

ANNOTATED READINGS

The Arctic Council

By Andrew Chater and Brittany Ennis

At a time when many of us find ourselves working from home in social isolation, NAADSN has invited various academic subject matter experts to suggest core readings on topics related to North American and Arctic Defence and Security.

The internet is filled with perspectives and opinions. These lists are intended to help direct policy shapers, practitioners, and academics to credible scholarly and semi-scholarly sources that reflect leading-edge research and thinking.

Barry, Tom, Brynhildur Davidsdóttir, Niels Einarsson, and Oran R. Young. “[The Arctic Council: An Agent of Change?](#)” *Global Environment Change* 63 (2020): 2-10.

This paper sets out to explore the ways that the Arctic Council has changed over time, evaluate the reasons for this change and then explore the impact of change on institutional effectiveness. It presents a case study of the institution’s biodiversity agenda and whether the Arctic Council has solved problems in this area. The method employed draws on interviews with Council policy-makers, document analysis, and meeting attendance between 2008 and 2019. The authors note that the Council’s work has changed in that it has grown over time. They show that the Arctic Council operates with limited administration and voluntary funding of several hundred thousand dollars (USD) per working group. They see the lack of an overall strategy or policy goal for the institution (i.e., the piecemeal assemblage of projects) as a challenge. The authors conclude that the Arctic Council has affected state behaviour, such as work leading to improvements to biodiversity monitoring of fish stocks and bird populations, including among non-Arctic actors.

Ingimundarson, Valur. “[Managing a Contested Region: the Arctic Council and the Politics of Arctic Governance.](#)” *Polar Journal* 4, no. 1 (2014): 183-198.

In this article, Ingimundarson examines the role of Arctic and non-Arctic members in the Arctic Council. The author argues that intergovernmental agreement continues to shape Arctic co-operation. As the Arctic Council is not a formal international organization, it operates between an intergovernmental forum and a regional organization that is not legally bound by any decision. As the Arctic Council is not a formal intergovernmental organization, the forum may struggle with long-term regional management. In particular, the author highlights the fact that the Arctic 8 seek to maintain control of the Arctic Council. Although these actors have had to admit Asian states as observers to maintain credibility, the real power still lies within the Arctic 8. While the current arrangement in the Arctic Council provides opportunities for non-state actors and non-regional actors to engage in discussion, it is not a forum capable of handling regulatory matter. Given the wide range of actors, progress will occur at different rates and there may be varying expectations.

Kuusama, Tuuli. “[Evolution of the Arctic Council Agenda: From Environmental Protection to the Effects of Climate Change.](#)” In *Arctic Yearbook 2020*, edited by Lassi Heininen, Heather Exner-Pirot & Justin Barnes, 478-494. Akureyri, Iceland: Arctic Portal, 2020.

Kuusama examines the history of the Arctic Council recognizing environmental issues within the region. She notes that the Arctic region initially focused on environmental issues. Kuusama argues that the agenda-setting process is highly political and depends on the attention of the media. The author characterizes climate change as a Downsian issue whereby the issue of climate change continues the pattern of losing and gaining public interest. In the first stage, the problem exists but is not a well-known public issue. In the second stage, there was an Arctic interest on monitoring the climate, but there was still very little research in the area. The author characterizes the third stage as the Arctic Climate Awakening, which occurred in the early 2000s. Here, there was an increase in public knowledge and awareness of economic opportunities stemming from climate change. The fourth stage is where the Arctic Council began to engage climate change into their work. This stage lasted until 2017. The last stage that we are currently in is the time of uncertainty. Kuusama concludes by stating that the Trump Administration and the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to decrease public interest in climate change in the Arctic as new priorities emerge.

Lackenbauer, P. Whitney, Heather Nicol and Wilfrid Greaves (editors). [One Arctic: The Arctic Council and Circumpolar Governance.](#) Ottawa: Canadian Arctic Resources Committee, 2017.

This edited collection examines how the Arctic Council had changed leading up to its 20th anniversary. Chapters variously argue that: the mandate of the Council has grown incrementally; the number of side-forums within the institution also has increased; the tools at the Arctic Council’s disposal to address issues have sharpened (such as the body serving as a negotiating space for legally binding agreements); the institution is more economically-focused compared to the past, and; climate change has become a sharper focus in its work, sometimes at odds with domestic priorities. Other chapters question the Arctic Council’s place in regional governance and the capacity of the Permanent Participants. Improving the uneven capacity of Permanent Participants and enabling them to participate fully in the Arctic Council’s work is an ongoing issue, though progress has been made. The institutional theme of “One Arctic,” which gives the book its title, has seen states and other actors conceive as the region as an interrelated whole, rather than a separate regions.

Loukacheva, Natalia. “[The Arctic Council and ‘Law-Making.’” *Northern Review* no. 50 \(2020\): 109-135.](#)

Loukacheva examines the contribution of the Arctic Council to law making in the Arctic region. The Council is a forum that lacks a “legislative body,” but which still has had success in shaping international law. The institution develops soft-law, or non-legally binding instruments, such as biennial declarations, action programs on black carbon and plans to protect the marine environment. The scientific knowledge that the Council has helped create has inspired other pieces of international law, such as the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants. The Council has been the forum to create the Arctic Economic Council, Arctic Coast Guard Forum and Arctic Offshore Regulators

Forum. It has served as a venue in which to create legally binding agreements. It could create new international agreements in the future if an agreement is necessary and if states decide that doing so is within their interest. Whether the Arctic Council is a venue to create future agreements depends on the subject matter of new initiatives.

Poto, Margherita Paola and Fornabaio, Lara. [“Participation as the Essence of Good Governance: Some General Reflections and a Case Study on the Arctic Council.”](#) *Arctic Review on Law and Politics* 8 (2017): 139-159.

Poto uses the Arctic Council as a case study to better understand good governance. Poto focuses on the Arctic Council's commitment to give Indigenous people a voice in the decision-making process. The author argues that citizen activism is a bottom-up approach essential to successful global governance. This approach ensures effective communication and fully engaged participants amongst both public and private actors. Poto highlights the Arctic Council as both a flexible and permanent platform that recognizes the fundamental need to protect and incorporate all Arctic voices. Although the participation of Indigenous groups is key to the Arctic Council, the author argues that the role of Permanent Participants could still improve. For example, the traditions of Permanent Participants should not be seen as separate from the interests of the international community. In addition, Indigenous peoples should be given funding from their state's government to support an increase of diversity in the decision-making process. The author concludes by emphasizing the importance of co-management and inclusiveness to support development in the Arctic that will hopefully lead to accomplishing stronger legal goals.

Rahbek-Clemmensen, Jon, and Gry Thomasen. [“How Has Arctic Coastal State Co-operation Affected the Arctic Council?”](#) *Marine Policy* 122 (2020): 104239.

This paper examines the implications of the Ilulissat Meeting on the Arctic Council. In 2008, the five countries with territory on the Arctic Ocean (Canada, Denmark (via Greenland), Norway, Russia, and the United States, also known as the A5) held a meeting in Ilulissat without the other three Arctic states (Finland, Iceland, and Sweden) to pledge co-operation to resolve boundary disputes (in the *Ilulissat Declaration*). Based on interviews with 27 diplomats and experts, the authors seek to determine the impact of this exclusion on broader regional relations. It was the first time since the creation of the Arctic Council that some states had defined their regional role as distinct from other states. Initially, there was concern that the new grouping would become a competitor to the Arctic Council, though ultimately the A5 carved out a “functional niche.” Ultimately, the authors find that the exact role of the A5 is still somewhat vague.

Spence, Jennifer. [“Is a Melting Arctic Making the Arctic Council Too Cool? Exploring the Limits to the Effectiveness of a Boundary Organization.”](#) *Review of Policy Research* 34, no. 6 (2017): 790-811.

In this paper, the author articulates the concept of the Arctic Council as a boundary organization to serve as a theoretical lens to understand the institution. The Arctic Council is an institution that has brought together experts and key stakeholders across boundaries and, in doing so, has produced products that have defined the boundaries of the region. This characteristic is an example of the definition of a boundary organization. An argument in the paper is that the Arctic Council has evolved from a decision-shaping

body to a decision-making body. The pressure for the Arctic Council to take action has grown over time, and policy-makers interviewed by the author confirm this view. There is increasing interest in the meetings of the Council to the extent that it has expanded the array of events offered. The number of observers in the institution has proliferated over time. The Arctic Council is an important institution linking knowledge and action.

Wehrmann, Dorothea. "[The Arctic Council as a Success Case for Transnational Cooperation in Times of Rapid Global Changes?](#)" In *Arctic Yearbook 2020*, edited by Lassi Heininen, Heather Exner-Pirot and Justin Barnes, 425-442. Akureyri, Iceland: Northern Research Forum, 2020.

This article seeks to identify lessons for international co-operation based on the Arctic Council, rooted in academic literature on transnational co-operation. Some successes of the institution include the mix of actors, the collaboration with Indigenous peoples' organizations and the array of observers. The inclusion of all of the Arctic states has ensured the legitimacy of the institution. The agenda of the Council has shifted and evolved over time, but the main concern remains sustainable development and the environment. It makes decisions and takes actions rooted in reciprocity and trust. The broadness of the Council's mandate has allowed flexibility but also has made ambitious or focused more difficult. It has allowed for the inclusion of diverse perspectives and local knowledge. Weaknesses of the Arctic Council include the lack of goal setting, enforcement and monitoring. Institutionally, the Arctic Council lacks sustained funding. A major contribution of the Arctic Council is its efforts to develop regional specialized information.

Wilson, Page. "[Society, Steward or Security Actor? Three visions of the Arctic Council.](#)" *Cooperation and Conflict* 5, no. 1 (2016): 55-74.

In this paper, Wilson argues that there are three visions that shape the progression of the Arctic Council. The first vision is the Arctic Council as a society of sovereign states. In this vision, states have common interests and agree to adhere to certain rules. This view focuses on the forum as a club where states work together to influence policymaking and scientific research in the Arctic, while also making space for Indigenous groups. The second vision perceives the Arctic Council as a steward for the Arctic. In this vision, the Arctic Council is expected to make decisions based on scientific knowledge rooted in environmental politics. There is an emphasis on the relationship between humans and nature. The challenge is to transition from an exclusive group to an inclusive forum whilst keeping the environment and its people as a priority. The third vision views the Arctic Council as a security actor that extends to influence all policy areas. The author concludes that all three visions can exist in competition, which will create tensions, especially as more actors seek to change how we think about the Arctic.

Observers to the Arctic Council

Babin, Julie, and Frédéric Lasserre. "[Asian States at the Arctic Council: Perceptions in Western States.](#)" *Polar Geography* 42(3) (2019): 145-159.

In this article, Babin and Lasserre explore whether the West has a reason to be concerned about the growing interest of Asian states in the Arctic. In particular, the authors look at Japan, Singapore, China, and Japan's participation in the Arctic since the

Kiruna meeting in 2013. They note that there is a particular fear that China's interest stems from a desire to invade and reshape the Arctic. Further, the authors recognize that the participation of Asian states in Arctic Council meetings and working groups is quite weak and is limited by their restricted status. The authors also recognize that there is limited literature available on the Asian Observers. They argue that the interest of Asia at the Arctic Council received negative attention, but it should be a reminder that it is also an opportunity to increase Polar research and awareness for non-Arctic states. This fact is already clear in Japan's National Polar Research Institute, China's research in the natural sciences, and the Observers' contributions in the working groups. Thus, Babin and Lasserre conclude that there is nothing to indicate that Asian Observers intend to use the Arctic Council to pursue agendas that go against the forum's values.

Burke, Danita Catherine, and Teale N. Phelps Bondaroff. "[Becoming an Arctic Council NGO Observer.](#)" *Polar Record* 54 (2019): 349-359.

Burke and Bondaroff explore the NGO observer process to the Arctic Council. Although there is a formal application, the authors argue that Arctic states and Permanent Participants evaluate informal criteria, which is largely based on perceptions of the NGO applicant. They note that the Arctic Council has had to include observers and consider applications at biennial meetings to accommodate an increased interest in the region. The authors argue that the Arctic Council heavily considers perceptions of the legitimacy of the applicants, and relations with current observers. In addition, the Arctic Council considers the opinions of Permanent Participants when evaluating an NGO observer application. The Arctic Council tends to look for NGOs that can engage in insider politics, that are willing to participate, and that are trustworthy. Burke and Bondaroff determine that different understandings of legitimacy are the major differing factor in how NGO applicants are evaluated. They conclude by noting that NGOs looking to join the Arctic Council should understand their perceived legitimacy and adjust their strategy accordingly.

Chater, Andrew. "[Explaining Non-Arctic states in the Arctic Council.](#)" *Strategic Analysis* 40, no. 3 (2016): 173-184.

This paper answers the research question: "How has the role of observers in the Arctic Council evolved and why is there increased interest in participation by states and international institutions?" Based on a review of Arctic Council documents and interviews with key policy makers, the author examines the role and interest of non-Arctic states in the institution. A conclusion is that observers are weak actors in the Arctic Council because they can only participate to the extent that member states allow. However, non-Arctic states seek to become observers in the institution for two reasons. First, they seek to be part of the governance of climate change, which is a key environmental issue that will have serious implications for state interest. Second, they seek to be part of the economic gains to be made in the region as the extent of sea ice lessens and the region opens to allow the exploitation of new resources and shipping routes. These goals might seem contradictory, but they both are important.

Graczyk, Piotr, Małgorzata Śmieszek, Timo Koivurova, and Adam Stępień. "[Preparing for the Global Rush: the Arctic Council, Institutional Norms, and Socialisation of Observer Behaviour.](#)" In *Governing Arctic Change*, pp. 121-139. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2017.

This chapter examines how three observers in the Arctic Council have socialized to the norms of the institution. The three observers examined are China, the European Union, and Poland. The Arctic Council imposes limits on the powers of observers in the institution and these three actors have conformed to these limits. Observers can only attend Arctic Council meetings when allowed by member states and they can only do what member states allow them to do. Member states demand that observers accept the legal rights of the Arctic States, as well as the treaty rights and cultural traditions of Permanent Participants. Delegations from China, the European Union, and Poland all have indicated a willingness to support the work of the Permanent Participants. The European Union is not an accredited observer to the Arctic Council, but it continues to participate as an ad-hoc observer.

Hossain, K. & Maruyama, H. "[Japan's Admission to the Arctic Council and Commitment to the Rights of its Indigenous People.](#)" *Polar Journal*, 6(1) (2016): 169-187.

Hossain and Maruyama examine Japan's treatment of their own Indigenous people since becoming one of four Asian countries to earn a spot as an Observer of the Arctic Council in 2013. They note that Japan's interest in the Arctic stems primarily from the Northern Sea shipping route. Other interests include the resources believed to be in the Arctic and climate change research. The authors highlight the fact that as Observers, Japan has agreed to embody the values of the Arctic Council, which includes respecting Indigenous peoples. They argue that, while Japan has respected the Permanent Participants of the Arctic Council, they have not demonstrated the same level of commitment towards their own Indigenous group, the Ainu. Although Japan acknowledged the Ainu existence as Indigenous peoples, the state determines what is authentic Ainu culture, and excludes the Ainu from participating in decision-making activities that affect them. Further, Japan argues that the lack of universal definition of Indigenous peoples makes it difficult for Ainu to claim certain rights. Thus, Hossain and Maruyama conclude that while Japan's commitment to Arctic Council values is real, their lack of dedication towards the Ainu is incompatible under human rights law and with its engagement with the Arctic Council.

Knecht, Sebastian. "[The Politics of Arctic International Cooperation: Introducing a Dataset on Stakeholder Participation in Arctic Council Meetings, 1998-2015.](#)" *Cooperation and Conflict* 52(2) (2017): 203-223.

In this article, Knecht presents preliminary results of a new dataset called stakeholder participation in Arctic Council meetings, or STAPAC, which compiles all participants in Arctic Council Ministerial, Senior Arctic Officials (SAO) and other meetings from 1998 until 2015. In total, this dataset represents "all nine Ministerial meetings, 34 SAO meetings, 18 AMAP, 24 EPPR, 29 PAME and 32 SDWG meetings," as well as some task force meetings, but not ACAP or CAFF meetings. He finds that the largest group of participants is member states, followed by Permanent Participants and then Observers. Among Observers, non-Arctic states and the European Union attend most often. He concludes that Observers do not attend as many Arctic Council functions as they could,

thus not taking full advantage of all of the opportunities that the status entails. Knecht concludes that further research could examine the quality of participation in the Arctic Council, rather than only the quantity.

Manicom, James, and P. Whitney Lackenbauer. ["East Asian States, the Arctic Council and International Relations in the Arctic."](#) *Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) Policy Brief no.26 (April 2013).*

This paper argues that the Arctic region is undergoing a profound change due to climate change that is attracting international attention, raising alarm among some policy-makers within Arctic states and among Arctic inhabitants. Many commentators express reservations about the interest of the government of China in the Arctic region. The three major states in East Asia, namely China, Japan, and South Korea, have researchers that contribute to Arctic science. The authors argue that if there is reservation about the interest of these states in the Arctic, the best thing for states to do is co-operate to "enmesh them into 'Arctic' ways of thinking."

Stephen, Matthew D. and Stephen, Kathrin. (2020). ["The Integration of Emerging Powers into Club Institutions: China and the Arctic Council."](#) *Global Policy 11(3): 51-60.*

Stephen and Stephen begin by defining the Arctic Council as a club institution that offers exclusive membership to member states, but also include rotational membership options designed to provide new contributions to the forum. The authors argue that the logic of exclusivity is important in understanding how responsive the Arctic Council is to changing interests and perspectives. They then use China's use of cooperation and persuasion tactics to earn Observer status. They state that China's ability to integrate as an outside power is due to three factors: China's ability to fit into the Arctic Council's logic of exclusivity, China's incentive to gain access to the forum, and China's ability to convince the Arctic Council to include them. In addition, China's emphasis on the role that the international community has in helping in the Arctic helped positively reframe the Arctic as a global space. However, Stephen and Stephen also recognize that China may have been in the right place at the right time with pressure on the Arctic Council to open to other states. They conclude by stating that beyond strategy, gaining entry into club institutions heavily relies on negotiations and international politics.

Xinmin, M. (2019). ["China's Arctic Policy on the Basis of International Law: Identification, Goals, Principles, and Positions."](#) *Marine Policy 100: 265-276.*

The author provides an analysis of China's 2018 white paper on the Arctic region, examining its characterization of (1) the Arctic's legal status, (2) the legal order in the Arctic, (3) the proper role for China, (4) its rationale for participation in the region, (5) the basis of its participation, and (6) its actual participation. The author finds that China (1) recognizes the authority of the Arctic states, (2) acknowledges the authority of international law, (3) states its interest in the region due to climate change and economic potential, (4) emphasizes its potential role in regional governance mechanisms, (5) sees environmental protection as a major goal, and (6) seeks participation in the major international institutions solving issues in the region. The author concludes, "While seeking its legitimate interests in the Arctic, what China pursues is not only the mutual benefits with other States, but also the win-win results of the humankind."