

The Conception and Socio-Cultural Attributes of the Frontier Territories

Anna Nemirovskaya

Senior Research Fellow

Roberto Foa

Research Fellow

Laboratory for Comparative Social
Research

Higher School of Economics

Sankt-Petersburg, Russia

This presentation will focus on the ideas, methodology, issues of the regional typology and socio-cultural attributes of countries characterized by **the presence of obvious center and frontier areas due to historical features of population settlement and distribution in their territory**: the United States, Russia, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, China, Mexico and Australia.

Historical descriptions, national statistics and sociological research suggest that the particular socio-cultural space of the frontier is not only a fact of the historical formation of American society, but a broader social phenomenon that is characteristic of other countries. Based on an analysis of **the World Value Survey database**, this presentation will show key distinctive features of the cultural spaces of core and frontier territories.

«Frontier Thesis» — the idea proposed by American historian Frederic Turner, who explained the specific features of the development of the USA by the interaction of the settlers with the frontier (the boundary of American settlements). Thus Turner tried to prove the originality of social institutions of the United States and the diversity within the American nation due to such interaction.

The 1990-ies and the beginning of the XXI-st century – the revival of interest to the **frontier theory in social sciences**, especially social anthropology, social history, historiography, cultural studies and even economics.

The **Frontier Thesis** is the argument advanced by historian Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893 that the origin of the distinctive egalitarian, democratic, aggressive, and innovative features of the American character has been the American frontier experience.

He stressed the process — the moving frontier line — and the impact it had on pioneers going through the process. In the thesis, the frontier established liberty by releasing Americans from European mind-sets and ending prior customs of the 19th century.

Turner first announced his thesis in a paper entitled *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, delivered to the American Historical Association in 1893 in Chicago. Turner elaborated on the theme in his advanced history lectures and in a series of essays published over the next 25 years, published along with his initial paper as *The Frontier in American History*. (from Wikipedia)

In 1491, Europeans occupied a small, peripheral peninsula accounting for, at most, 6.8% of the world's landmass. Four centuries later, the peoples of the European peninsula had charted, conquered, and settled much of North America, Australasia, South America, and, via the Russian Empire, the northern third of Asia - a group of territories accounting for a phenomenal 45.1% of the world's surface (The Americas constitute 42,549,000 km², Siberia and Central Asia 16,806,550km², Australasia 7,885,000km², out of a total global landmass of 148,940,000km². Europe's landmass, including European Russia, is 10,180,000km²).

“Frontier countries”, like Brazil, Russia, the United States, and Canada are remarkably different in respect to their climate, governance, and economic institutions, but one thing they have in common: that the elites of their capitals and Atlantic littoral consider themselves, in varying degrees and quantities, as ‘European’; while their interior populations consider themselves the natives and true denizens of their land.

This, we argue, is the distinctive pattern of a frontier society, in which the first wave of settlers establishes itself according to the tastes and hierarchies of the motherland, while subsequent waves, living in sheltered terrains distant from worldly affairs, identify instead with the great landmass which they have, with great difficulty, brought into mastery.

It is also why each of these societies, at some point in its history, must wrestle with **the tension between core and periphery**, which politically is a struggle between the cosmopolitan, liberal, and deferential norms of the coast, and the isolationist, conservative, and economically libertarian values of the frontier.

Typical features of frontier territory and society:

- ethnic and cultural heterogeneity of groups (and, later, the territories where they settle)
- frontier groups are unequal in their size
- persistent ambivalent-conflict interaction
- the original gender imbalance in the dominant group of the frontier
- socio-cultural and ethnic assimilation of frontier groups
- marginal geopolitical location of the frontier territory
- the lack of clear boundaries - public and internal “quasi-boundaries” (presence of "natural border lines," resonating space frontier)
- the center zone of frontier is limited to city life
- de facto colonial status of the territory
- the lack of theoretical understanding what the targeted regional policy should be
- nominal government
- peculiar system of local administration, distinct from that of the mother country
- loose management, administration, comprador local "non-resident“ elites
- administrative lawlessness and outrage
- a higher, in comparison to metropoly, degree of horizontal and vertical mobility
- unformed population, fragmented social structure.

(Summarized by I.P. Basalaeva according to historiographic sources, research and literary texts, 2012)

This project examines in greater detail the social and political cultures of the frontier, studying differences in social capital, history, governance, and political preferences among frontier regions, relative to their core state areas.

Using data from the six waves of the World Values Surveys, plus a range of statistical sources, we show significant yet predictable differences among frontier regions in areas ranging from voluntary association, to civic activism, to quality of institutions and political preferences.

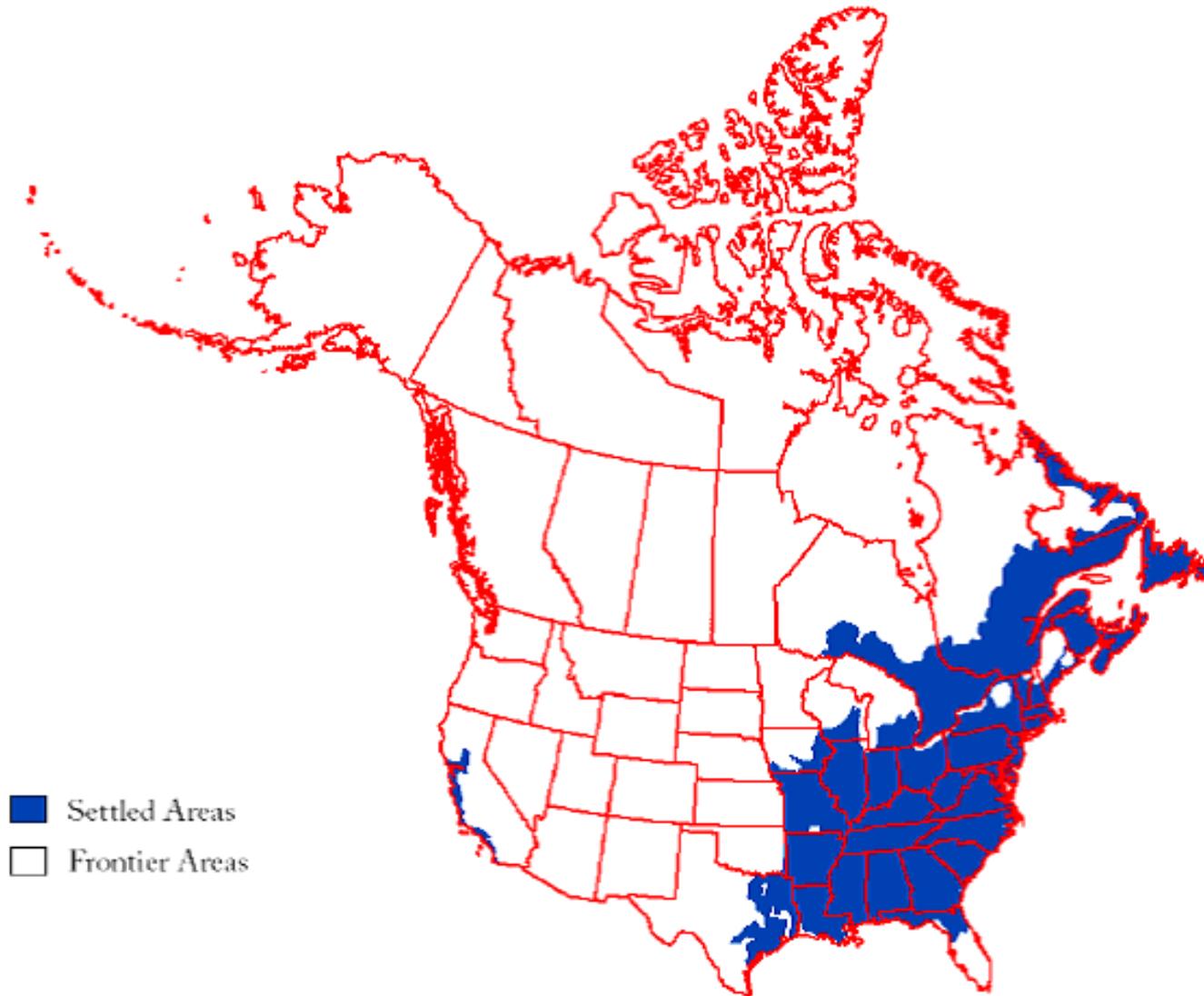
The frontier may be defined by several attributes, including **administrative remoteness (distance from the central government), population sparsity, or the relatively recent arrival of its transitory population.**

For the purpose of this project we understand frontier zones as **essentially far flung regions in which most of the population are migrants**, or the children of migrants, and in which, by consequence, the institutions of public order, the police and judiciary to local government and administration, are relatively young and newly formed.

It is **the recency of administrative structures**, we argue, which constitutes the core of the frontier, and other attributes which are contributors. Areas with low population density may or may not be frontier zones, for example, though many frontier zones have low population density by virtue of the recent origin of the inhabitants; **the arrival of a populus into a formerly blank geography, in new townships, and thus new mayoralties, new electoral districts, is a typical characteristic of the frontier.**

	Distance from Political Authority	Population Sparsity	<i>Net Migration, 1950-</i>
Brazilian Interior			
- North (Amazonas)	2860km*	3.8/km ²	
- Centre-West	930km*	8.1/km ²	
- <i>national av.</i>		22/km ²	
Canadian West			
- Alberta	2874km	5.9/km ²	High
- British Columbia	3551km	4.76/km ²	Medium
- Saskatchewan	2213km	1.75/km ²	Medium
- <i>national av.</i>		3.41/km ²	
United States Frontier			
- Southwest	1905km	28.5/km ²	High
- California	3700km	93.3/km ²	Medium
- Northwest	3746km	25.41/km ²	Medium
- Rocky Mountains	3189km	25.55/km ²	High
- Alaska	5422km	0.49/km ²	High
- Upper Midwest	1502km	15.0/km ²	Low
- <i>national av.</i>		32/km ²	
Russian Federation			
- Siberia	2821km	3.76/km ²	High
- Far East	6434km	1.0/km ²	High
- Urals	1159km	6.8/km ²	Low
- Northern Provinces	995km		Low
- <i>national av.</i>		8.3/km ²	
Argentina			
- Cordoba	625km	Low	Low
- Mendoza	958km	Medium	Low
- <i>national av.</i>		14/km ²	
Chinese Western Provinces			
- Xinjiang	2414km	13/km ²	Low*
- <i>national av.</i>		140/km ²	
Kazakhstan			
- <i>national av.</i>		5.8/km ²	

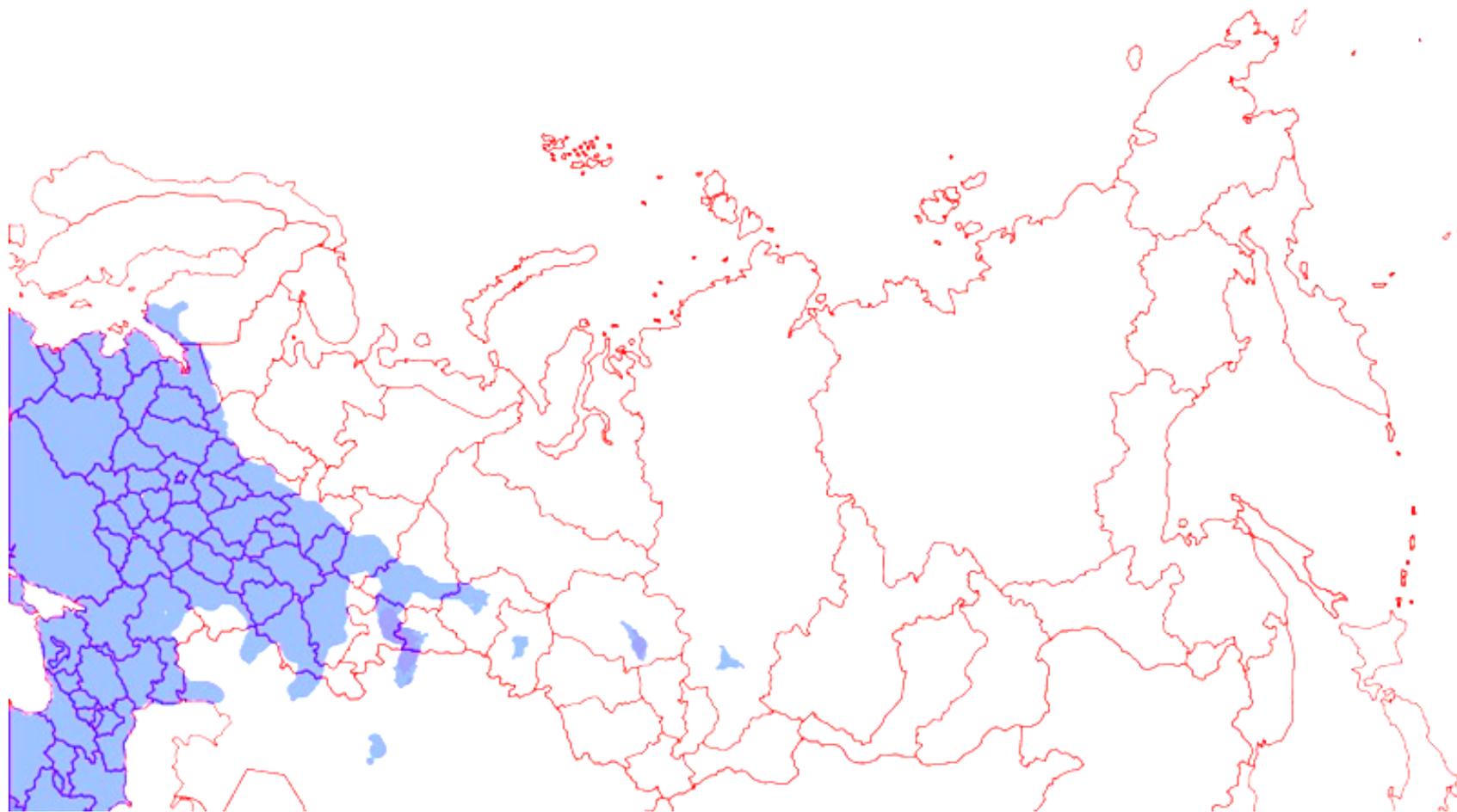
The Frontier in North America circa 1850
(Source: Robinson and Garcia-Jimeno, 2009)



The Frontier in South America circa 1850
(Source: Robinson and Garcia-Jimeno, 2009)



The Frontier in Russia circa 1897



Frontier Regions of the United States



Frontier Regions of Canada



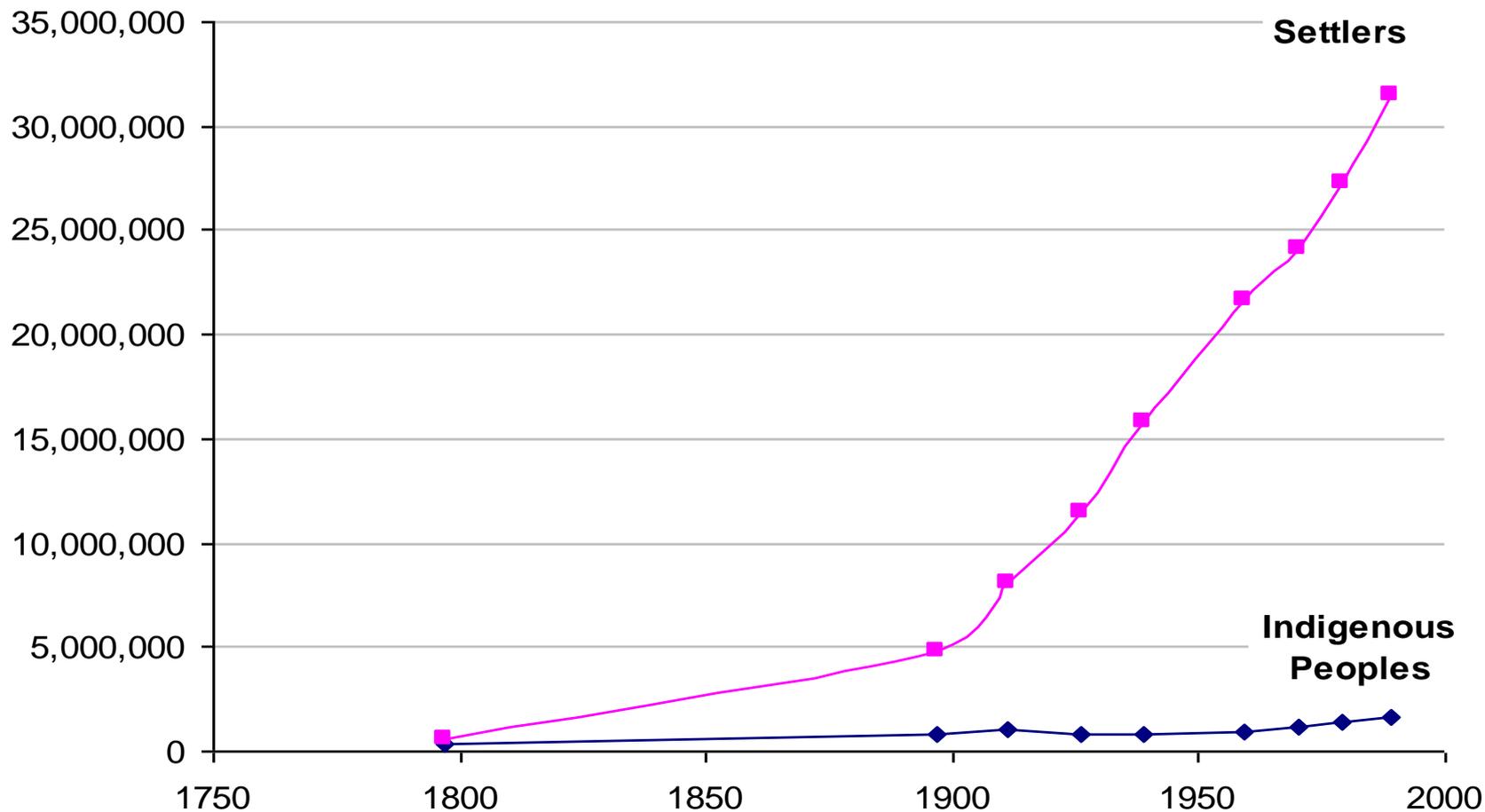
Frontier Regions of Brazil



Frontier Regions of Russia

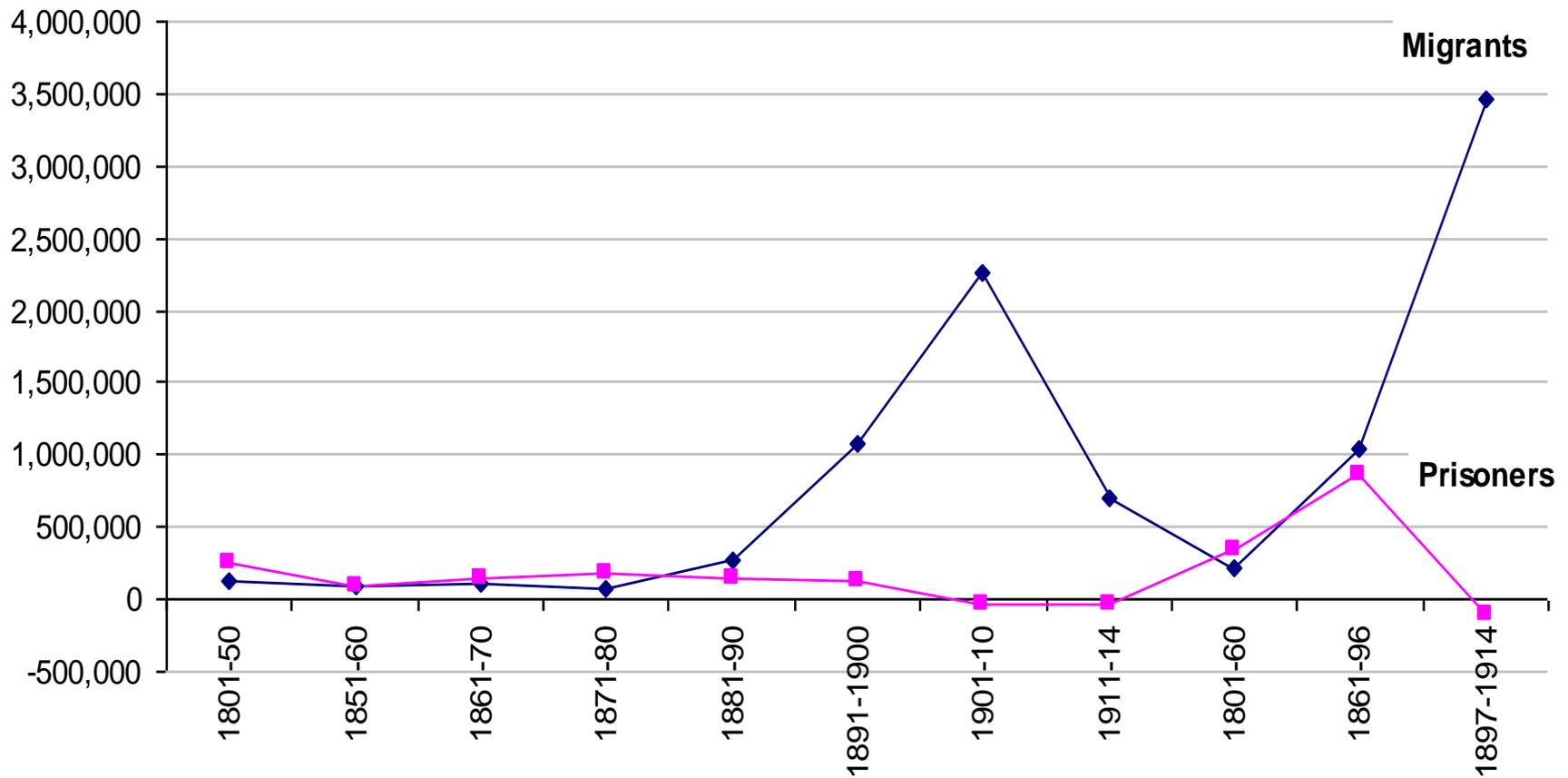


Indigenous and non-Indigenous Population of Siberia, 1796-1989



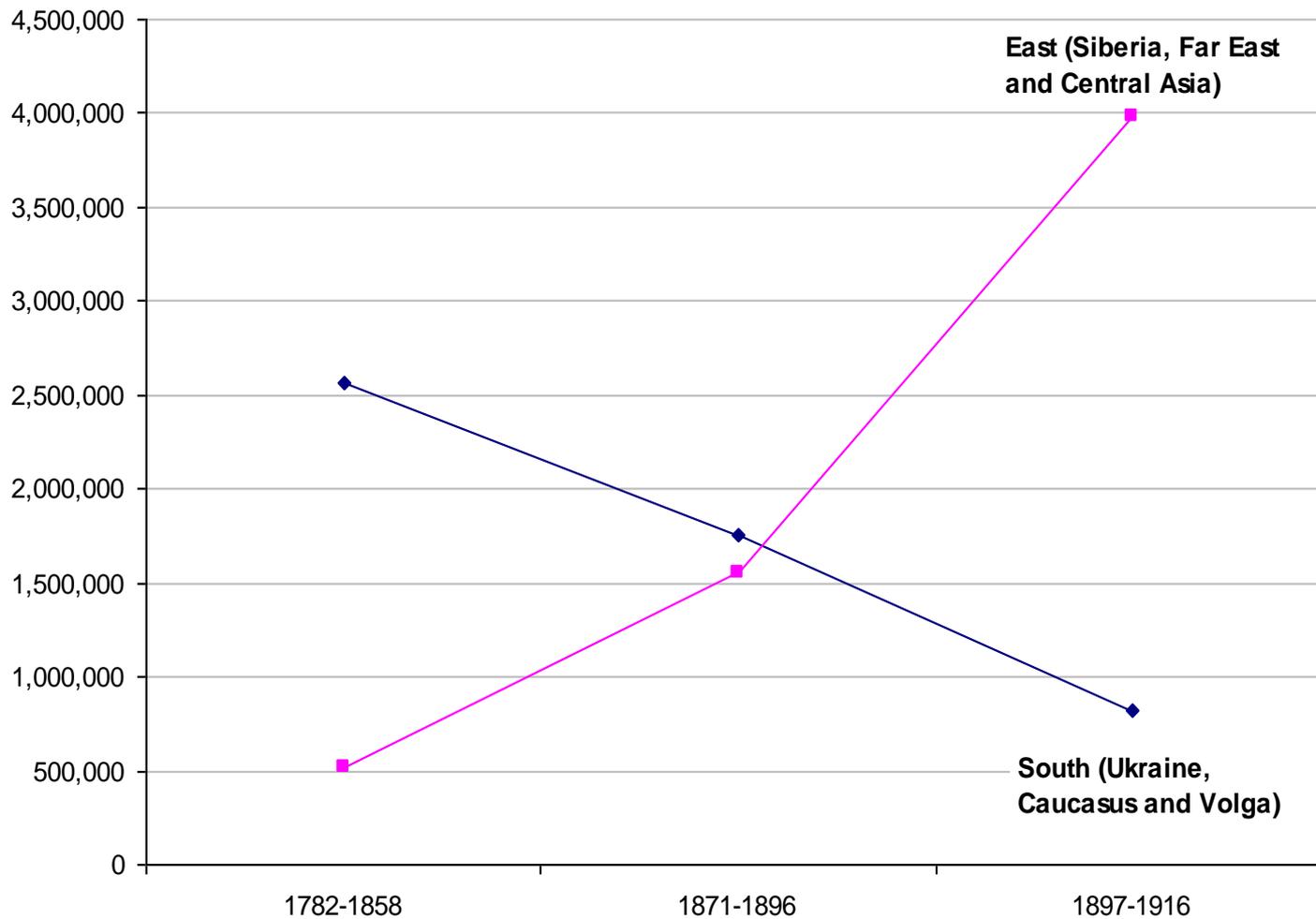
Sources: 1976-7 data from Gagemeister, 1854. Subsequent data cited in Forsyth, James A., *History of the Peoples of Siberia. Russia's North Asian Colony, 1581-1990*. P. 405. Calculated from *Aziatskaya Rossia*, vol. I, pp. 82-5; V.I. Kozlov, *Natsionalnosti SSSR*, 2nd edn, 1982, pp. 285-7; *Narody Sibiri; USSR, Censuses, 1959, 1970, 1979*, and preliminary data for 1989 published in the Report on the USSR, 1990, no. 201, pp. 15-19.

Settlers in the Asian part of Russia, 1801-1914



Source: Obolenskiy V.V. (1928, C. 84). *International and inter-continental migrations in pre-war Russia and the USSR*. Moscow: Central Statistical Board.

Internal Migration Flows in Imperial Russia, 1782-1916

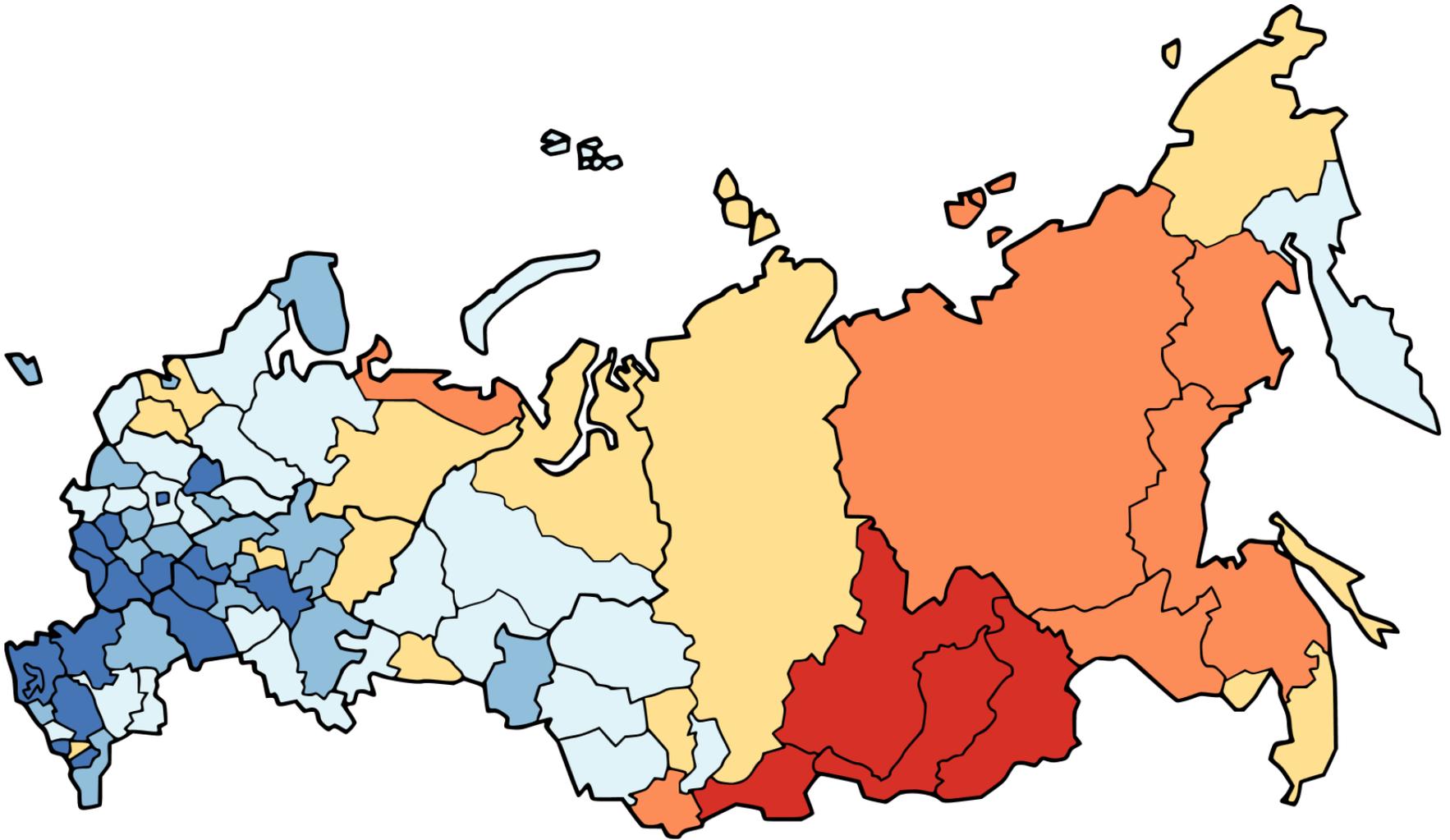


Source: Mironov B.N. (2009). *Historical sociology of Russia*. St. Petersburg.

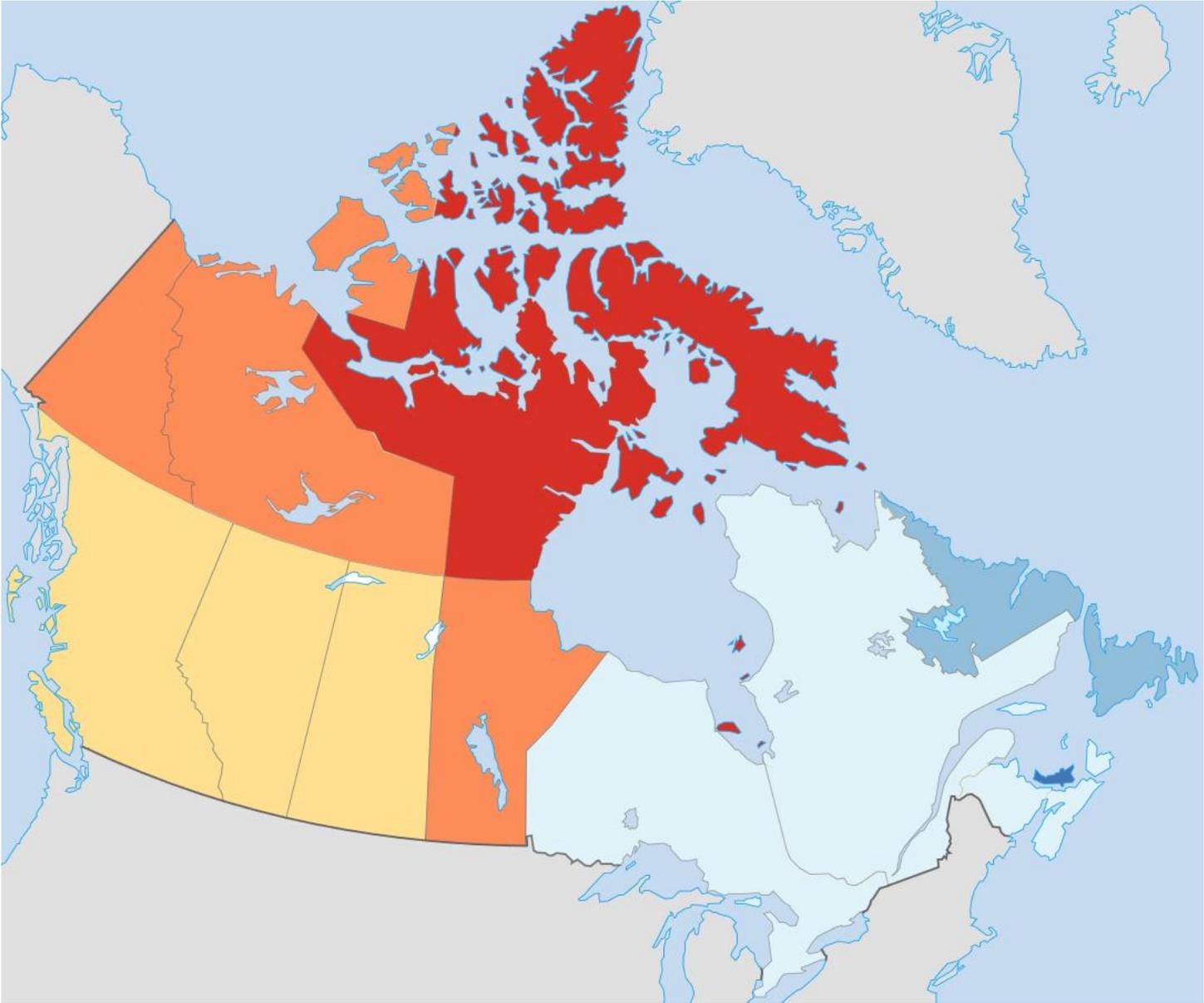
Internal deportations in the USSR

Period	Number of deportees
1920	45,000
1930-1931	2,050,000
1932-1934	535,000
1935-1938	260,000
1939-1941	395,000
1941-1942	1,200,000
1943-1944	870,000
1944-1945	260,000
1947-1952	400,000
Total	6,015,000

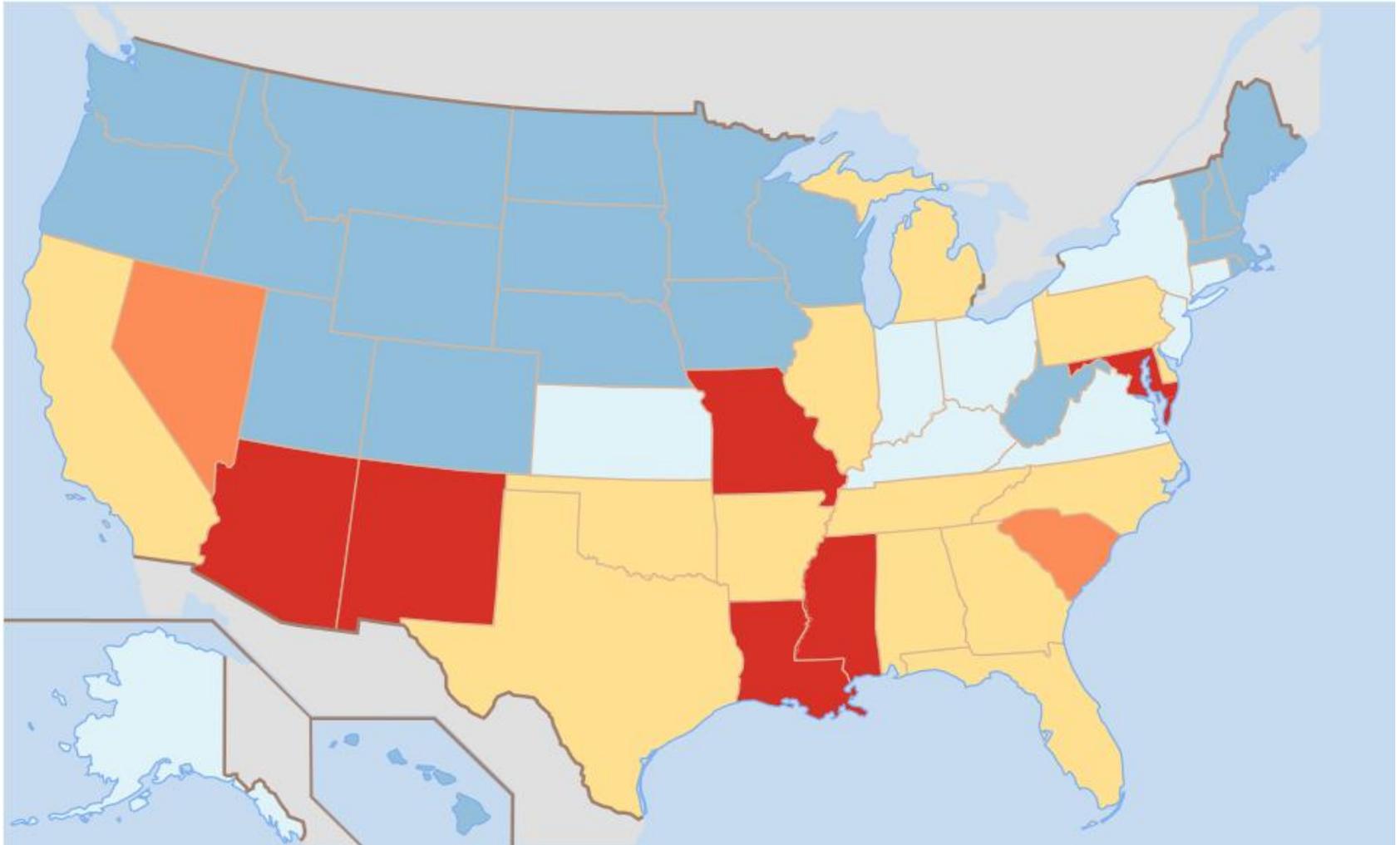
Homicide Rates In Russian Regions



Homicide Rates In Canadian Regions



Homicide Rates In the US Regions

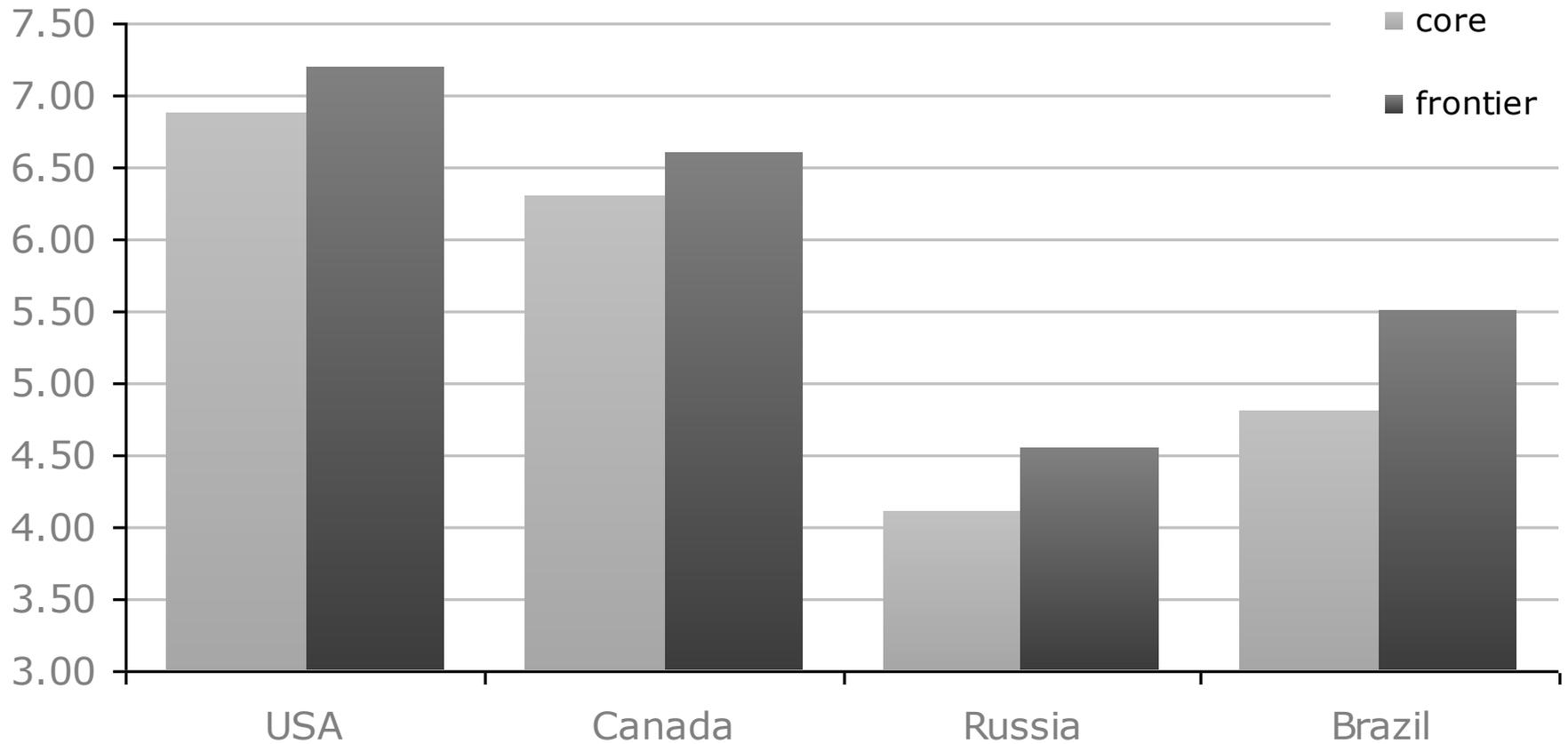


Socio-Cultural Attributes of the Frontier

- Individualism
- Economic libertarianism
- Greater reliance on social cooperation, less reliance on government

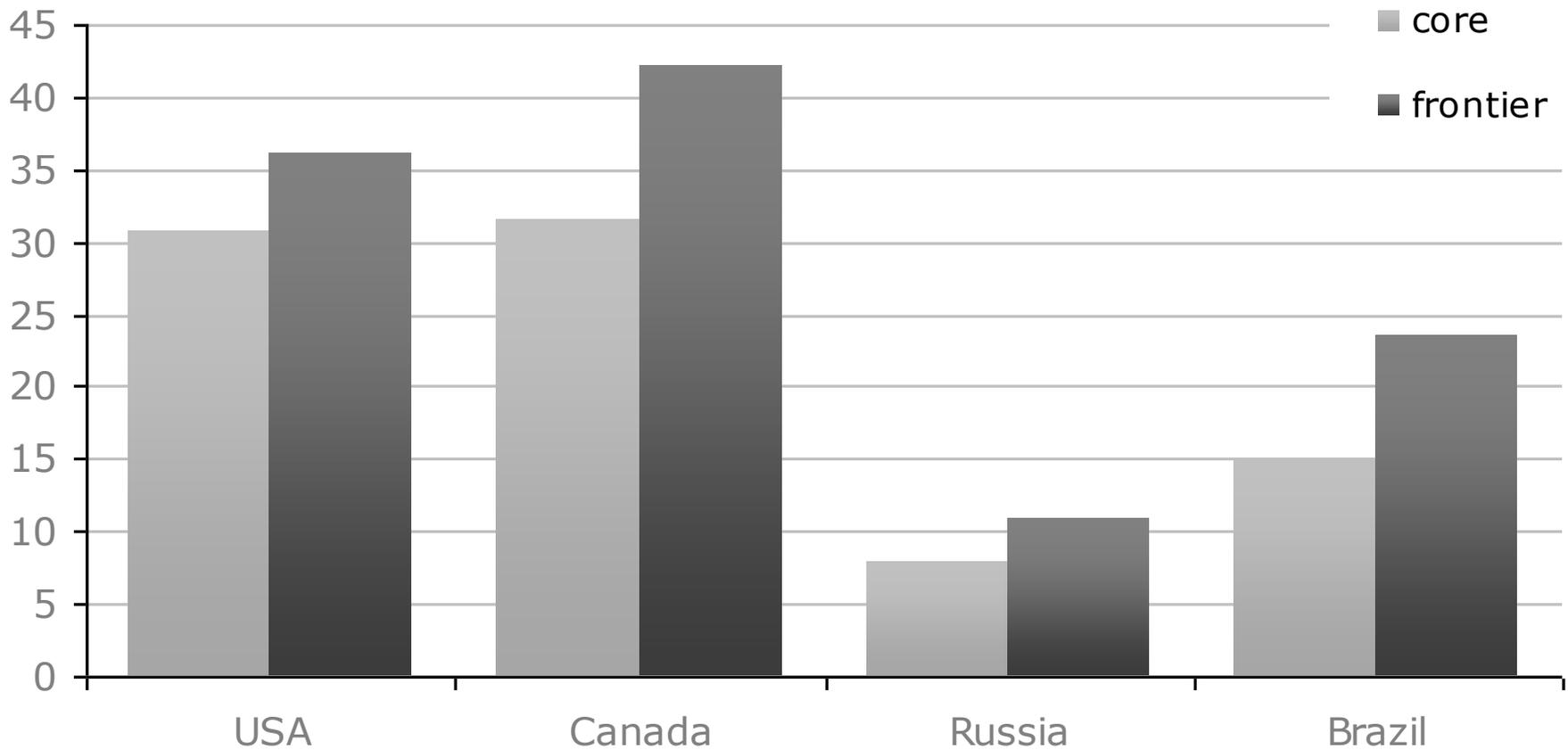
Individualism

Which of these views is closer to your own: '1' Government should take more responsibility, '10' Individuals should take more responsibility for themselves?

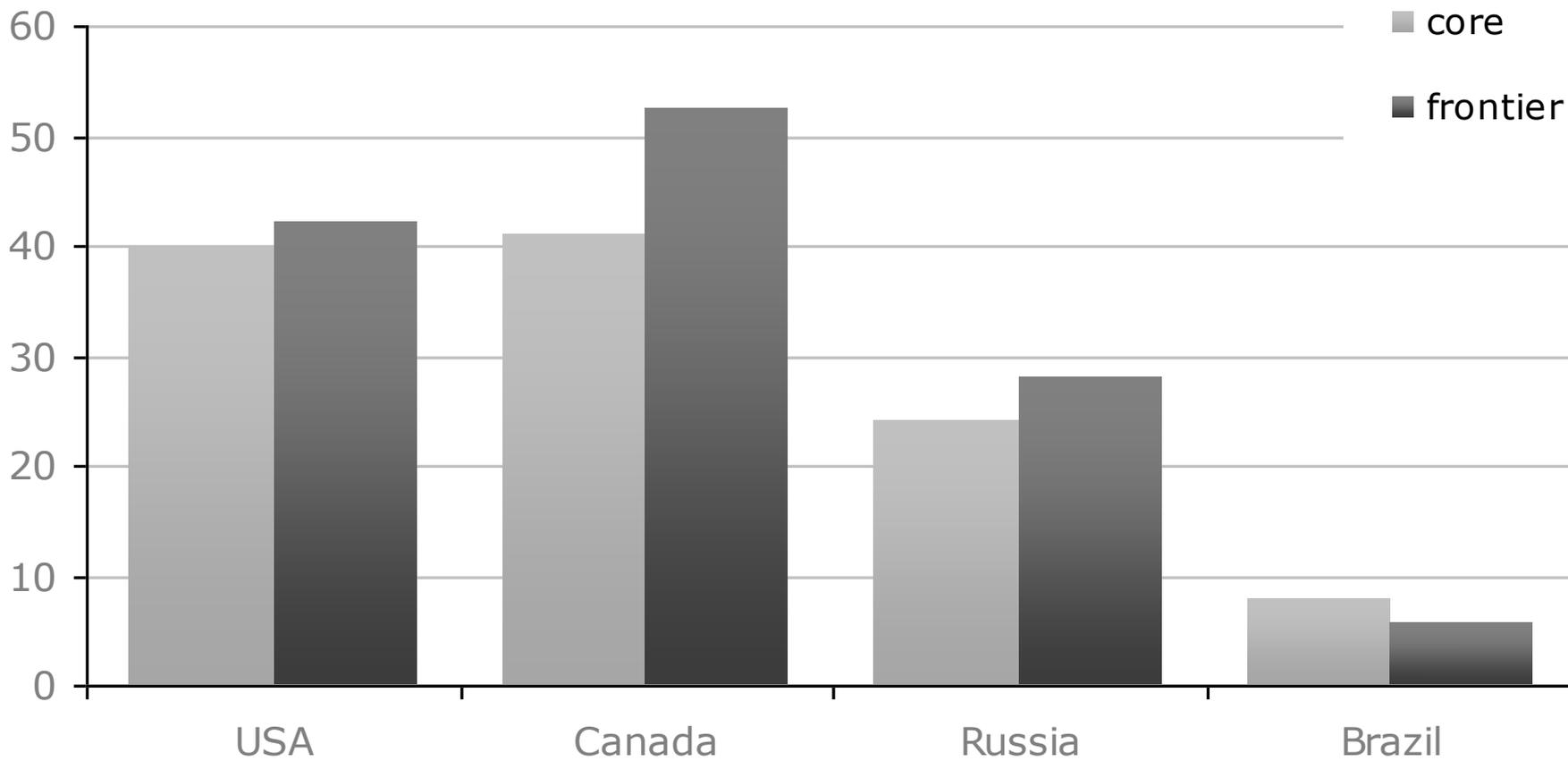


Social Cooperation

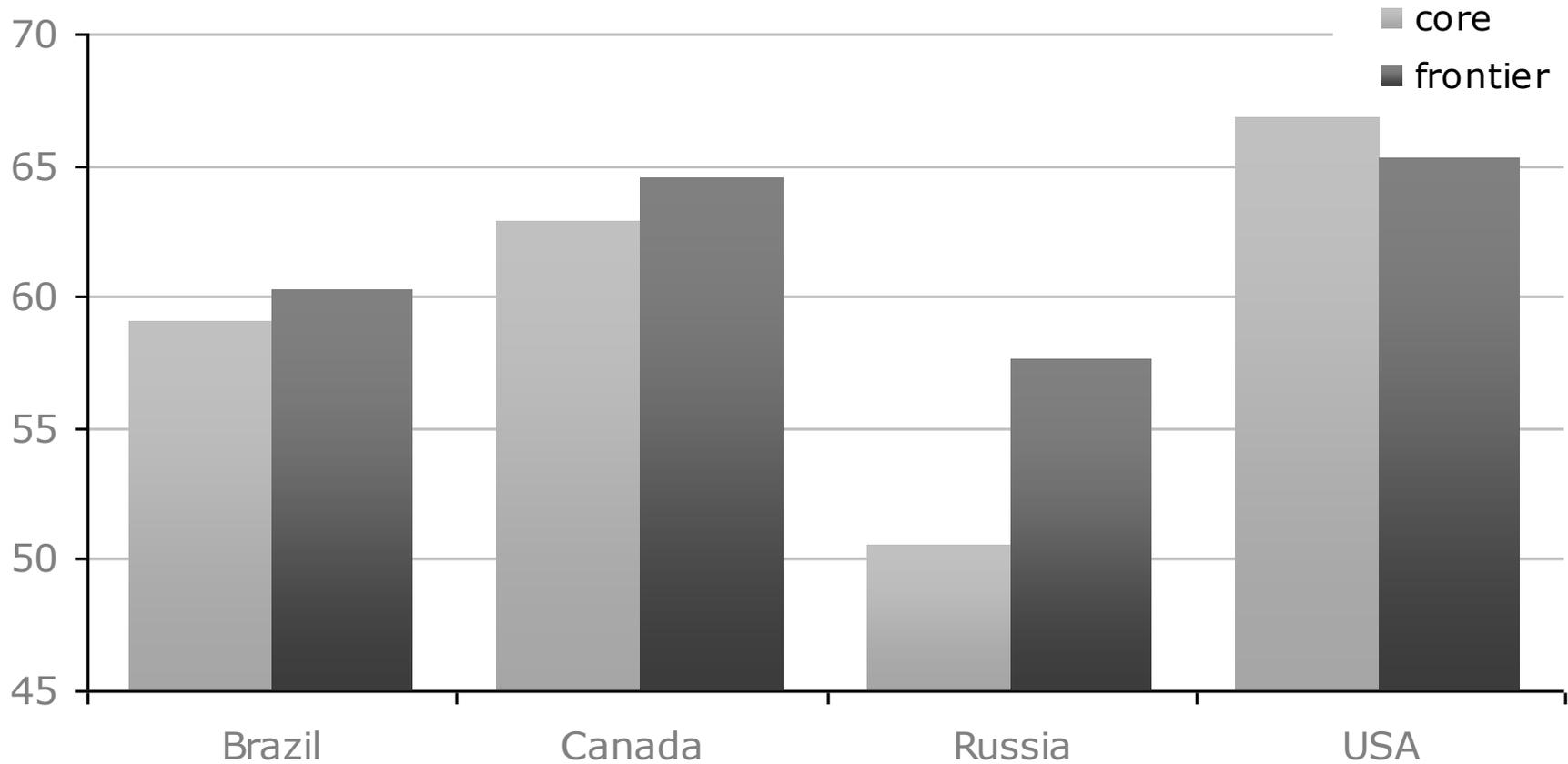
Percentage of Respondents who are Active or Inactive Members of Arts or Cultural Associations



Percentage who say that “In general, people can be trusted”

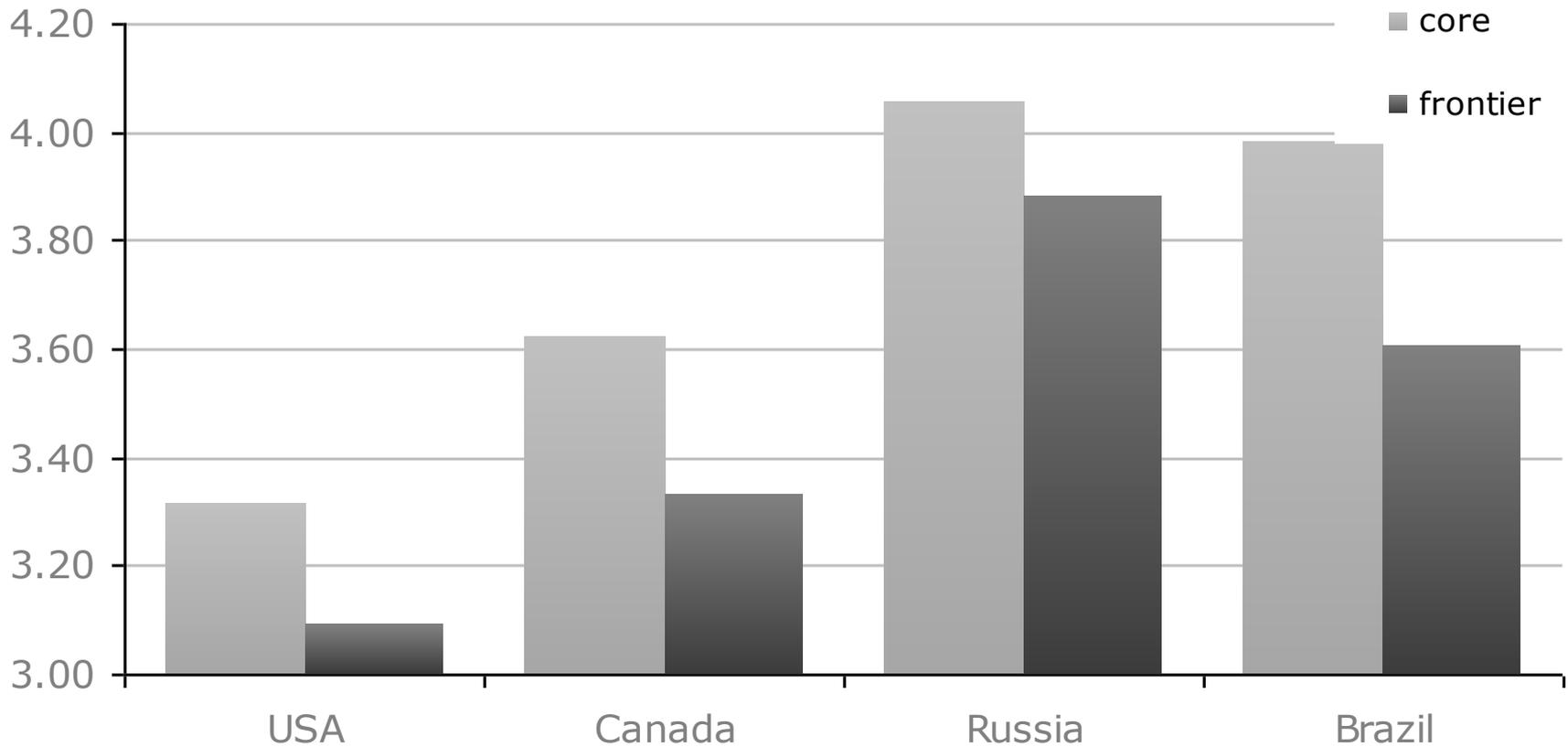


Percentage of Respondents Who 'Have Done' or 'Would be Willing to' Join a Peaceful Demonstration



Economic Libertarianism

Which of these views is closer to your own: '1' Competition is good, it stimulates people to work harder '10' Competition is harmful, it brings out the worst in people?

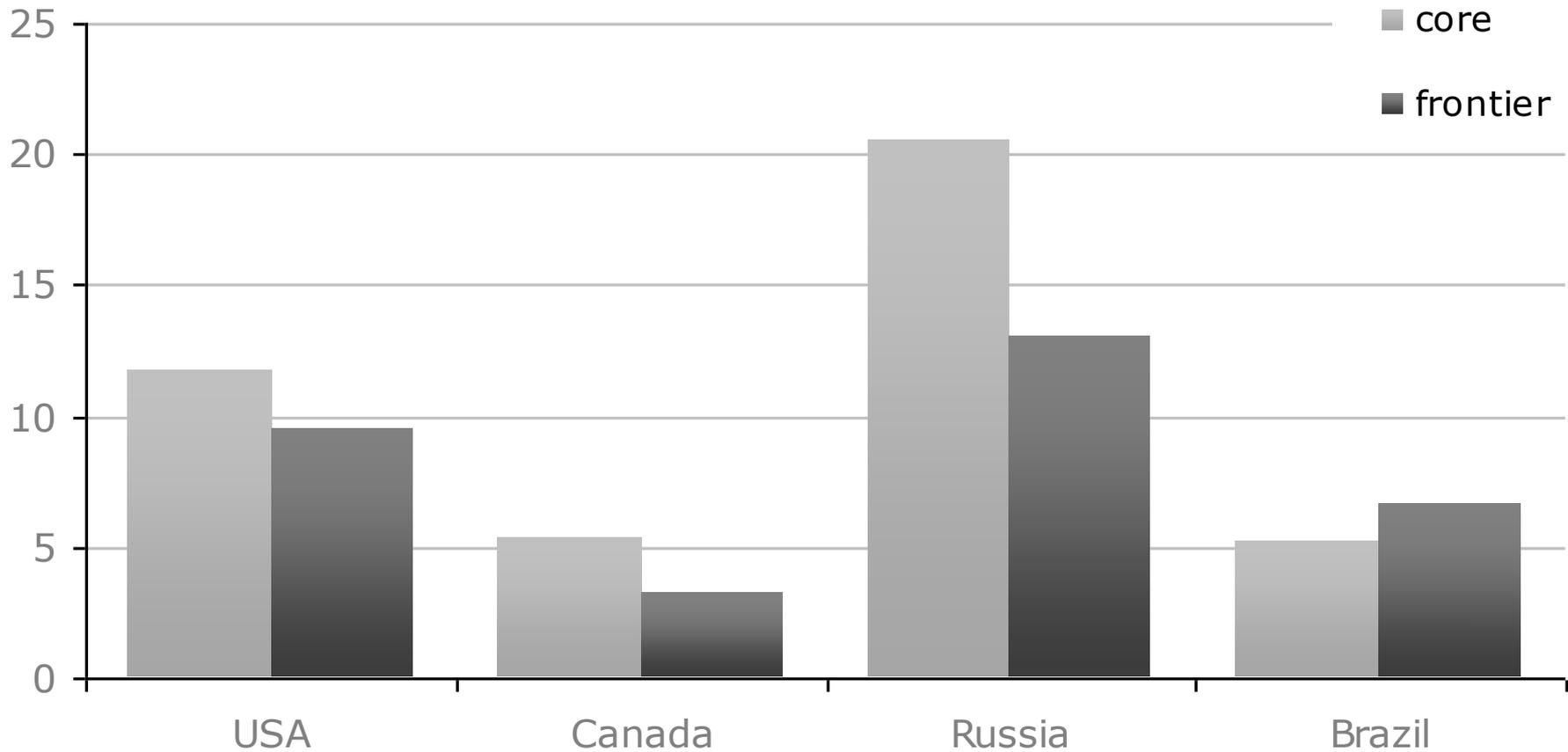


Tolerance

Tolerance?

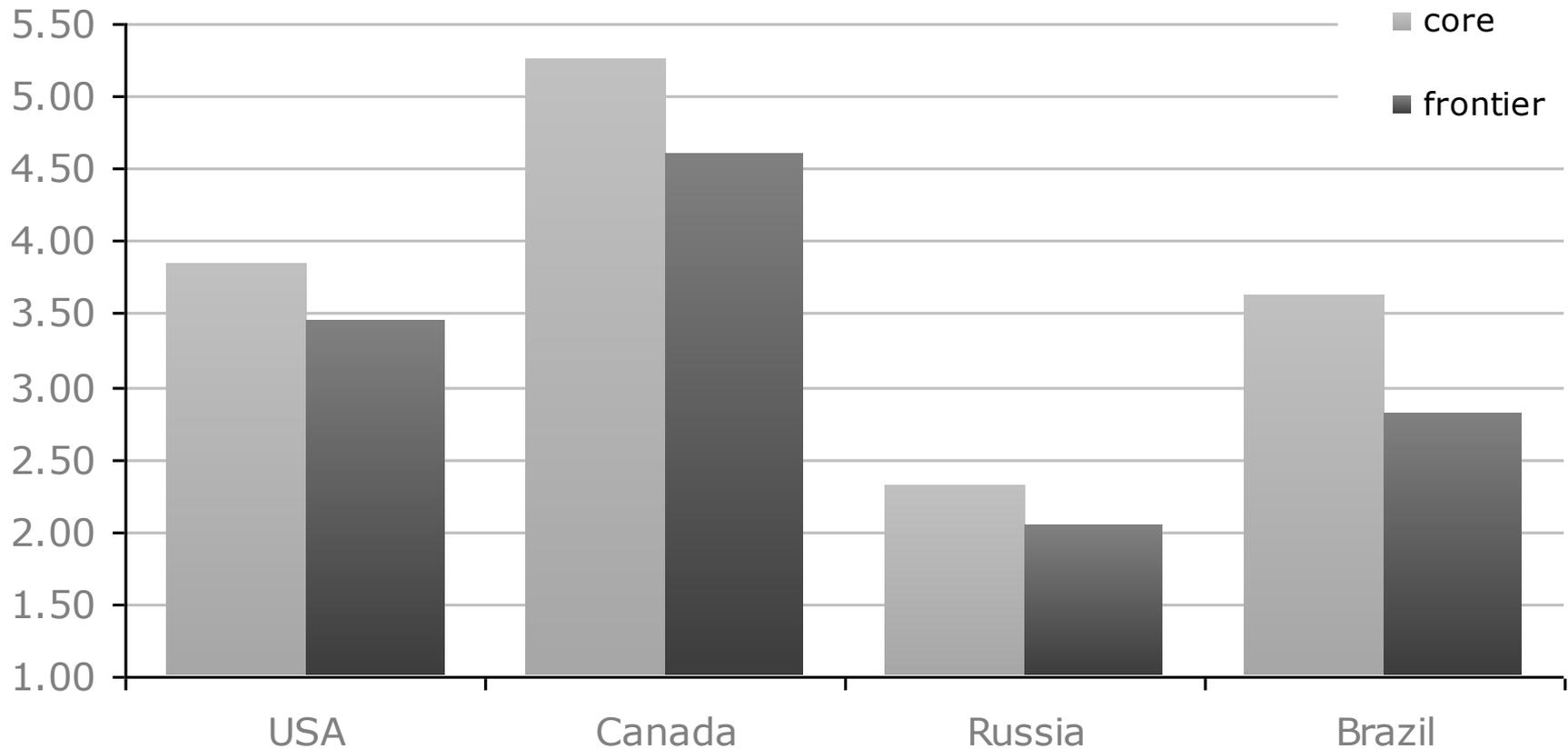
- In general, we find that frontier zones are more tolerant towards ascriptive attributes (e.g. race, migrant status) but *not* towards 'lifestyle' minorities (single mothers, homosexuals, drug addicts)
- This is consistent with the argument that frontier zones tend to be more individualistic and economically libertarian - but also socially conservative.

Percentage of Respondents Objecting to Having a 'Foreign Worker or an Immigrant' as a Neighbour



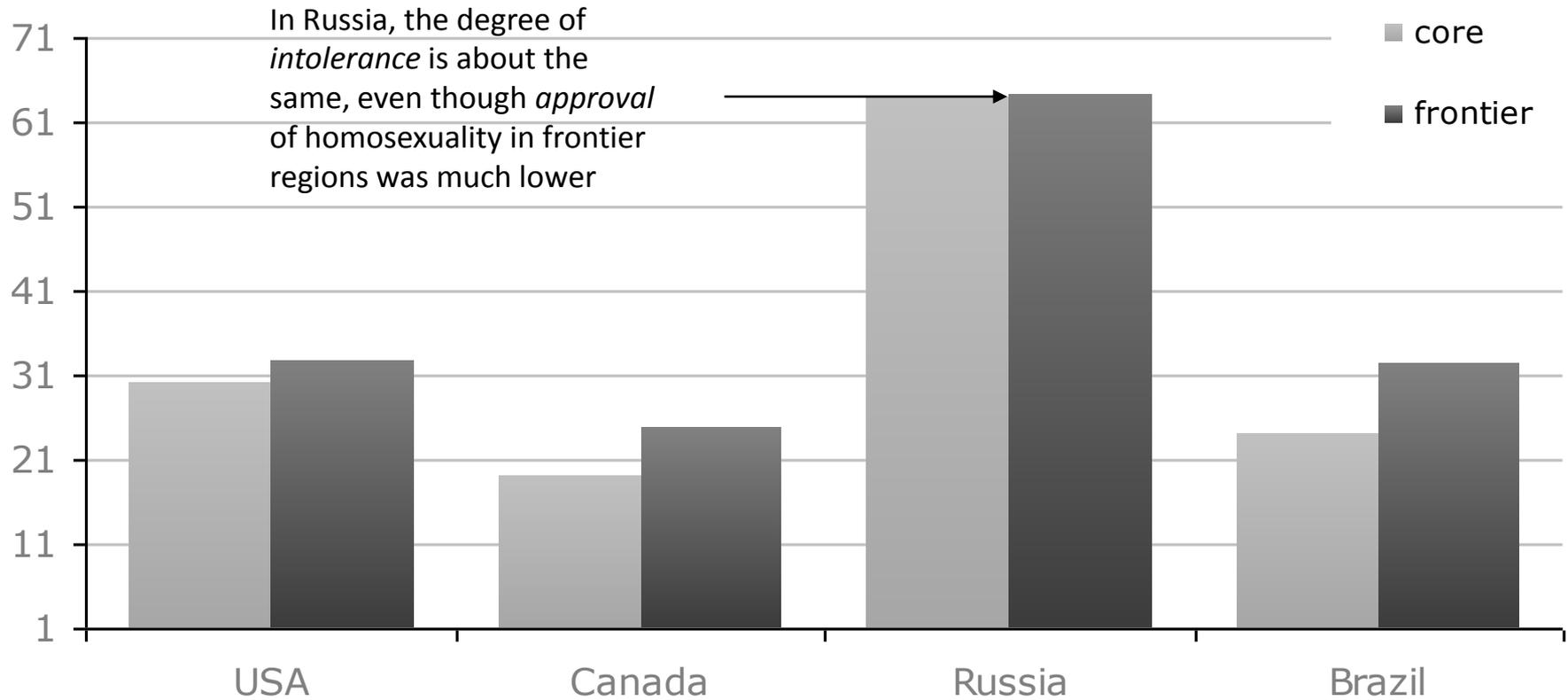
While Social Attitudes in Frontier Regions are *Significantly* more Conservative than in non-Frontier Regions...

[How justifiable is 'homosexuality', where 1 is 'never justifiable' and 10 is always justifiable?]



...Nonetheless, the degree of *intolerance* towards social minority groups is not as low as might be 'expected'

[Percentage of Respondents Objecting to Having a 'Homosexual' as a Neighbour]



* Sample: Russia, Canada, Brazil, USA	Trust	tolerate other race	tolerate immigrant	civic activism	voluntary (1)	voluntary (2)
Frontier Zone (2/0)	0.025*** (0.004)	0.004* (0.002)	0.005* (0.003)	0.008** (0.003)	0.01* (0.004)	0.008** (0.003)
Gender (1 = male)	0.011 (0.008)	0.01** (0.004)	0.007 (0.004)	-0.04*** (0.005)	0 (0.007)	0.002 (0.005)
Age	0.002*** (0)	-0.001*** (0)	-0.001*** (0)	-0.003*** (0)	0* (0)	0 (0)
Income	0.022*** (0.002)	0.002* (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.013*** (0.001)	0.021*** (0.001)	0.018*** (0.001)
Age of educational completion	0.005*** (0.001)	0.001** (0)	0.001*** (0)	0.005*** (0)	0.004*** (0)	-
Size of village/town	-0.003 (0.002)	0.000 (0.001)	0.003** (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.002)	0.001 (0.001)
year of survey	-0.041*** (0.004)	0.006** (0.002)	-0.008*** (0.002)	-0.007** (0.003)	-0.034*** (0.005)	-0.038*** (0.004)
Russia dummy variable	-0.194*** (0.011)	-0.044*** (0.006)	-0.061*** (0.007)	-0.306*** (0.008)	-	-0.257*** (0.011)
Brazil dummy variable	-0.266*** (0.013)	0.003 (0.006)	-0.002 (0.007)	-0.078*** (0.009)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.028*** (0.008)
US dummy variable	-0.028** (0.009)	-0.024*** (0.005)	-0.061*** (0.006)	0.025*** (0.007)	0.057*** (0.009)	0.051*** (0.008)
Constant	0.255*** (0.024)	1.923*** (0.012)	1.959*** (0.014)	0.78*** (0.017)	0.208*** (0.035)	0.34*** (0.028)
Adj. r²	0.121	0.01	0.017	0.179	0.142	0.248
N	14209	14472	14472	14370	5013	7557

* Sample excludes USA (only Russia, Canada and Brazil)	trust	tolerate other race	tolerate immigrant	activism	voluntary (1)	voluntary (2)
Frontier Zone	0.021*** (0.005)	0.003 (0.003)	0.003 (0.003)	0.013** (0.004)	0.016** (0.005)	0.011** (0.003)
Gender	-0.004* (0.001)	0.008 (0.005)	0.008 (0.005)	-0.041*** (0.007)	-0.001 (0.008)	0 (0.005)
Age	0 (0.008)	-0.001*** (0)	-0.001*** (0)	-0.003*** (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Income	0.001*** (0)	0.002* (0.001)	0.002 (0.001)	0.012*** (0.001)	0.017*** (0.002)	0.013*** (0.001)
Age of educational completion	0.019*** (0.002)	0.001* (0)	0.001* (0)	0.006*** (0)	0.004*** (0)	-
Size of town	-0.007*** (0.002)	-0.001 (0.001)	0 (0.001)	0 (0.001)	0 (0.002)	0.001 (0.001)
year of survey	-0.017*** (0.004)	0.003 (0.002)	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.023*** (0.003)	-	0.075*** (0.003)
Russia dummy variable	0.093*** (0.013)	-0.047*** (0.007)	-0.062*** (0.008)	-0.224*** (0.011)	-	-
Canada dummy variable	0.298*** (0.012)	-0.004 (0.007)	0 (0.007)	0.076*** (0.01)	0.015 (0.01)	0.035*** (0.007)
Constant	0.081** (0.025)	1.942*** (0.013)	1.963*** (0.014)	0.757*** (0.02)	0.059* (0.025)	-0.216*** (0.02)
Adj. r ²	0.126	0.011	0.016	0.179	0.074	0.194
N	11881	9724	9724	9658	2923	5145

* The sample includes all frontier countries	Tolerate homosexuals		Tolerate people of different race		Tolerate people with AIDS		Tolerate heavy drinkers		Tolerate immigrants / foreign workers	
Frontier Zone (2/0)	0,018*** (0,003)	0,019*** (0,003)	0,019*** (0,002)	0,017*** (0,002)	0,036*** (0,003)	0,034*** (0,003)	0,034*** (0,003)	0,028*** (0,003)	0,018*** (0,002)	0,018*** (0,002)
Gender (1 = male)	0,053*** (0,005)	0,058*** (0,005)	0,010** (0,003)	0,007** (0,004)	0,014** (0,004)	0,013** (0,004)	-0,079*** (0,005)	-0,078*** (0,005)	0,013*** (0,004)	0,011** (0,004)
Age	-0,001*** (0)	-0,002*** (0)	0*** (0)	-0,001*** (0)	-0,003*** (0)	-0,003*** (0)	-0,002*** (0)	-0,002*** (0)	-0,001*** (0)	-0,001*** (0)
Age of educational completion	0,029*** (0,001)	0,037*** (0,000)	0,029*** (0,001)	0,026*** (0,001)	0,040*** (0,001)	0,037*** (0,001)	-0,004*** (0,001)	-0,002** (0,001)	0,025*** (0,001)	0,021*** (0,001)
Size of village/town	0,001 (0,001)	0,002** (0,001)	0,011*** (0,001)	0,010*** (0,001)	0,003*** (0,001)	0,003*** (0,001)	-0,007*** (0,001)	-0,011*** (0,001)	0,010*** (0,001)	0,010*** (0,001)
Year of survey	-0,017*** (0)	0,015*** (0,000)	-0,001** (0)	-0,001** (0)	0,015*** (0)	0,015*** (0)	0,005*** (0)	0,004*** (0)	-0,001*** (0)	-0,001** (0)
Employment status			-0,006*** (0,001)	-0,006*** (0,001)	-	-0,003** (0,001)	0,003** (0,001)	0,002** (0,001)	-0,004*** (0,001)	-0,004*** (0,001)
Satisfaction with life	0,013*** (0,001)	-0,003** (0,001)	0,011*** (0,001)	0,009*** (0,001)	0,015*** (0,001)	0,013*** (0,001)	0,008*** (0,001)	0,005*** (0,001)		
Income									0,001 (0,001)	0,001 (0,001)
Russia dummy variable		-0,317*** (0,009)		0,073*** (0,006)						
USA dummy variable		-0,079*** (0,010)								
Argentina dummy variable		0,042*** (0,008)		0,105*** (0,008)		0,135*** (0,010)		0,210*** (0,011)		
Canada dummy variable				0,052*** (0,005)		0,096*** (0,007)				0,073*** (0,006)
Australia dummy variable										0,043*** (0,008)
Mexico dummy variable								0,111*** (0,007)		0,124*** (0,013)
Constant	-34,224*** (0,812)	-30,256*** (0,824)	2,536*** (0,593)	2,671*** (0,593)	-30,136*** (0,773)	-29,265*** (0,772)	-8,870*** (0,863)	-7,116*** (0,861)	3,088*** (0,644)	2,392*** (0,670)
R ²	0,109	0,145	0,098	0,106	0,151	0,158	0,022	0,035	0,067	0,072
Adj. R ²	0,109	0,145	0,098	0,105	0,151	0,158	0,022	0,034	0,067	0,072
N	40629	40629	40172	40172	40651	40651	40172	40172	36241	36241

Some Observations for Further Study

- Individualism, social cooperation, and economic libertarianism appear to be universal features of the frontier, and not simply a specificity of the United States.
- Social tolerance is more pronounced in the cases of Russia, the United States, and Canada than in Brazil, where it is lower in frontier zones.
- One hypothesis is that this is a result of the outcome of the settlement process – whereas in the other frontiers, the indigenous population was largely marginalised or eliminated; in Brazil settler-indigenous conflict remains widespread today - hence lower social and interethnic tolerance and trust. This is discussed in much greater detail in the paper.
- We are working on extending the frontier analysis to other cases.
- While frontier regions have stronger ‘social’ institutions, they often have weaker governance and rule of law (higher homicide, corruption, poor public goods provision). Understanding this paradox is also at the centre of the current research program.

Thank you for your attention!