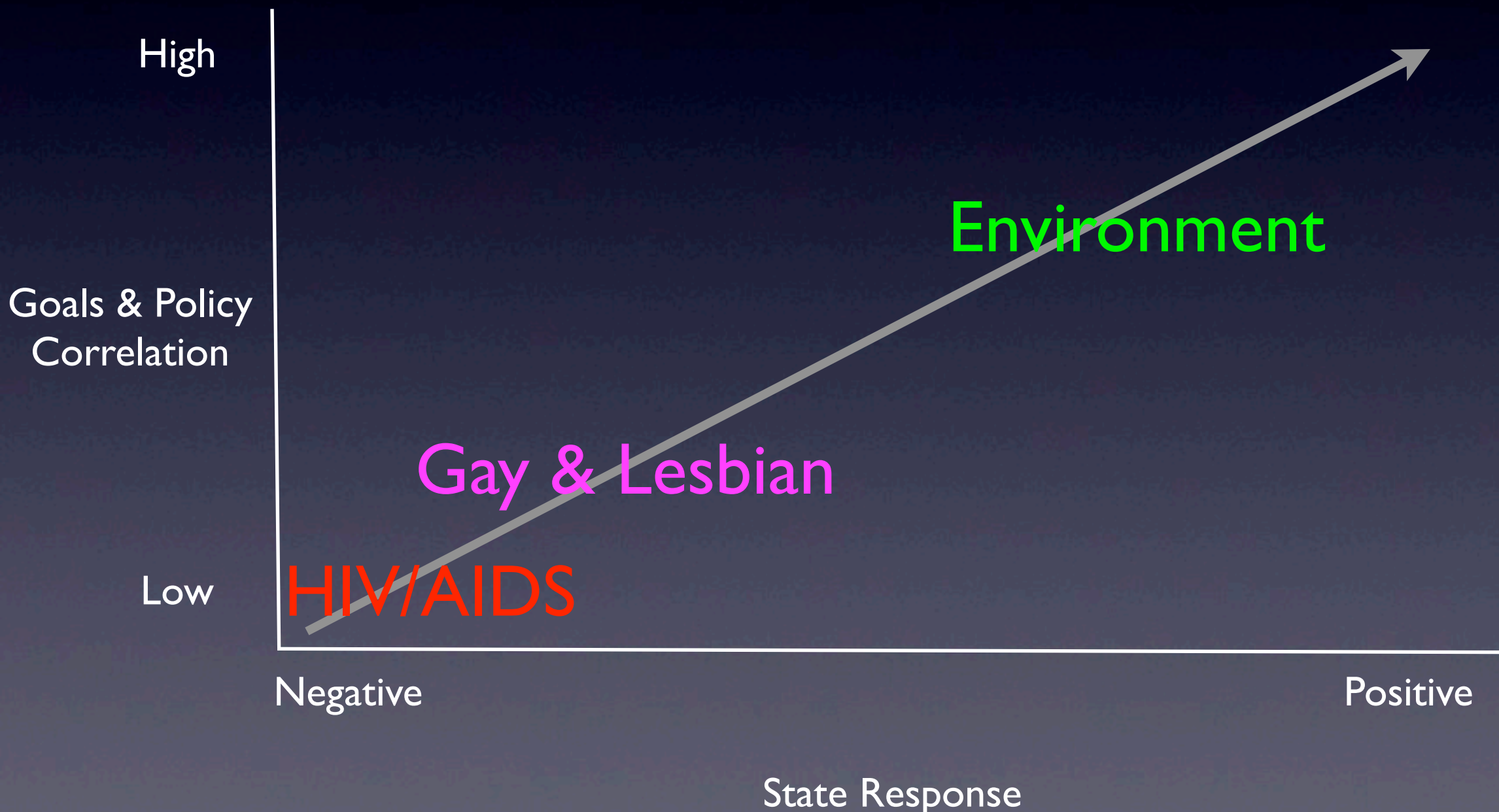
# NGO-state relations were mostly as expected in Beijing...



But these patterns in Beijing were rarely duplicated elsewhere

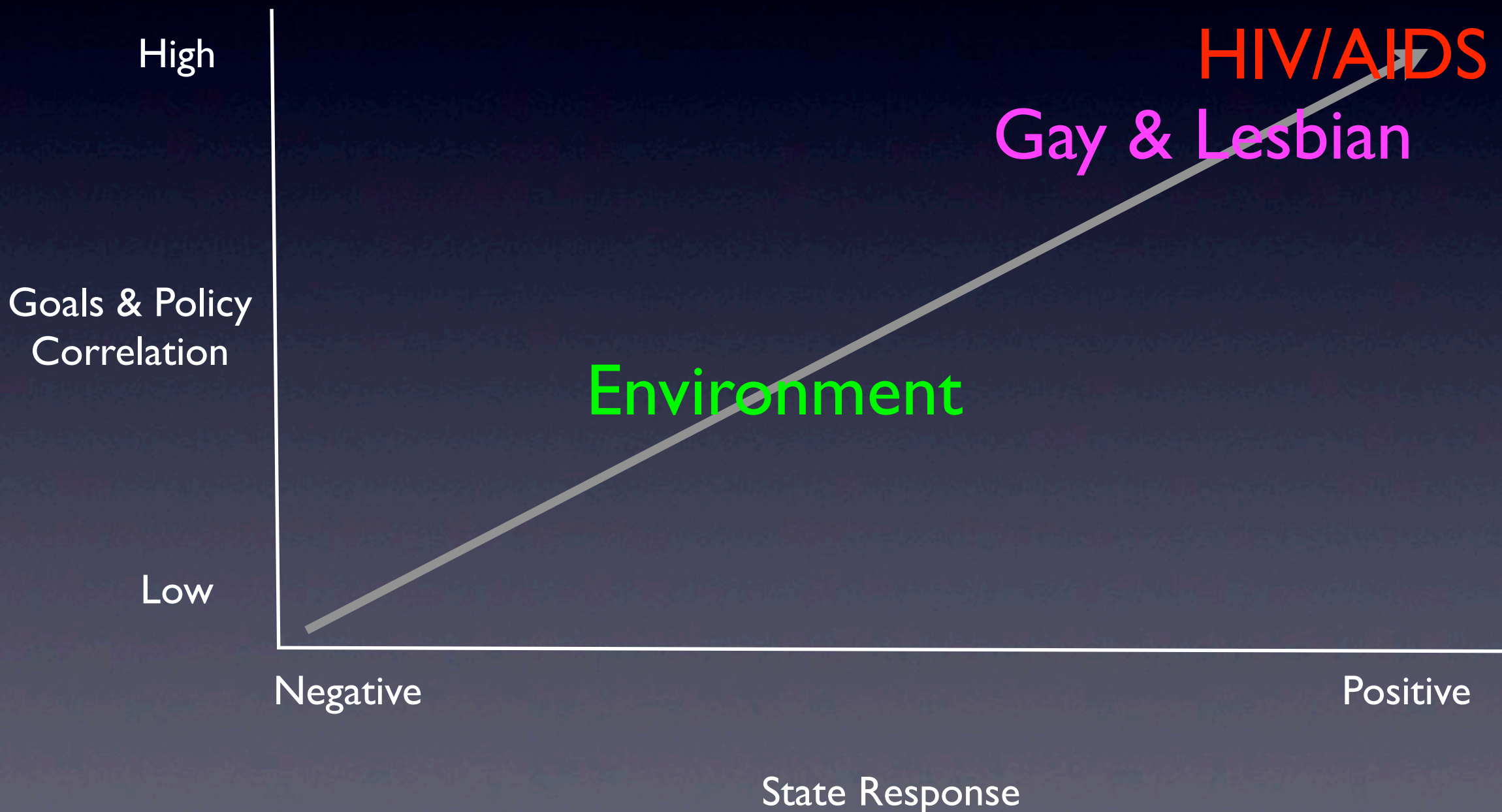
- Local interests differ from and matter *more* than central interests
  - Decentralization plays important role
- Incentive structures for cadre promotion complicate political space for NGOs
  - Interests in *economic development* can increase or decrease opportunities

# Henan: reputational concerns close space, especially for HIV/AIDS work





# Yunnan: economic interests changed opportunities for issue areas



# All (Chinese NGO) politics are local

- NGOs choices are highly constrained by local government interests; close relations with the center *don't* guarantee viability
- Issues and regions that were once 'heaven' for NGOs might quickly turn into 'hell'
- As government interests change, NGOs must adapt to stay in their good graces

# Agency matters: NGOs can adapt to enjoy more opportunities

- Adjust group activities to match (local) government interests, rhetorically and substantively
- Increase transparency, actively and passively
- Give government credit for NGO success
- Avoid networking with other organizations; keep a distance from 'troublemakers'



# Theoretical and empirical implications

- Relationship between NGOs and authoritarian governments is not zero-sum
  - ‘Co-dependent’ state–society relations
- NGOs can, surprisingly, *strengthen* authoritarianism
- By de-romanticizing NGOs and leaders their strategic and economic behavior is revealed

# Understanding NGO development helps explain other emerging patterns

- Working carefully within confines of the system, NGOs can make policy change (at the margins)
  - Funders might not be able to achieve dual goals of tackling social problems *and* build civil society
  - Explains the appeal of alternative models of funding for NGOs—*social entrepreneurship*
- Success in China could mean this model of state-society relations is exportable

# Exporting China's model of state-society relations?

- The society-side of the 'go out' policy
- What happens when NGOs who are doing the 'teaching' have themselves emerged within an entirely different political context?
- You know your own environment best; do you do as you were taught?
- What effect could this have on the development of NGO-state relations elsewhere?



# Hypothesizing the effect of Chinese NGOs on local NGOs

- $H_0$  No effect
- $H_1$  Effect, but unintended and weak (no state links?); pro-authoritarian
- $H_2$  Effect, but intended and strong (state links?); pro-authoritarian
- $H_3$  Effect, but not as state intended; pro-democracy, 'transnational activism'?
- $H_4$  Chinese NGOs re-socialized by others, re-learn from Western NGOs operating in same context?
- $H_5$  Chinese NGOs and Western NGOs conflict, a 'soft power war'?
- $H_6$  Effect of Chinese NGOs and Western NGOs not too different; co-dependent state-society relations universal?

# Testing the hypotheses

- Funding sources likely matter; ‘independent’ v. state-supported?
- British Academy-funded research to commence Spring/Summer 2014
  - Interview Chinese NGOs operating in Malawi, Zambia, and Tanzania; and their African counterparts
- Other comparative research examining Chinese NGOs operating in Southeast Asia



SOCIAL  
ORGANIZATIONS  
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STATE IN CHINA

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# Thank you!

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