

# Governance of the Frontier

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# Social Institutions of the Frontier

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**Abstract:** One of the attributes most consistently highlighted in the literature on frontier society is the tendency to spontaneous social organisation. However, despite the resilience of the 'frontier thesis' within sociology and political science, it has not been subject to a rigorous empirical examination. Does it constitute a description of the social norms and institution of the western United States, or is it one manifestation of a more general 'frontier phenomenon', found in other times and places? In order to answer these questions, this article examines data on the nature of social relations in frontier zones in four countries: Brazil, Russia, Canada and the United States. Taking a wide range of survey items, we find that higher levels of voluntary activity, social trust, tolerance of outgroups, and civic protest are distinctive features of frontier life, and not simply a feature of the American historical experience.

JEL Z13, N90, R23.

**Keywords.** Social institutions, social capital, settlement patterns, historical institutionalism, frontier thesis.

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# Governance of the Frontier<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** How is state capacity consolidated? While there is a growing literature on state formation and the rise of state capacity over time, this literature typically deals with differences between countries, neglecting the fact that state formation also occurs differentially *within* a country over time. This article examines legacies of state formation spatially, by looking at variation within "frontier" states – countries which in recent centuries have extended rule over new territories adjacent to their core regions. Frontier zones within such countries are found to have ongoing lower levels of public order and deficient public goods provision. Several theories are examined to explain this discrepancy, including internal resettlement, costs of monitoring and enforcement, and the relationship between settlers and the indigenous population. It is argued that the formation of strong social institutions among settlers leads to resistance to attempts to impose governance over frontier regions, and to 'select for' lower fiscal capacity and lower provision of public goods.

JEL Z13, N90, R23, H41.

**Keywords.** State formation, settlement patterns, historical institutionalism, frontier thesis, public goods, rule of law, governance.

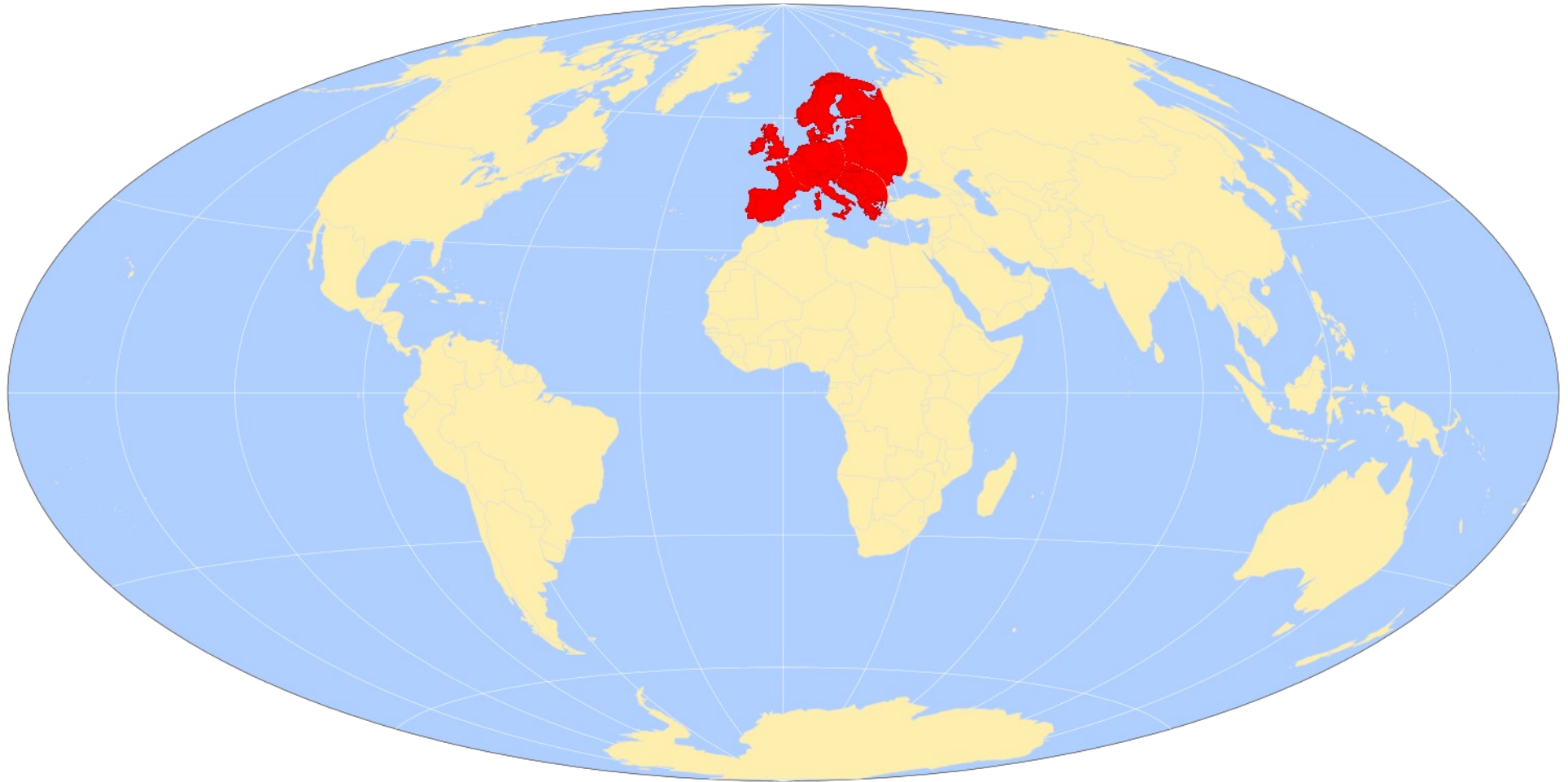
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<sup>1</sup> This study was sponsored by the Russian Foundation for the Humanities, under the project *Social structure and social institutions of the frontier regions of Russia: quality of life and potential for modernization* (# 13-33-01319).

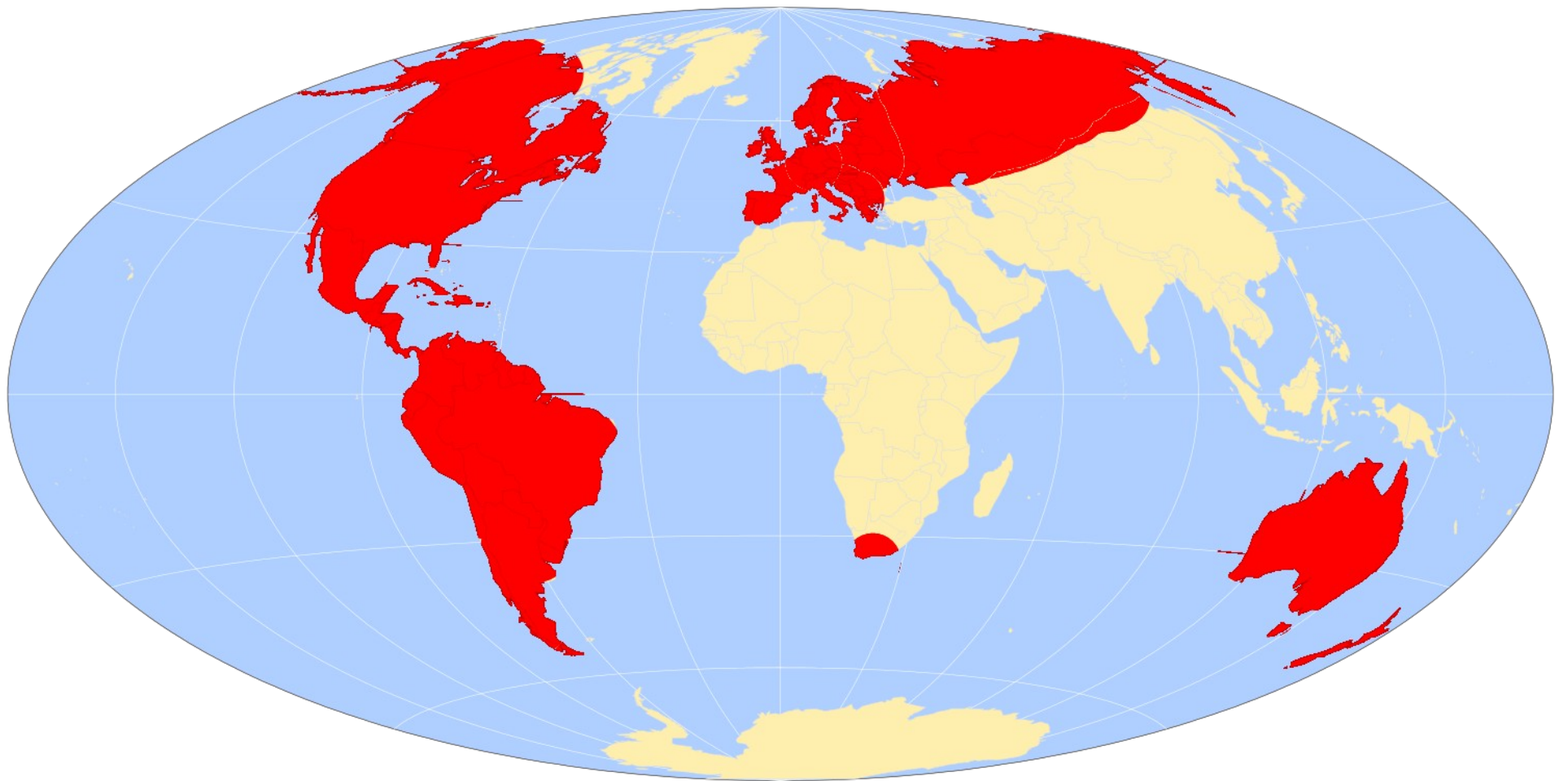
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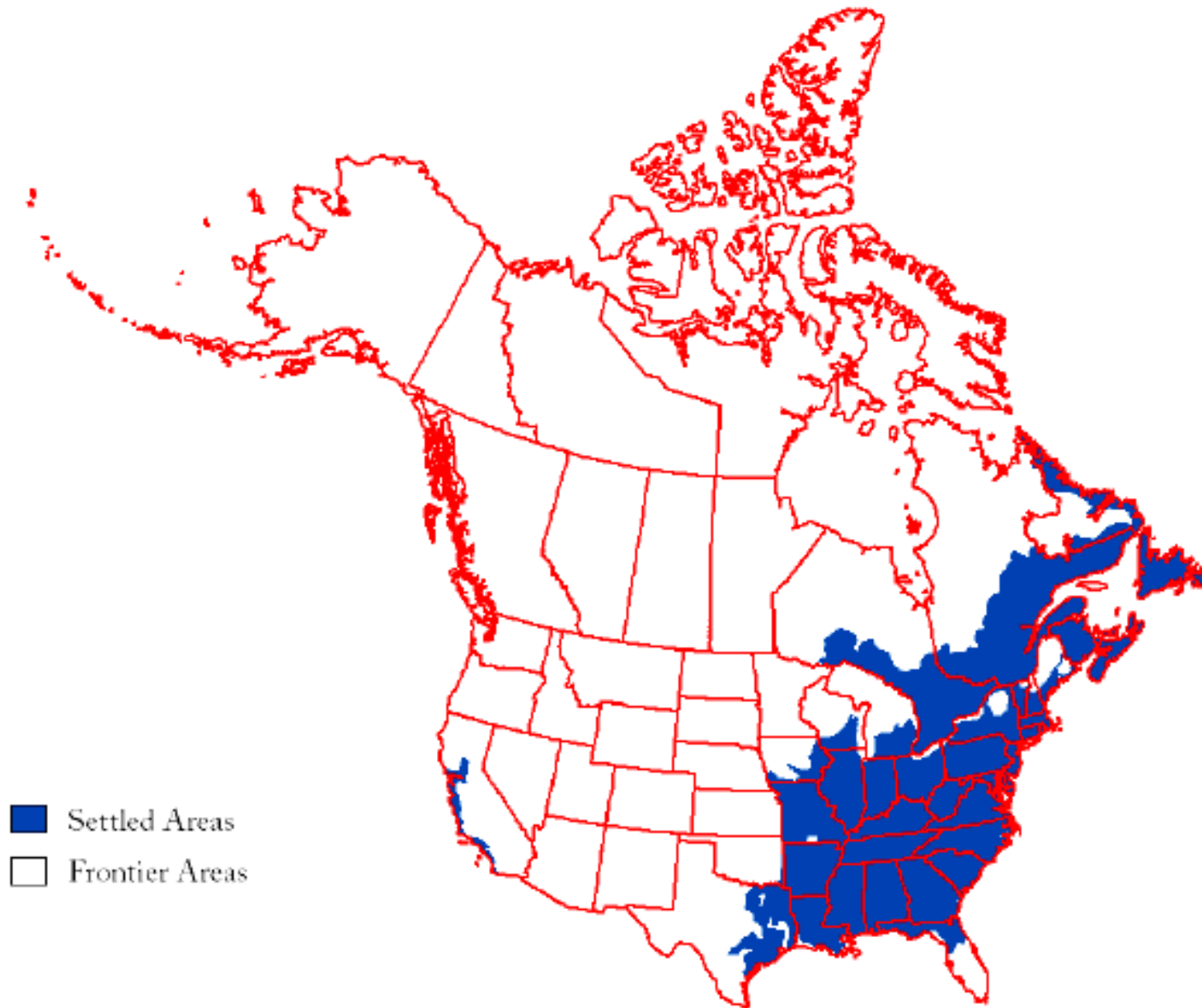
1491 – Europeans occupy 6.8% of world landmass



1891 – Europeans occupy 51.9% of world landmass



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

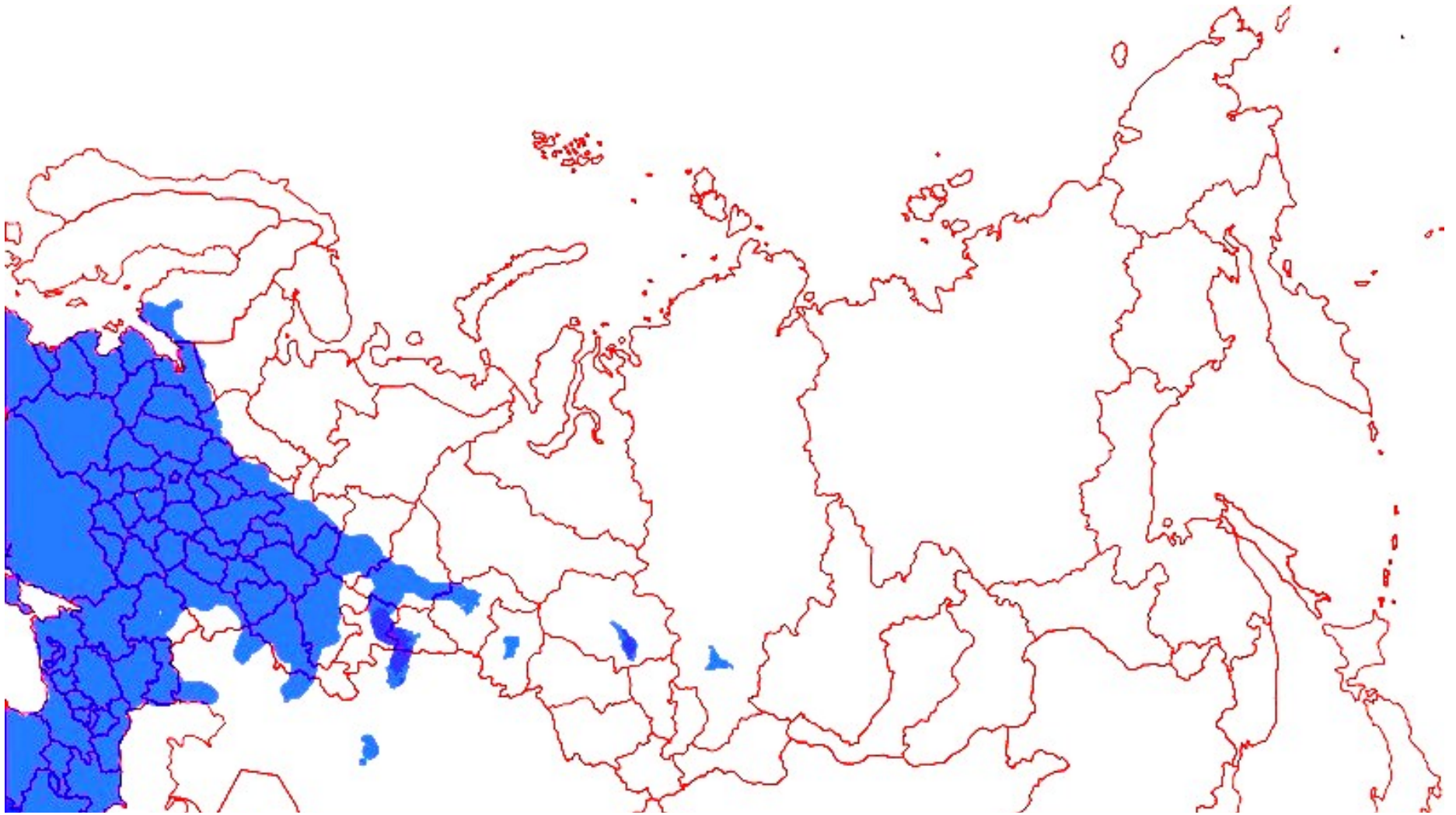


# The Frontier in South America circa 1850

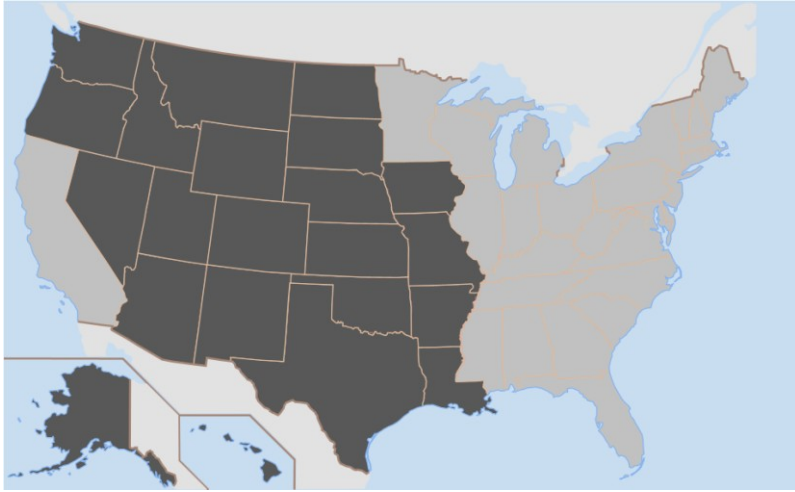
(Source: Robinson and Garcia-Jimeno, 2009)



## The Frontier in Russia circa 1897



## Frontier Regions of the United States



## Frontier Regions of Canada



## Frontier Regions of Brazil



## Frontier Regions of Russia



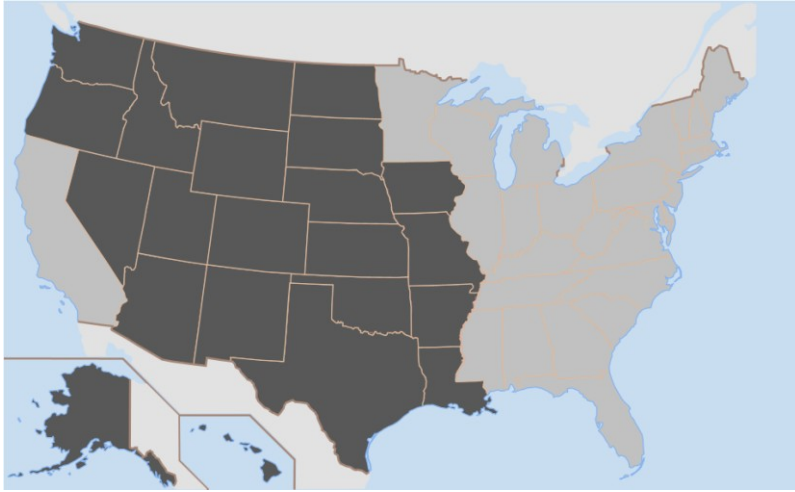


To what extent does the settlement process in and of itself generate a new set of cultural and social institutions?

# AMERICAN FRONTIER LIFE



## Frontier Regions of the United States



## Frontier Regions of Canada



## Frontier Regions of Brazil

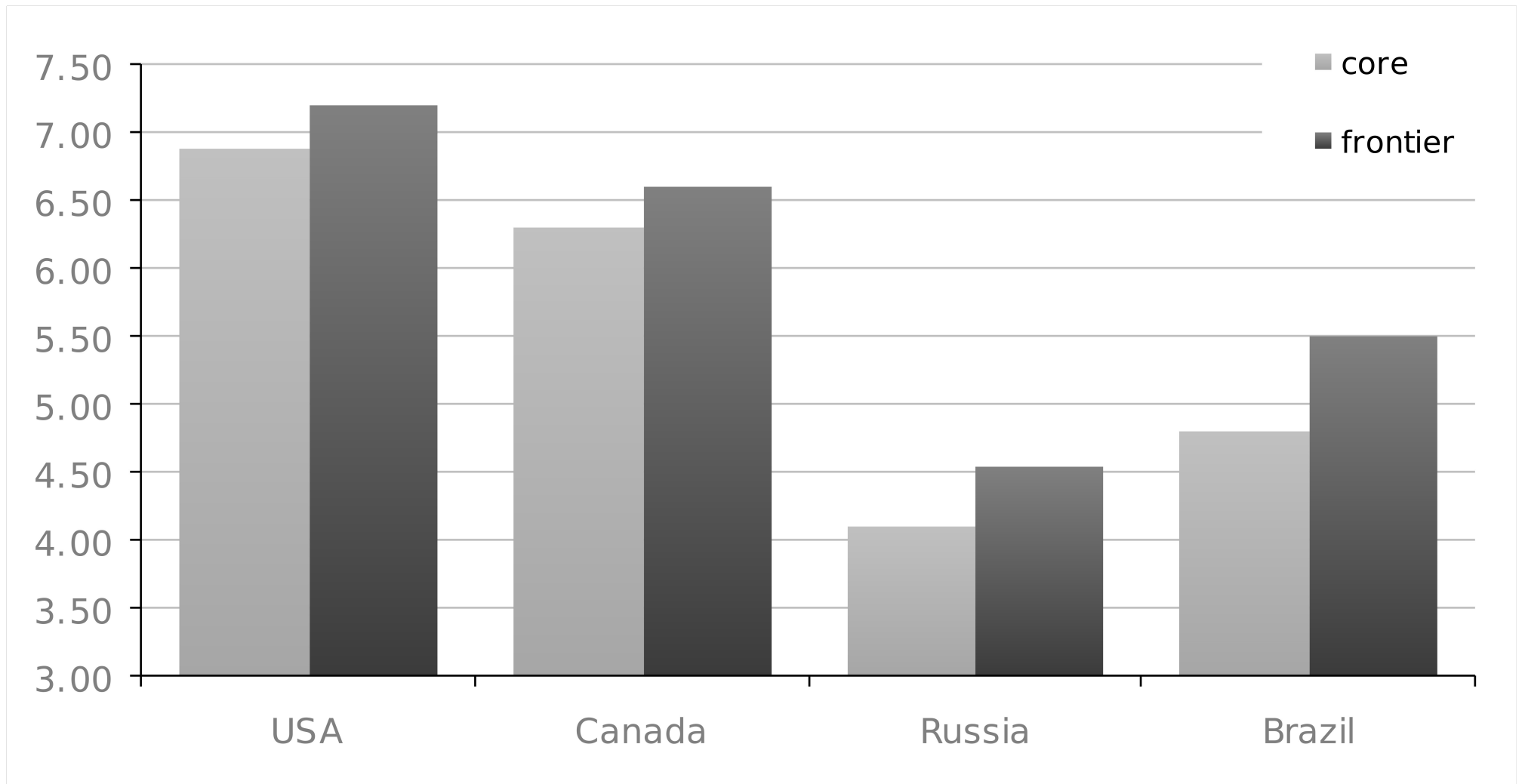


## Frontier Regions of Russia



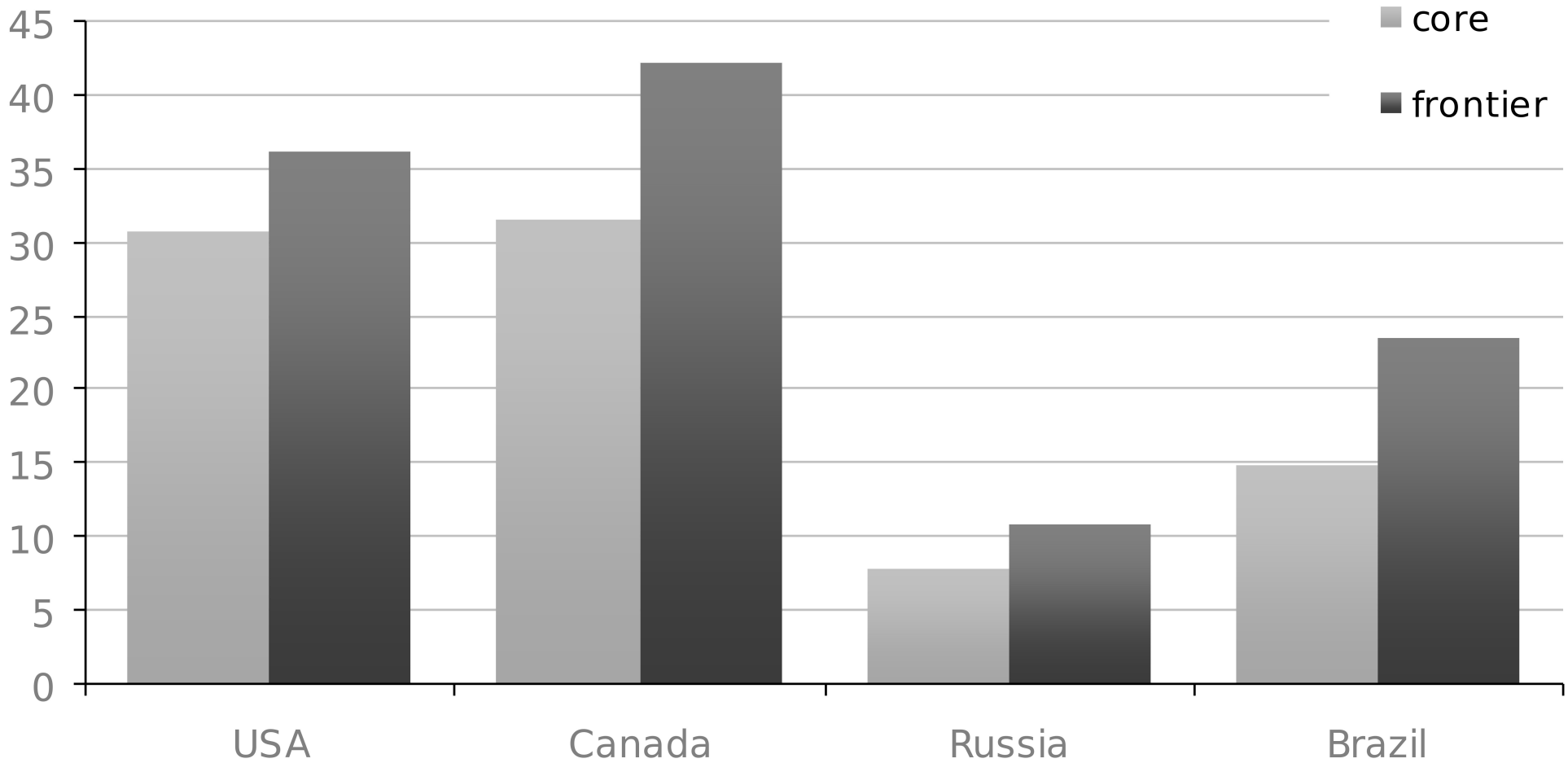
Individualism

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

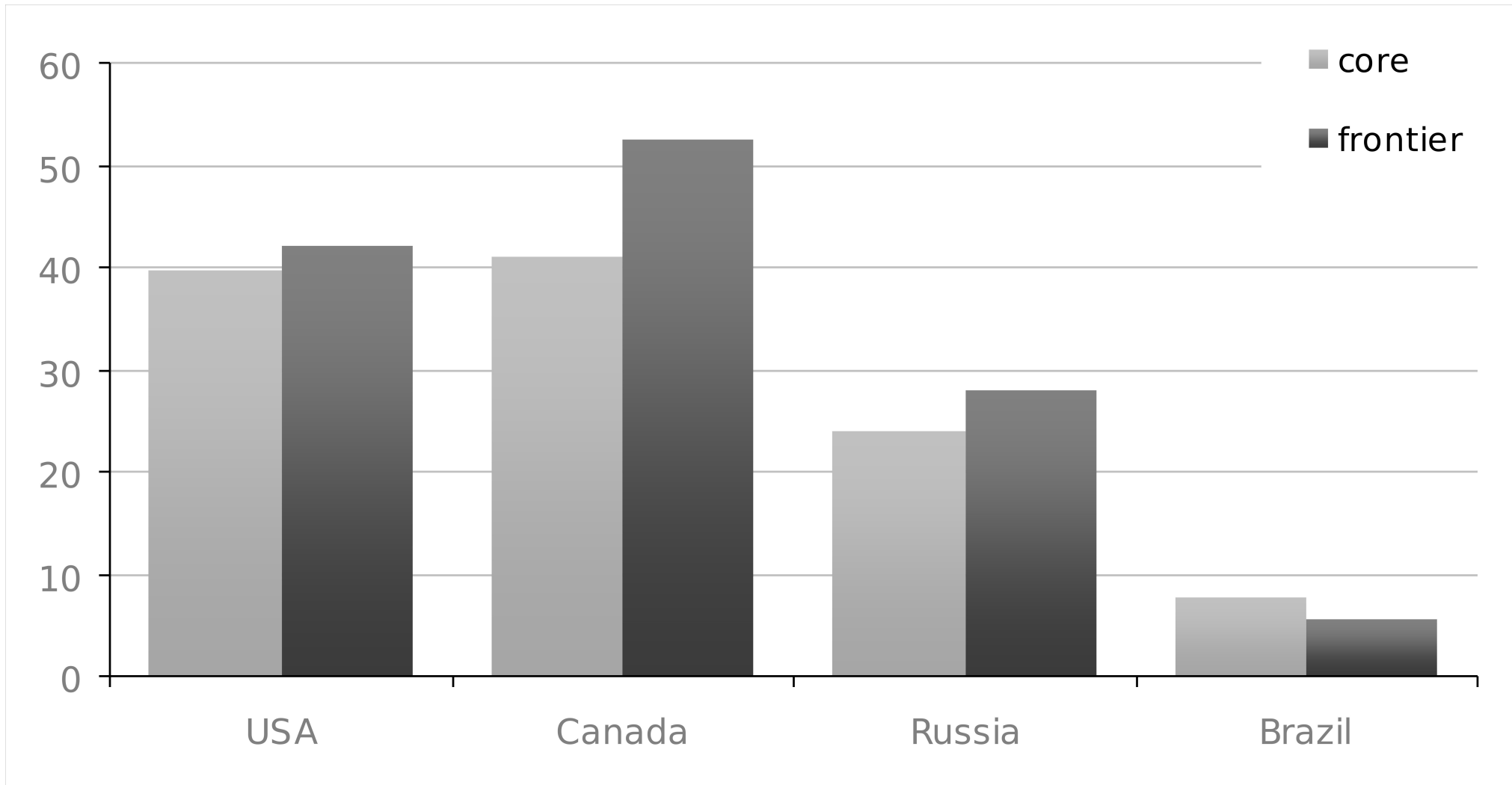


# Social Cooperation

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

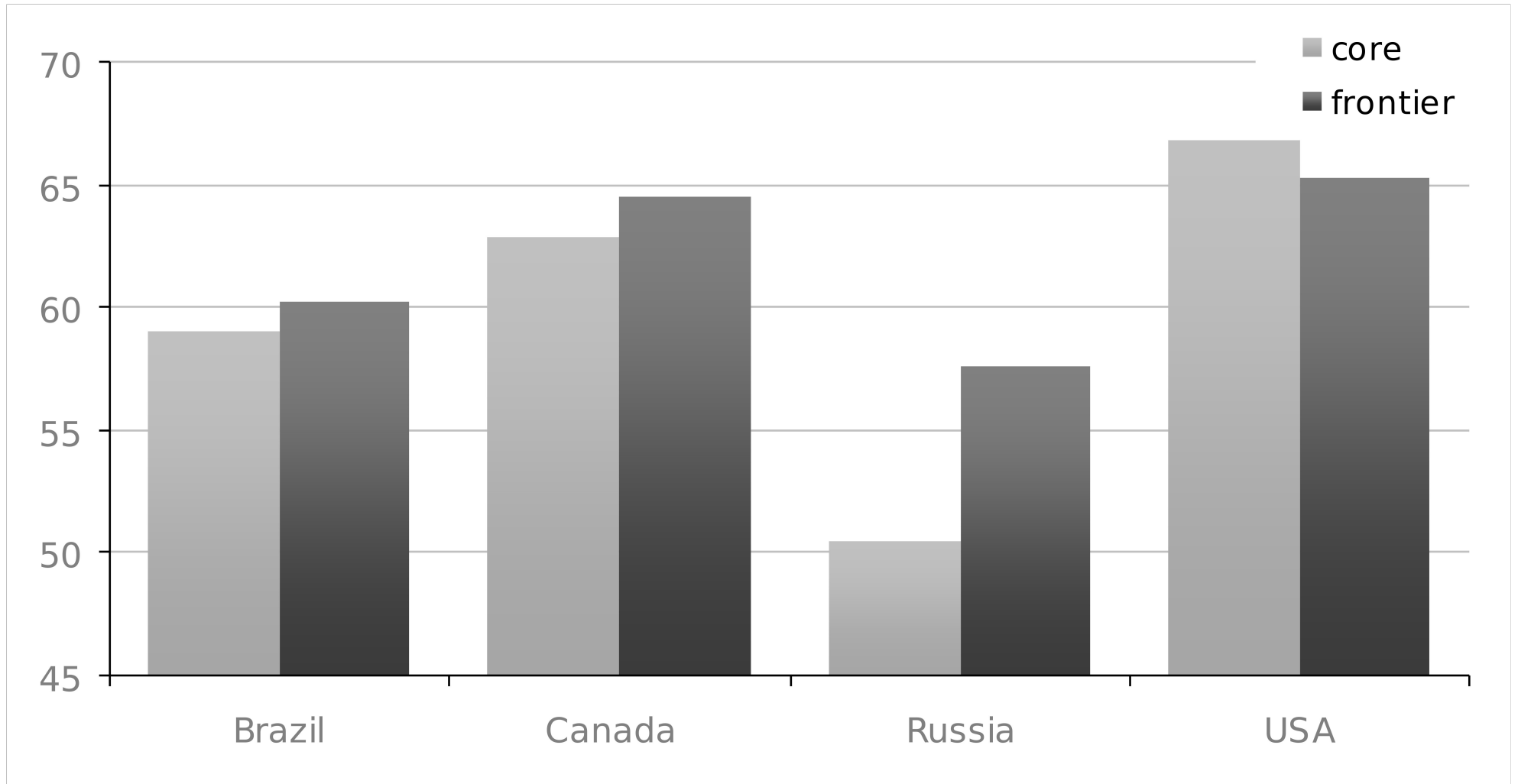


# Percentage who say that "In general, people can be trusted"





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



# The Paradox of the Frontier

‘nothing is more striking to a European traveller in the United States than the absence of what we term the Government, or the Administration’  
(Tocqueville 1835: 140)

The frontier: 'a region of personal feuds and frontier ideals of law' where 'the idea of the personality of law was often dominant over the organized machinery of justice' (Turner 1920: 142)

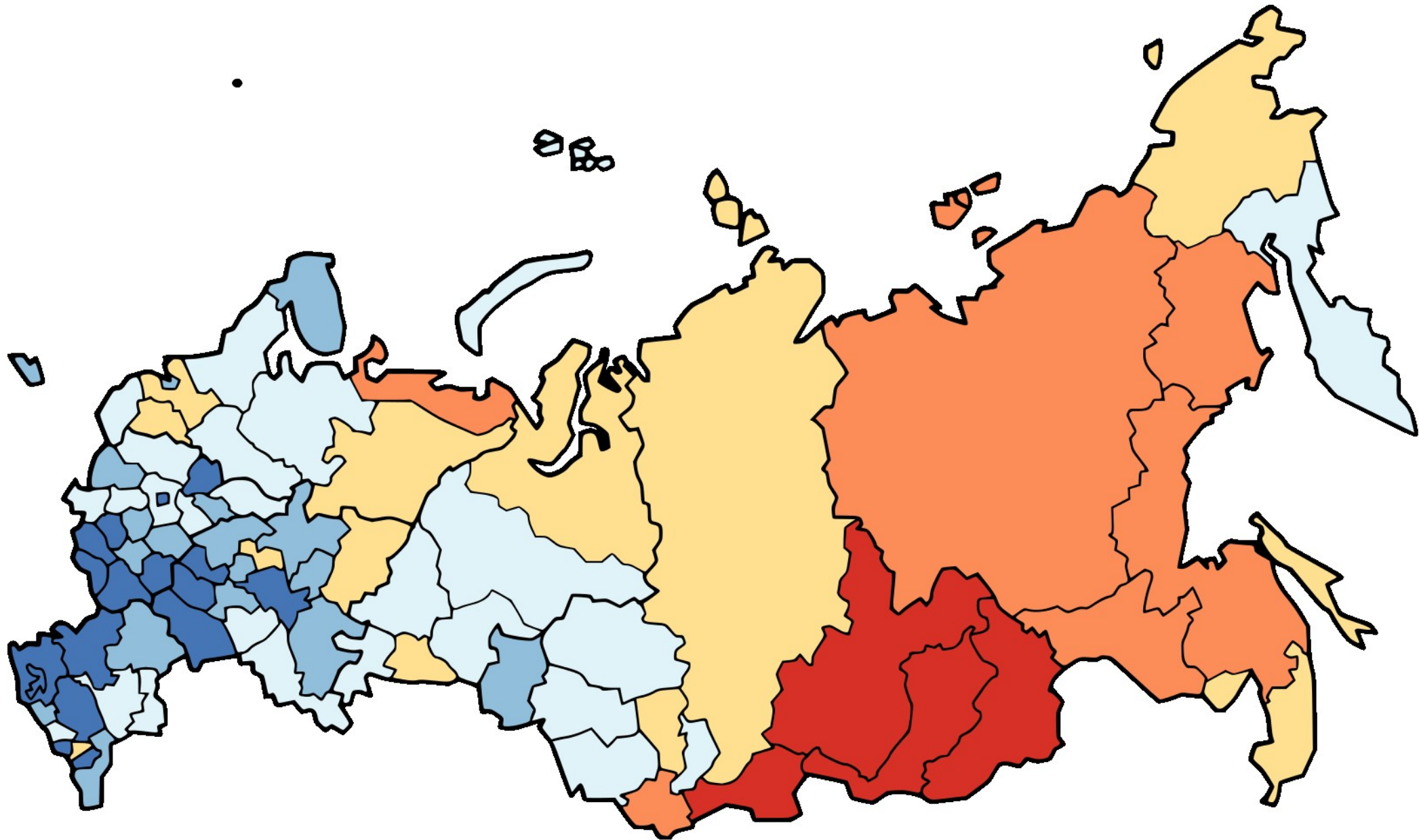
the frontier is 'subject to a laxity in regard to governmental affairs which has rendered possible the spoils system and all the manifest evils that follow from the lack of a highly developed civic spirit' (Turner, 1920: 17)

'the tax-gatherer is viewed as a representative of oppression' (Turner 1920: 16)

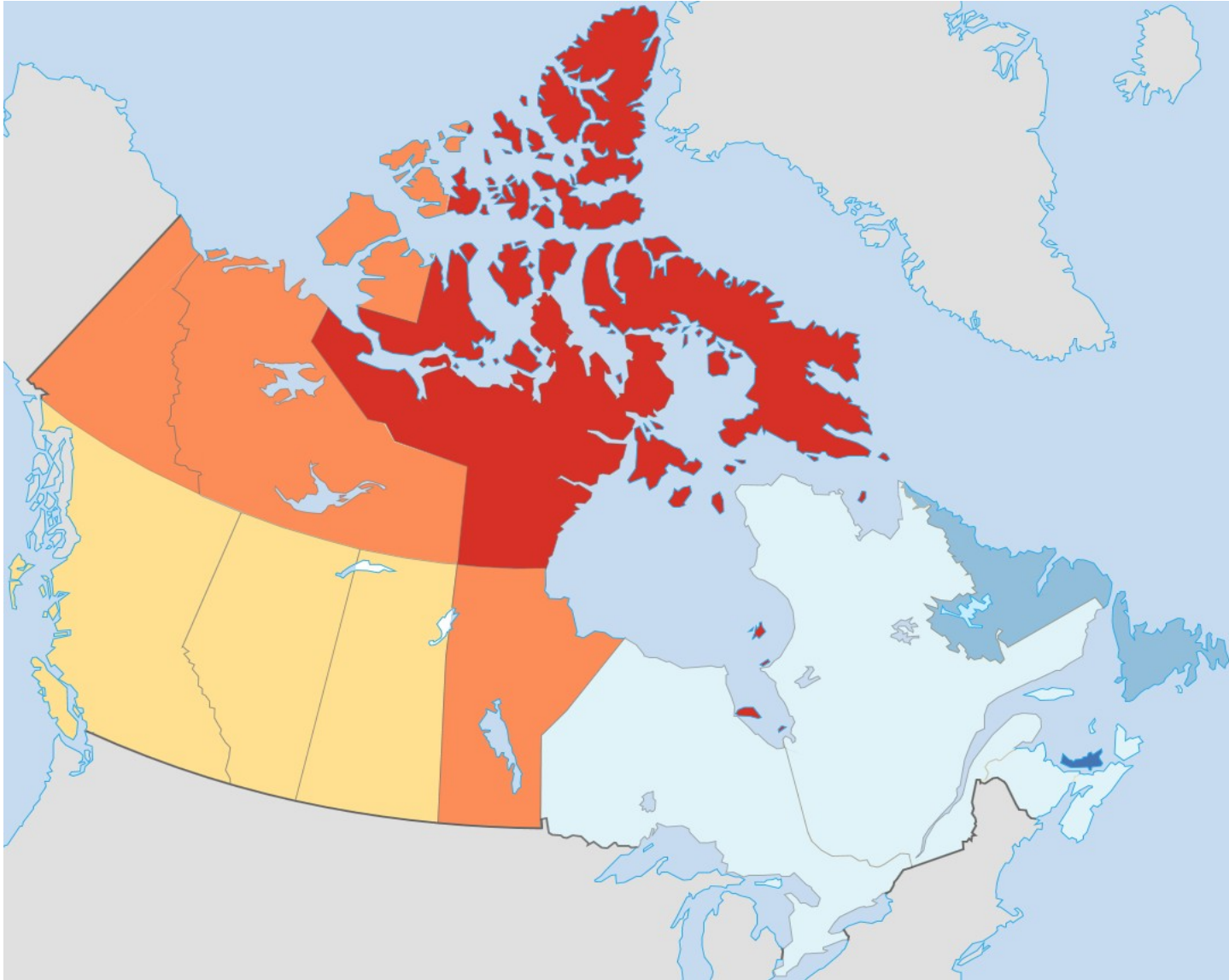
'I have refrained from dwelling on the lawless characteristics of the frontier, because they are sufficiently well known...the gambler and desperado, the regulators of the Carolinas and the vigilantes of California, are types of that line of scum that the waves of advancing civilization bore before them' (Turner 1920: 24)

# Absence of Rule of Law

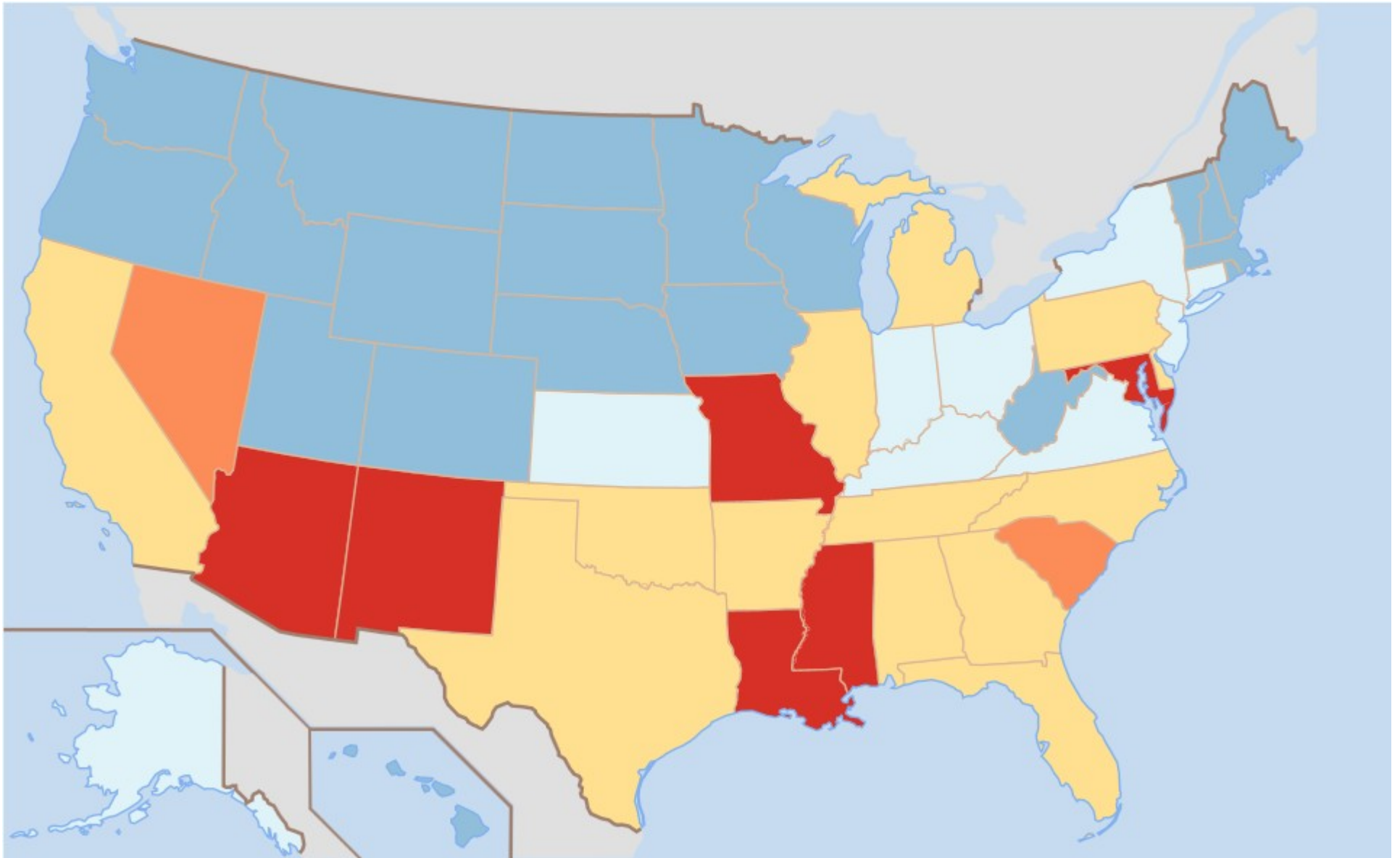
# Homicide Rate (2010), Russia



# Homicide Rate (2010), Canada

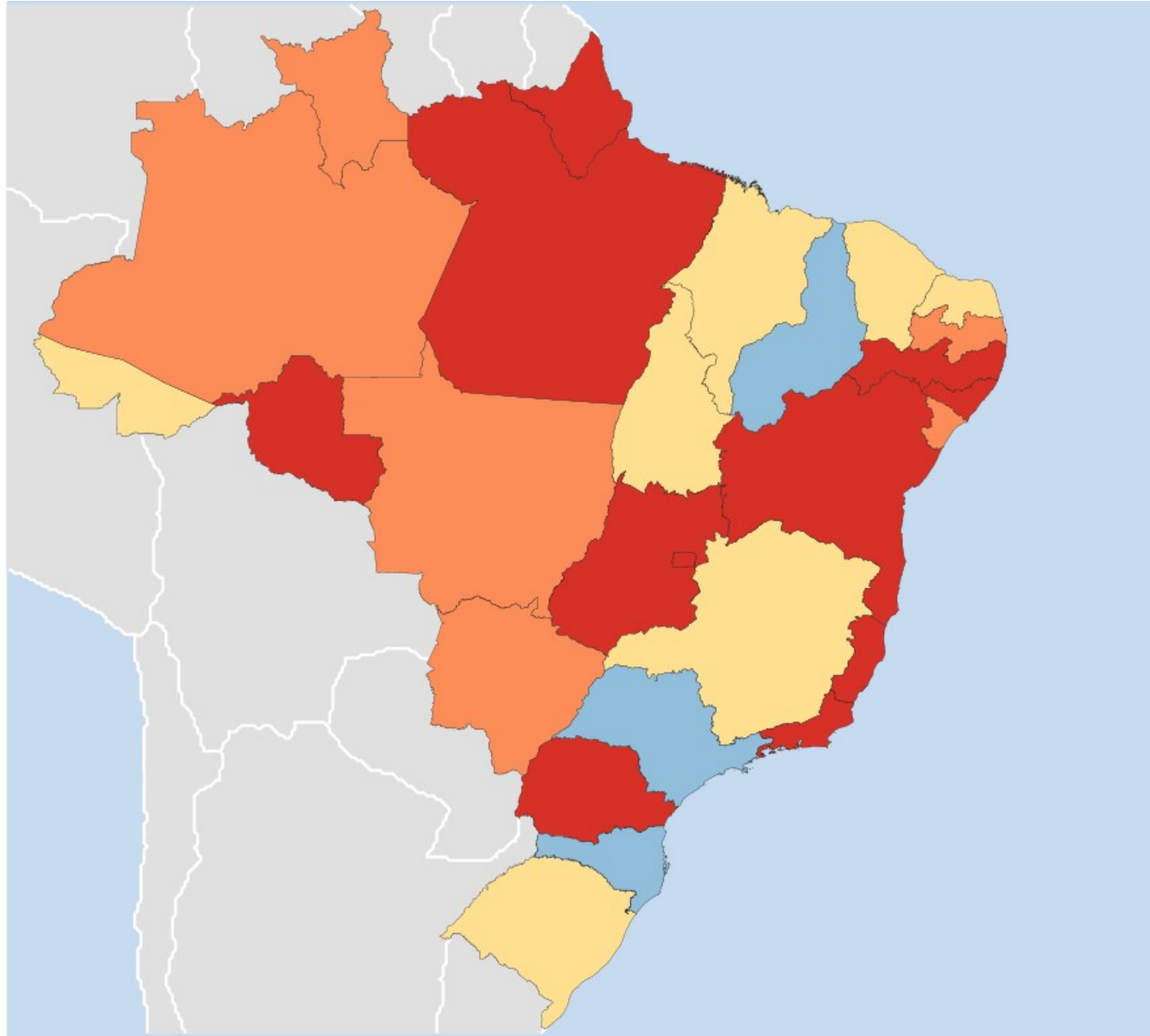


# Homicide Rate (2010), United States



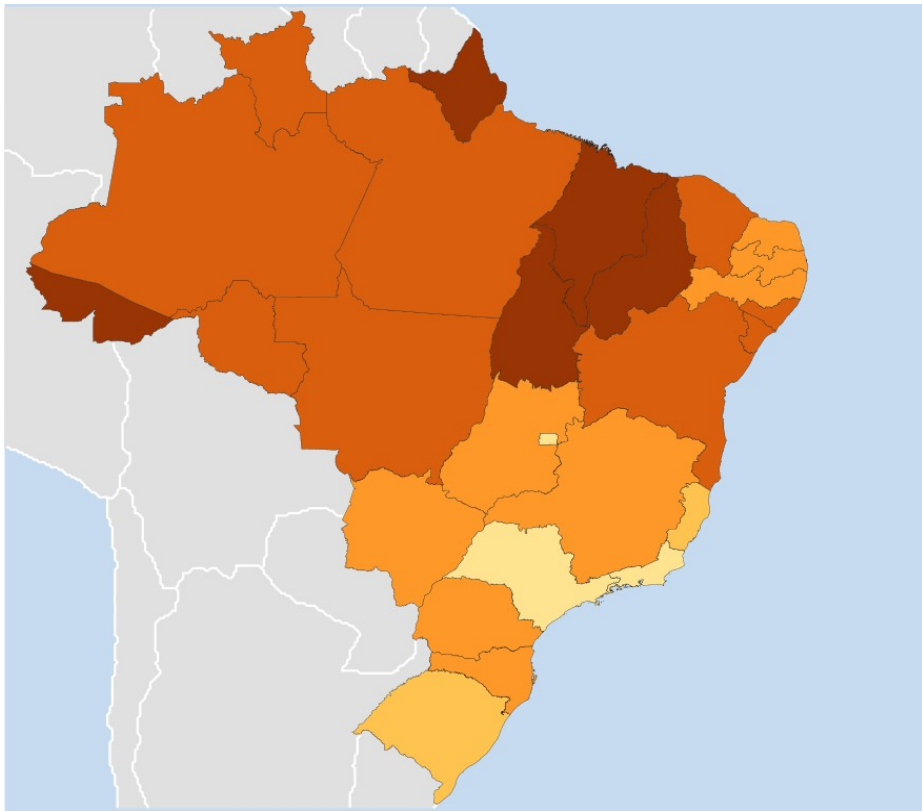


# Homicide Rate (2010), Brazil

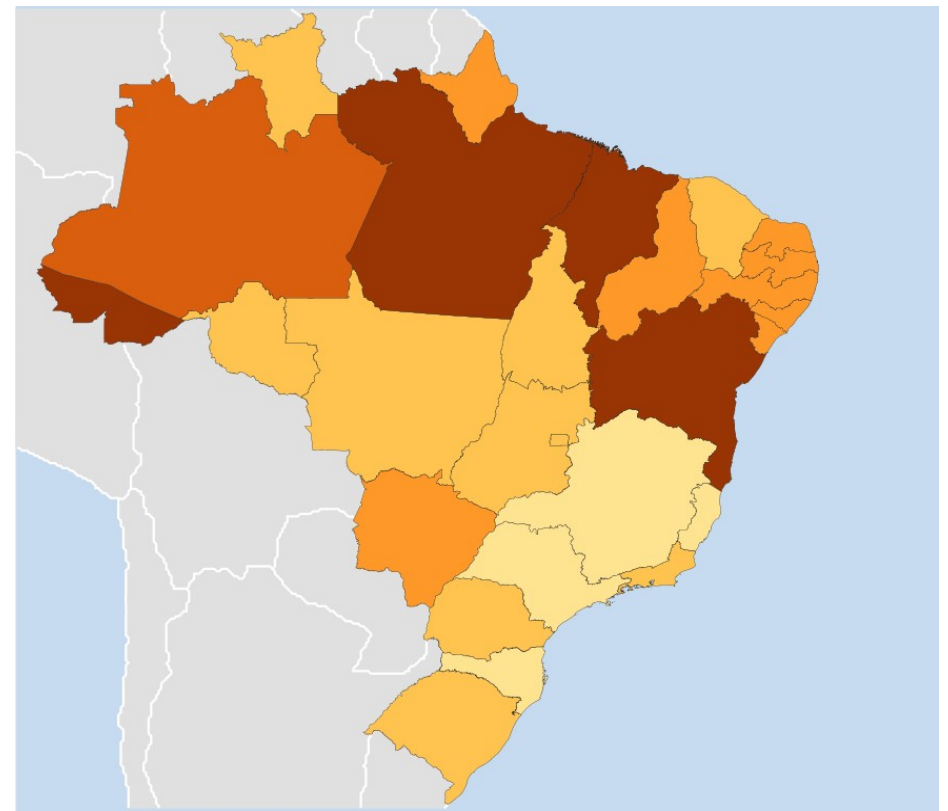


# Underprovision of Public Goods

# Homicide Rate (2010), Brazil



Doctors per 10,000



Immunisation Rate

# Explaining the Paradox of the Frontier

1) *Competition between social institutions and the state.* Social institutions form in advance of consolidation of the state. Prevents need for service provision, creates local pockets of resistance.

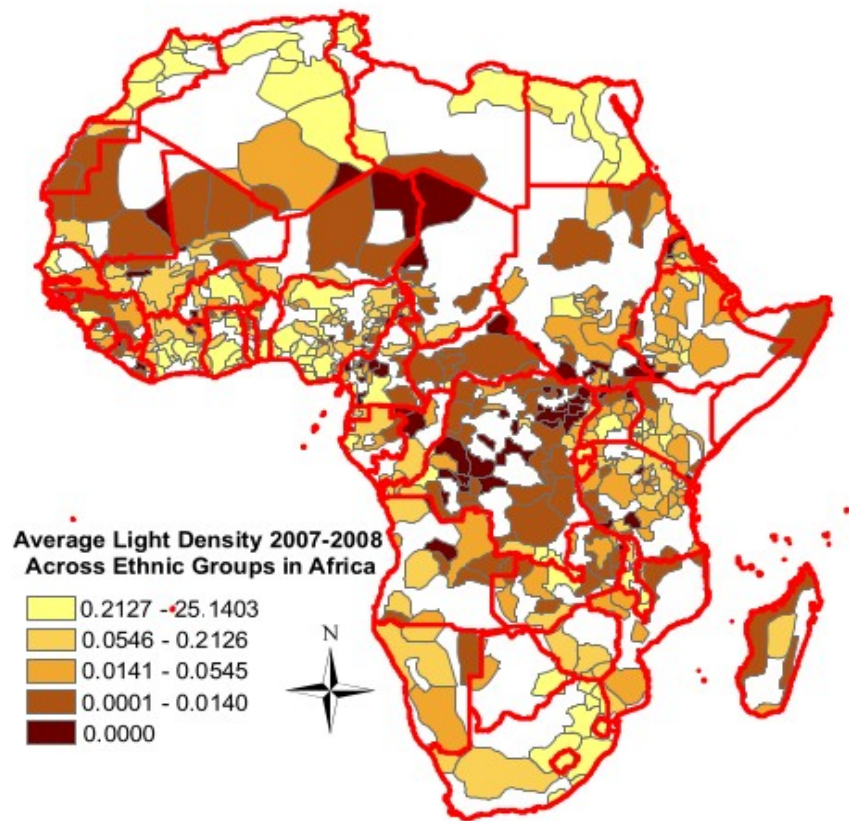
2) *Ethnic polarization theories: settlers and indigenous peoples.* Substantial literature on ethnic diversity and underprovision of public goods (Alesina et al. 2004).

3) *Selection effects: libertarian values of the frontier.* Established empirical observation that frontier areas are more 'anti-state'; though question of causality and identification strategy.

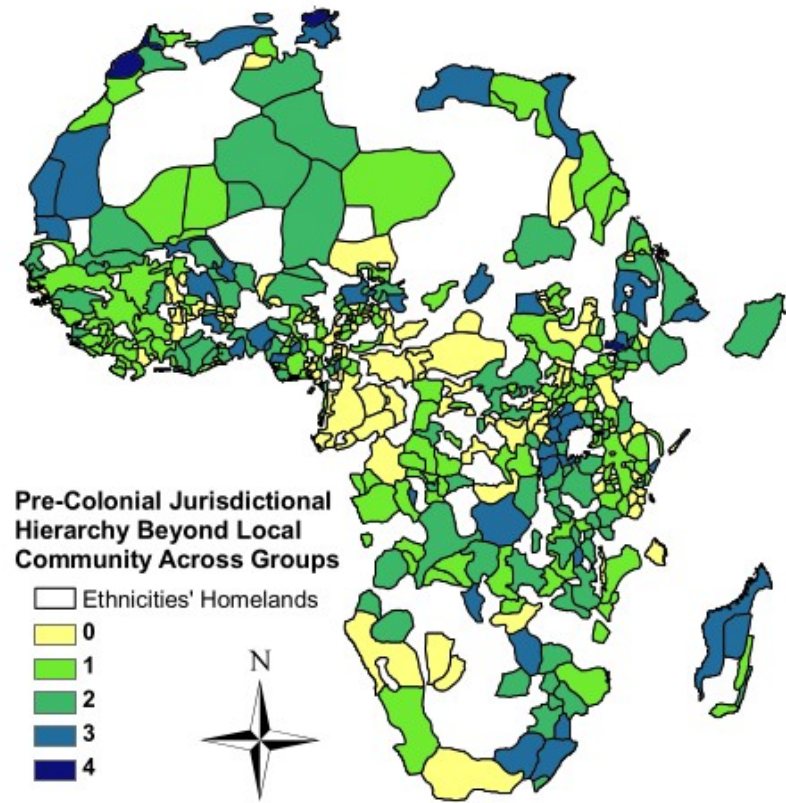
4) *Long-term effect of early 'undergovernance';* early formation of clientelistic networks of governance and negative social capital, failure of state formation.

# The Question

- There has been a recent revival of interest in long-term processes of state-building and state formation (Risse 2011; Krasner 2005; Fukuyama 2011, 2013). The intuition is that building state capacity, whether in terms of skills, (Weberian) norms, or organizational structure, is accretive and gradual
- **If this is true, legacies of (very) long-run historical state formation should explain variation in the capacity of states and territorial units to deliver public goods and rule of law today.**
- Some recent econometric studies, mainly focused on Africa (Gennaoli and Rainer 2007, Nunn and Puga 2013, Michalopoulos and Papaioannou 2013)

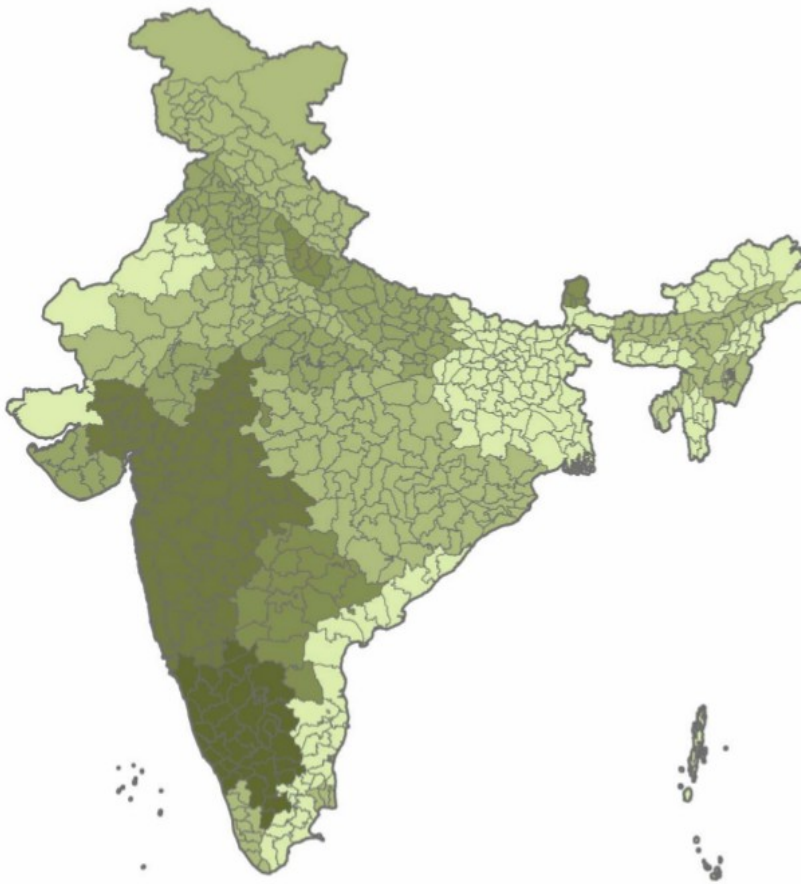


(A)

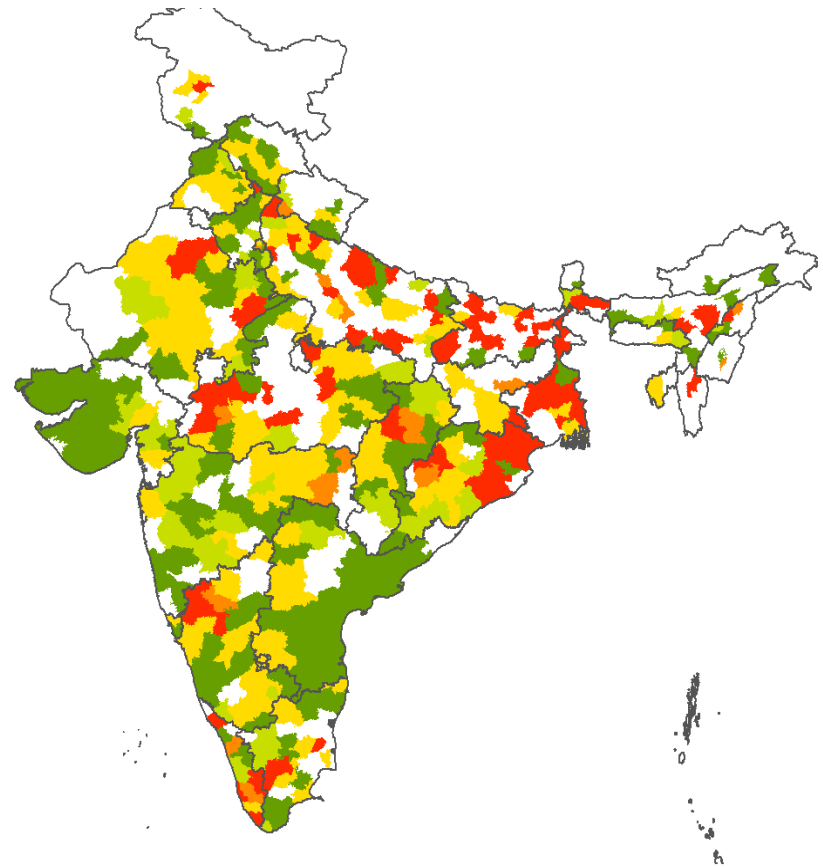


(B)

Source: Michalopoulos and Papaioannou (2013) "Precolonial Ethnic Institutions and Contemporary African Development", *Econometrica*

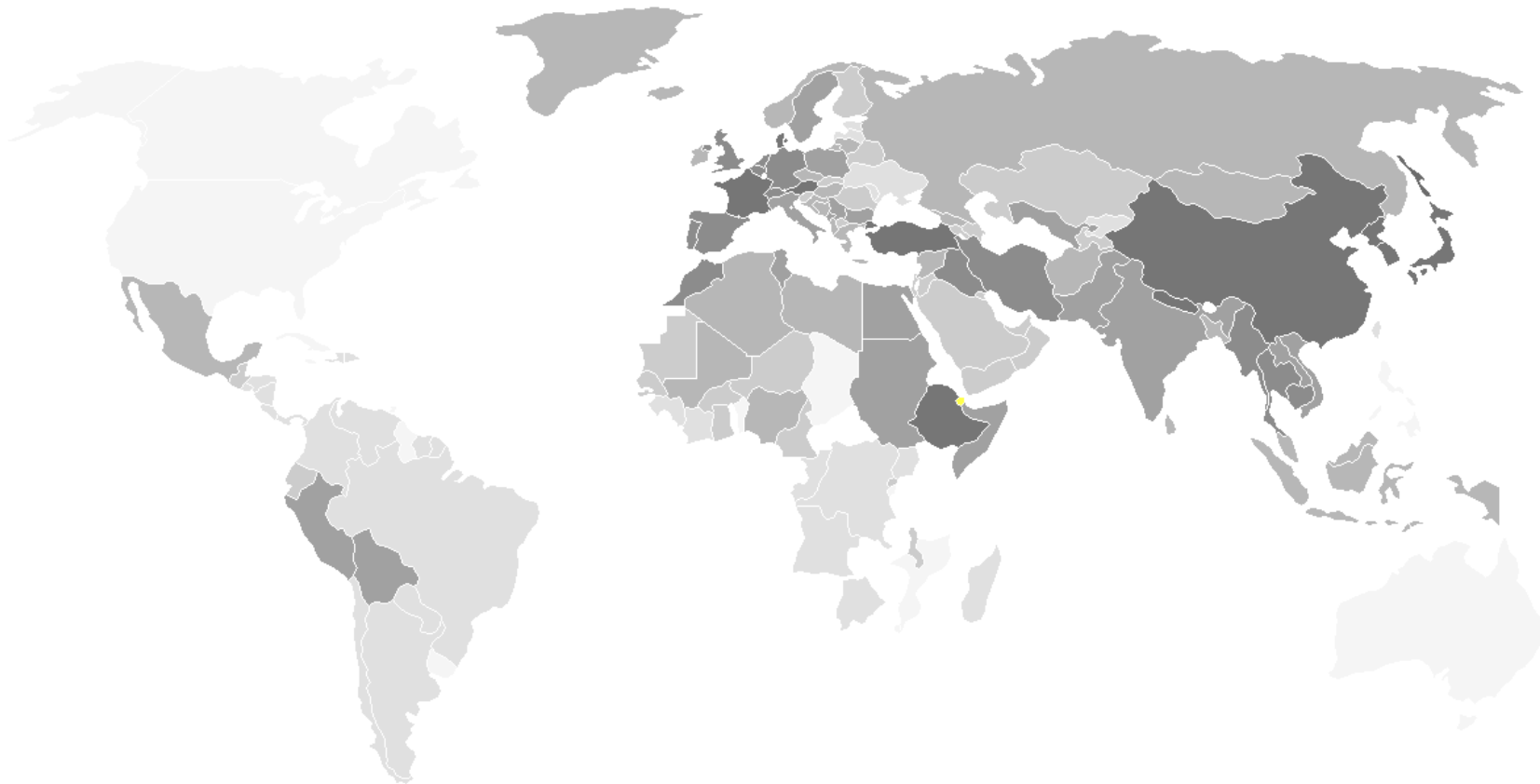


Precolonial State Formation Index in India 1760, based on taxes, administrative records, executive structure (Foa, forthcoming)



Households with a member who has experienced assault in last 12 months (India Human Development Survey, University of Maryland 2005)

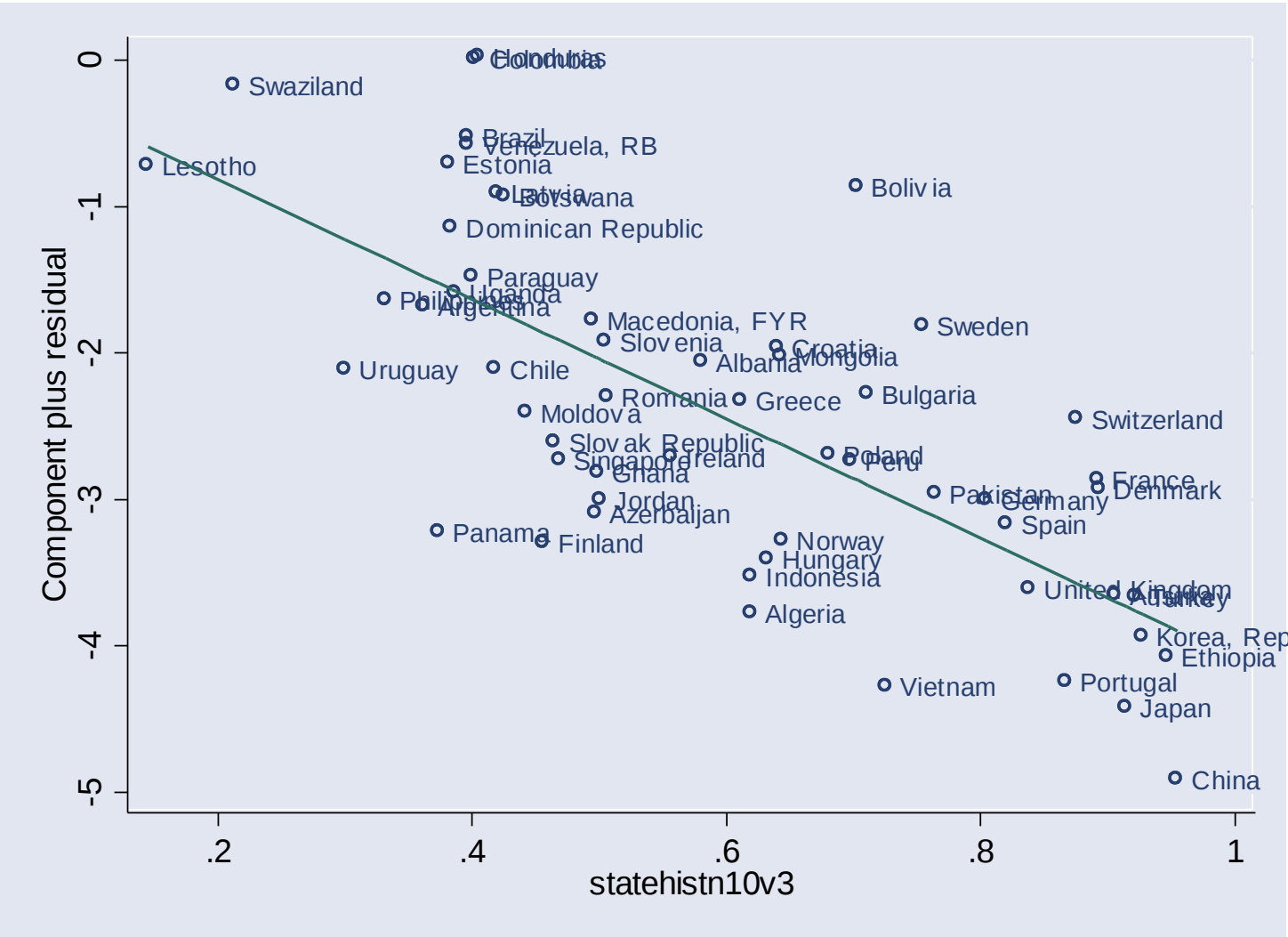
# “State History” (darker = longer state history)



Source: Bockstette et al. (2002). Shown is the state history index with a discount rate 50.



# Partial correlation of interpol crime rates (homicide, rape, theft, fraud) against state history



Controlling for: log GDP per capita, ethnolinguistic fractionalisation, former colonial status (0/1) and voluntary associational membership

on to this paper