

The Arctic Barometer – June 2022

*Predictions of Arctic experts on the future
of the region*



OBSERVATOIRE DE LA POLITIQUE
ET LA SÉCURITÉ DE L'ARCTIQUE



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The Arctic Barometer – June 2022

Predictions of Arctic experts on the future of the region

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The future of the Arctic region is characterized by a great deal of uncertainty, largely due to climate change. It is therefore normal that many predictions are made in an attempt to envision future developments that will affect the region. This high number of predictions can be observed in the media as well as in the academic sphere and makes it difficult to understand where the consensual or opposing positions lie.

The ambition of this research project is to survey Arctic experts and ask them to make predictions on some specific questions. These predictions are collected in an anonymous way and experts will be called upon to offer their predictions at regular intervals (every 6 months).

The project has three objectives in order to develop a clearer picture of expertise on the Arctic region:

- 1- Understand the points of contention and consensus on Arctic issues in the expert community;
- 2- Identify what moves the needle, i.e. the type of events, developments that make Arctic experts reconsider their predictions;
- 3- Compare the predictions made by academic researchers and civil society representatives in order to identify similarities and differences in their perceptions of the future of the Arctic.

For this first wave, questions focused on political and military developments. In total, 69 respondents (43 male, 25 female) participated by filling the questionnaire. Respondents were based in 12 countries, 67% being from Canada and the U.S. We asked respondents to assess from 0 to 100 the possibility for certain events to occur, with 0 meaning that it was impossible for the potential event to occur and 100 meaning it was certain that the event would happen.

I – ARCTIC GOVERNANCE: THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE OF THE ARCTIC COUNCIL

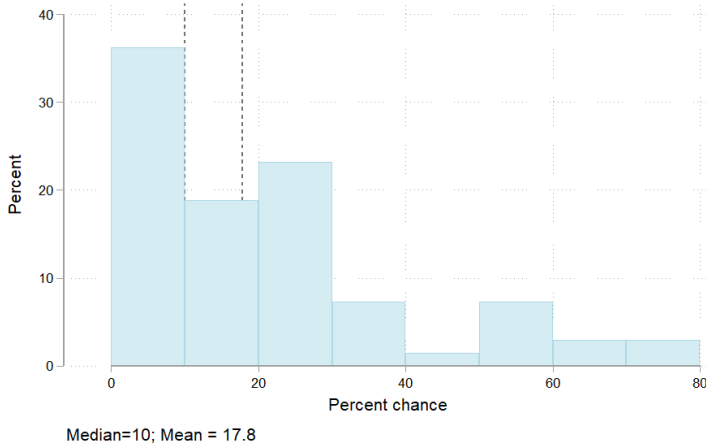


Figure 1: predictions for the statement “All eight Arctic countries will resume their cooperation at the Arctic Council before September 30, 2022”

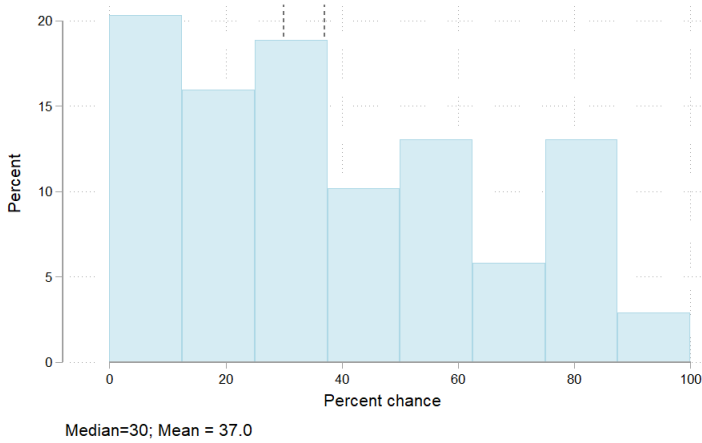


Figure 2: predictions for the statement “The seven Arctic states (except Russia) will start a new regional Arctic forum before September 30, 2022”

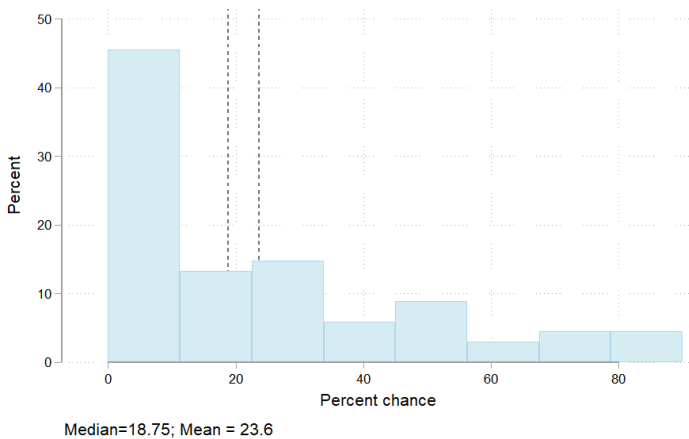


Figure 3: predictions for the statement “Russia will start a new regional Arctic forum before September 30, 2022”

ANALYSIS:

Here we show the distribution of responses to three questions relating to the immediate future of the Arctic Council. All in all, all three scenarios do not clear the 50% threshold for most respondents, highlighting that they are not likely to happen.

We see from Figure 1 that respondents are pessimistic about the chances of all eight Council members resuming cooperation by the fall. Respondents estimate a higher likelihood of Council states, excepting Russia, starting a new regional Arctic forum by this date, as seen in Figure 2.

Turning to Figure 3, we see that respondents estimate the probability of Russia starting a new regional Arctic forum by September 30, 2022 as low, though interestingly, not as low as the chance of all eight countries resuming cooperation in the Arctic Council by this date.

II - ARCTIC GOVERNANCE – THE LONG-TERM PERSPECTIVE

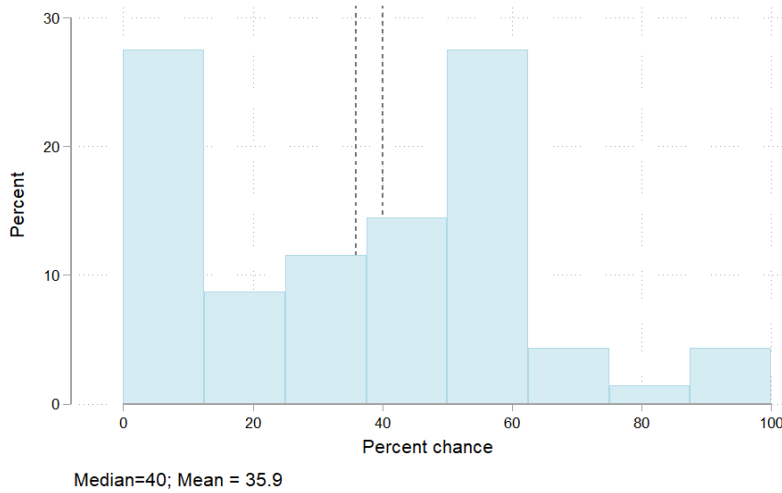


Figure 4: predictions for the statement “All eight Arctic states will meet in-person at the Arctic Council ministerial meeting in May 2023”

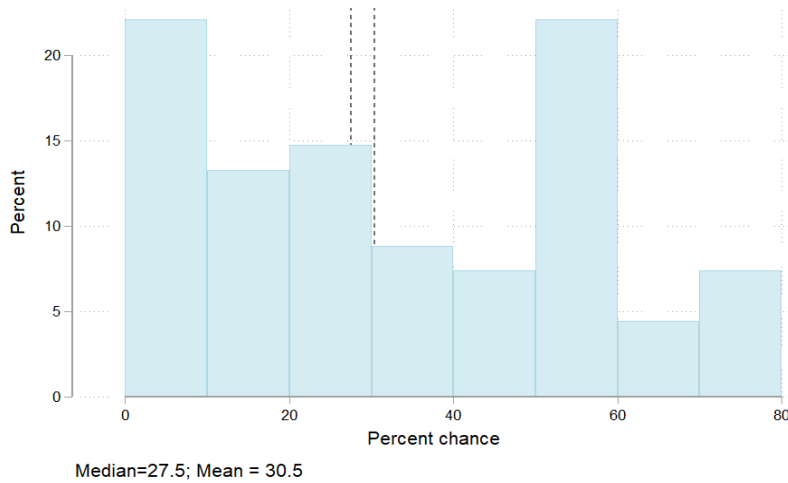


Figure 5: predictions for the statement “Greenland will become a sovereign nation before January 1 2026”

ANALYSIS:

The two graphs on this page show the distribution of estimates for two questions on longer term issues in Arctic governance.

In Figure 4 we can see that respondents are more confident that all eight Arctic Council member states will meet in person at the scheduled ministerial meeting of May 2023. This presents an interesting contrast with Figure 1 on the previous page. It is notable, however, that opinion is somewhat bimodal on this question, with a number of respondents viewing this event as having low probability, and a second group of respondents viewing it as having better than a 50% chance.

Similarly, opinion is divided on whether Greenland will become a sovereign nation by 2026 (Figure 5). Though most respondents rated this as having a lower than 50% probability, a substantial minority rated the likelihood as higher than 50%.

III - MILITARY QUESTIONS – TOWARDS AN ARCTIC MILITARY CONFRONTATION?

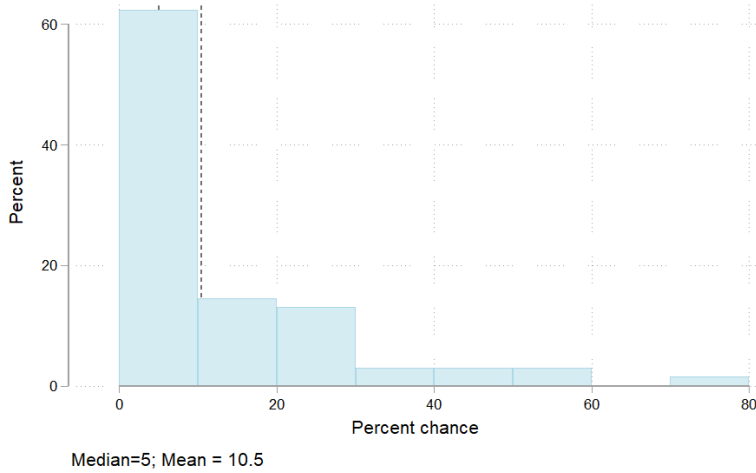


Figure 6: predictions for the statement “A military conflict will take place in the Arctic region (north of 60th parallel) before September 30 2022”

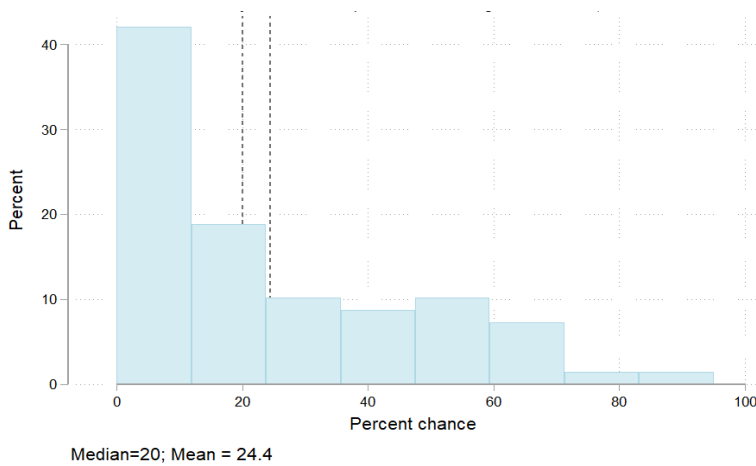


Figure 7: predictions for the statement “A military conflict will take place in the Arctic region (north of 60th parallel) before January 1 2026”

ANALYSIS:

Figures 6 and 7 present distributions of estimates of the probability of military conflict in the Arctic region.

As seen in Figure 6, respondents view the likelihood of conflict before September 30, 2022 as remote. In the question represented in Figure 7, respondents were asked to estimate the likelihood of conflict before 2026. Over this longer time frame, respondents saw conflict as relatively more likely, though still unlikely in absolute terms.

Overall, the Russian invasion of Ukraine did not seem to have created an impact on this issue. Structural and environmental constraints are still heavily weighing on a potential Arctic military conflict.

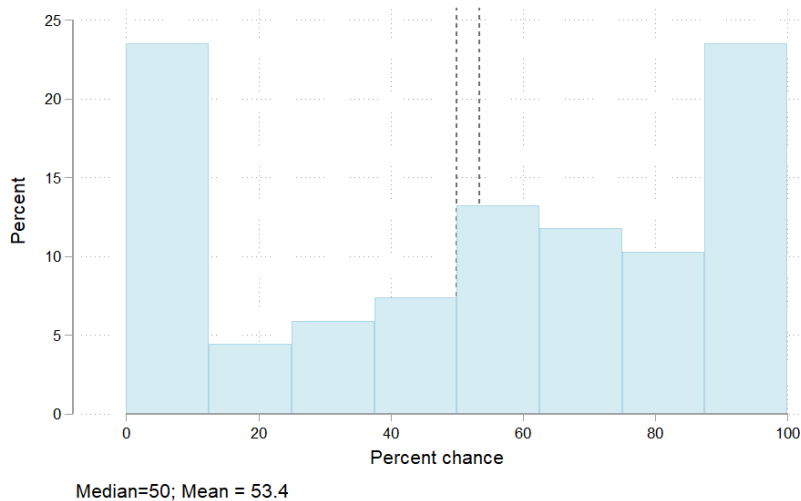


Figure 8: predictions for the statement “Russian bombers will violate the airspace of an Arctic state before September 30 2022”

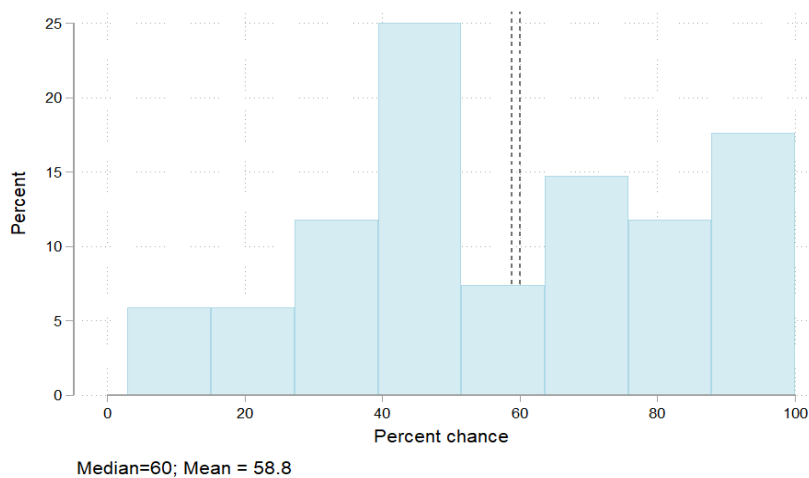


Figure 9: predictions for the statement “The United States will conduct a freedom of navigation operation (FONOP) in the Arctic region before January 1, 2026”

ANALYSIS:

Though respondents saw direct military conflict as unlikely, we can see in Figures 8 and 9 that provocative military actions are estimated as relatively more likely. This points towards the perception that provocations may occur but that it will not lead to broader confrontation.

In Figure 8, we can see that while a substantial minority rated the chance of Russian bombers violating the airspace of an Arctic state before this fall as very unlikely, respondents as a whole viewed this proposition as having slightly better than even odds, with a substantial minority viewing this as highly likely. Here, we observe sharply contrasted perceptions of the Russian threat in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war.

As seen in Figure 9, the chances of the United States conducting freedom of navigation operations in the Arctic were viewed as higher still, though admittedly over a longer time horizon.

IV – DIFFERENCES RELATED TO THE STATUS OF THE RESPONDENTS

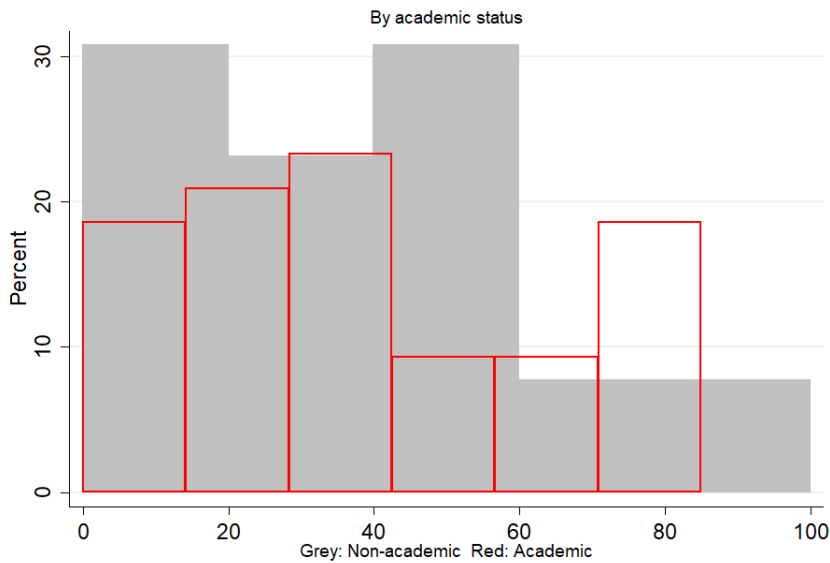


Figure 10: predictions by status of respondents for the statement “The seven Arctic states (except Russia) will start a new regional Arctic forum before September 30, 2022”

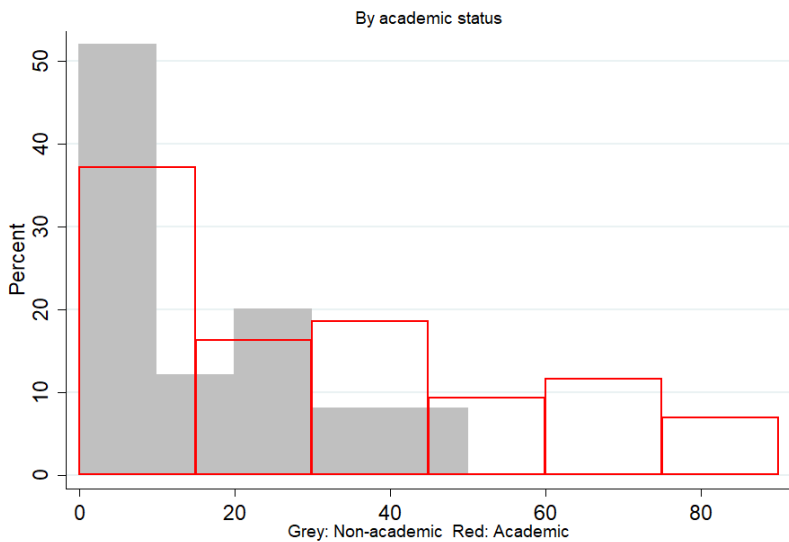


Figure 11: predictions by status of respondents for the statement “Russia will start a new regional Arctic forum before September 30, 2022”

ANALYSIS:

We consider now whether estimates differ by the work status of respondents. Sixty-two percent of our sample was “academic”, meaning either faculty, postdoctoral student or graduate student at a college or university. Our remaining respondents were drawn from government, civil society and the private sector.

Figures 10-13 compare the responses by academic status using overlapping histograms for selected questions. An interesting pattern emerges whereby academics consistently rate the likelihood of an event occurring more highly than do non-academic respondents.

This is particularly clear in regards to the likelihood of Russia starting a new regional Arctic forum (Figure 11) and the likelihood of Greenland achieving sovereignty (Figure 13). As these questions are resolved, it will be interesting to see whether academics are consistently overestimating the likelihood of these events occurring, or non-academics are consistently underrating the likelihood of these events.

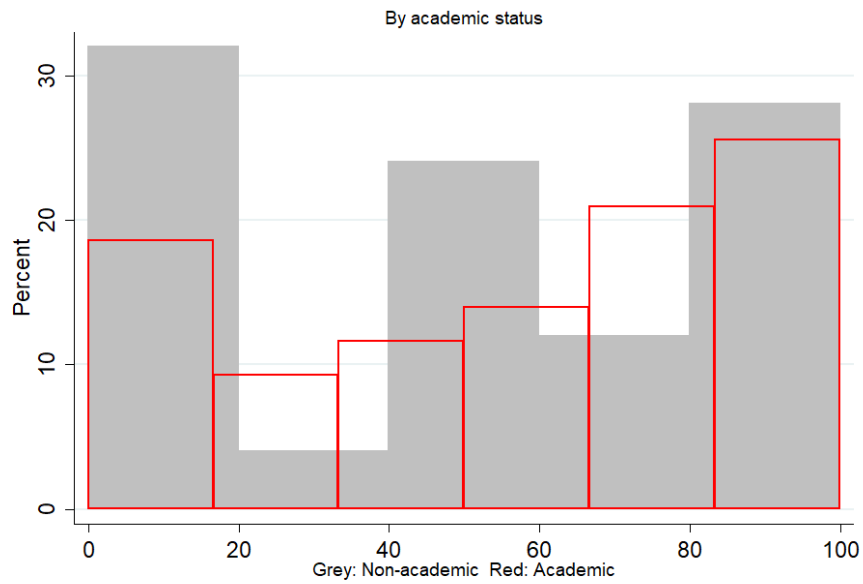


Figure 12: predictions by status of respondents for the statement “Russian bombers will violate the airspace of an Arctic state before September 30 2022”

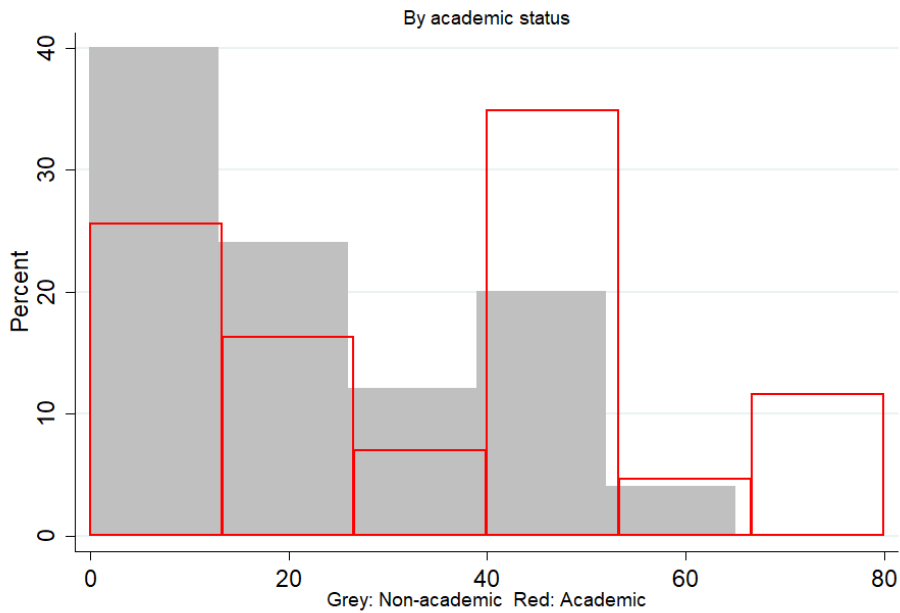


Figure 13: predictions by status of respondents for the statement “Greenland will become a sovereign nation before January 1 2026”



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JUNE 2022**

**OBSERVATOIRE DE LA POLITIQUE ET LA SÉCURITÉ DE
L'ARCTIQUE (OPSA) AND THE NORTH AMERICAN AND
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